

THE HUMANITY OF VIOLENCE

A Girardian reading of Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*

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I hereby declare that, except where it is otherwise acknowledged in the text, this thesis represents my own original work.

This work contains some materials that were submitted as part of the required assessment for ENGL8020.

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Abstract

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A Girardian Reading of Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*

While R. A. Foakes, in his survey of Shakespeare's most violent plays, suggests extreme violence is an aberrant impulse emerging from unfathomable shadows, René Girard sees it germinating in quotidian household antagonism. This thesis applies Girard's model of human relations, which maps violence from its inception in intimate relationships to climactic community crisis, to William Shakespeare's play, *The Comedy of Errors*, prompting a deeper look at the hilarious comedy. Girard's theory centres on the human propensity for spontaneous mimesis, which supports bonding but also provides a basis for desire and rivalry to create interpersonal conflict. He shows how mimesis spreads hostility in communities, dividing them into volatile warring tribes until the crowd's antagonism is projected on to a single arbitrary scapegoat, who is killed. Such processes are highly evident in Shakespeare's lightest, shortest play, despite its absurd plot revolving around two sets of identical twins. The thesis argues this darker sacrificial structure underlies the play's slapstick mayhem, and its twin motif references myth's archetypal 'warring brothers'. Girardian analysis reveals habitual mimetic conflict in both *Errors*' domestic and civic arenas, potently emblematised in Act 3, Scene 1 by twins positioned each side of a locked door escalating hostilities by matching insults. The play proceeds towards community crisis and victimisation, but the revelation of the twins instead shows the angry mob to have been gripped by a mass illusion of enmity. This Christian-feeling finale is explained in terms of Girard's unusual material reading of biblical scripture, and it is argued the play presents an alternative to community violence that circumvents scapegoating. The notion of innocence is explored in respect of the Christ-like victim Egeon and the simultaneous innocence and culpability of the play's protagonists. Whether or not Shakespeare was cognisant of the specific social processes Girard describes, the thesis finds *The Comedy of Errors* provides a concise dramatic blueprint of those processes, and a rich correspondence between the dramatist and the anthropologist, who drew on similar sources in articulating the dynamics of human relating: myth, drama, literature. Both, for instance, show a radical acceptance of violence as a formative force in human relations. The thesis then, helps build a bridge between Girard and Shakespearean scholarship in respect of *Errors*, arguing for the value of a Girardian analysis.

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I have no Christian background or affiliation – the views in this thesis rise from the analysis undertaken for it.

This is dedicated to my much missed mentor, Cody Anderson, 1953–2019.

Introduction

This thesis brings together two keen observers of human relations, William Shakespeare and René Girard. More specifically, it reads Shakespeare's play *The Comedy of Errors* from a Girardian perspective. This opens the play to fresh enquiry, as Girard's model of human violence brings darker, more meaningful aspects of the seemingly inconsequential comedy into focus. Why Hamlet delays or succumbs to a murderous code of revenge has long been a matter of serious debate. However, why *Errors'* Duke Solinus delays the execution of innocent Egeon, why jealous Adriana suddenly allies with sworn rival the Courtesan, or pious Luciana promotes both sides of a moral debate, have not. Such issues exist in *Errors*, but they are not prominent, and the play's farcical format distracts from the difficult contradictions they present. This thesis addresses this deficit by looking beyond the comical identity errors connected to the play's doubled identical twins, to assess its relationships and social dynamics against Girard's model of human relations.

Described in more detail below (p.12), Girard's model shows how human violence emerges from tensions in close relationships, escalates via imitated hostility to community crisis, and resolves through the cathartic communal murder of a scapegoat. The thesis shows how these phenomena manifest in *Errors* and how the model sheds new light on the play, demonstrating its value as an analytical tool. It not only extends Girard's work on *The Comedy of Errors* and on Shakespeare, but connects that work to Shakespearean scholarship on *Errors*, helping to bridge the current divide between those arenas.

The thesis readily confirms *Errors'* consistency with Girard. Text analysis uncovers simmering domestic tensions that pre-date and underpin the identity mistake provocations, and shows how the play's clear trajectory from these to wider community conflagration is effected by mimetic hostility. *Errors'* moving denouement, founded on the sudden truth that the twins' existence imparts to an antagonistic crowd, is proposed as a carefully constructed transmutation of the scapegoating impulse.

These findings are regularly tested against Shakespearean research to see if they are supported by that research, disagree with it, or provide new insights. Established analysis of *Errors* is used to test findings specific to the play. Broader research tests how Girardian themes expressed in the play align with Shakespeare's themes more generally, particularly with regard to marriage, violence and sacrificial dynamics. The key texts used are outlined below. This validation process confirms the value of a Girardian reading. It shows that reading targets less obvious aspects of the overtly comic play, honing in on its interpersonal antagonisms and civic violence to unearth serious questions around rivalry and sacrifice. Girard's wider anthropological viewpoint is often shown to embrace but extend critical views, providing a new, more expansive rationale for features of the play. As well, apparent contradictions in the play are valuably reconciled by a Girardian perspective. As the thesis repeatedly encounters Girard's explanatory power, it ultimately argues for Shakespeare's conscious application of the kinds of social patterns Girard describes.

Though Girard wrote his in-depth book on Shakespeare, *A Theatre of Envy*, in 1991,¹ few Shakespearean academics have taken up these views, with the exception of Ralph Hage and Richard Van Oort, whose work is used in this thesis. Hage points out this disconnect may be because Girard did not respond to Shakespearean research in setting out his ideas.² Concomitantly, critics overlook Girard. In his survey of Shakespeare's violence, R. A. Foakes notes, "violence in Shakespeare's plays has drawn little attention", yet he does not refer to *Theatre of Envy* which centrally addresses this topic, and he only minimally uses Girard's other work.³ Similarly, although Robert S. Miola consults Girard's article on *Errors*,⁴ he does not include it in his broad ranging compendium of *Errors* analysis or his, even wider, critical history of the play.⁵ This thesis helps remedy this gap by highlighting where Girardian analysis parallels other Shakespearean analysis or extends it.

The thesis also makes Girard's dense, anthropologically focused model more accessible. It does this by uncovering how aptly *Errors*' highly emblematic tableaux illustrate Girardian concepts. Girard's idea of 'mimetic rivalry' for

¹ René Girard, *A Theatre of Envy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

² Ralph Hage, "Necessary Victims : William Shakespeare's Tragic Ethics of Identity," *Contagion : Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 27 (2020): 125, <https://doi.org/10.14321/contagion.27.2020.0123>.

³ R. A. Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 15. 6, 18-19, 26, 186, 94-95.

⁴ René Girard, "Comedies of Errors : Plautus-Shakespeare-Molière," in *American Criticism in the Poststructuralist Age*, ed. Ira Konigsberg, Michigan Studies in the Humanities (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Michigan University Press, 1981).

⁵ Robert S. Miola, *The Comedy of Errors : Critical Essays*, ed. Robert S. Miola, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, (New York: Garland, 1997), 42.

instance – reciprocal, mirrored, indeed ‘twinned’, enmity⁶ – is perfectly expressed when twin Dromios, positioned each side of a closed door, ratchet up tensions by mimicking one another’s insults (3.1),⁷ or when spouses Adriana and Antipholus posture as outraged opponents while delivering matching speeches with mirrored accusatory tones (5.1).

The thesis goes beyond Girard’s explicit analysis of Shakespeare by expanding his analysis of *Errors*. Girard only briefly mentions *Errors* in his wide but selective survey of the oeuvre in *Theatre of Envy*. In his article, “Comedies of Errors: Plautus–Shakespeare–Molière”, he undertakes minimal textual analysis of the play. He uses *Errors* mainly as a starting point for discussing the effects of rivalry in human relations and the twin motif in myth and literature that signals those effects.⁸ Girard’s key comment on *Errors*, taken across both sources, is that its twin device produces the same effect in the play as mimetic rivalry does in human relationships: “as it destroys existing differences, it increases the expectation of difference.”⁹ Girard’s point is, that in focusing on imitating each other’s antagonistic acts, enemies become more alike than different, while simultaneously believing in their extreme dissimilarity. Girard says *Errors*’ twin mistakes alone demonstrate this effect, so it is not elucidated

⁶ René Girard, *'To Double Business Bound': Essays on Literature, Mimesis, and Anthropology* (London: Athlone Press, 1988), 186.

⁷ This and all further line references for *The Comedy of Errors* are from: William Shakespeare, *The Comedy of Errors*, ed. Charles Whitworth, Oxford World's Classics : The Oxford Shakespeare, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁸ Girard, "Comedies of Errors."

⁹ Girard, "Comedies of Errors," 71.

in the play's relationships.¹⁰ This thesis undertakes more in-depth text analysis of *Errors*, showing that while the twin motif functions as Girard describes, mimetic rivalry is amply expressed in other ways in the play. Its relationships are habitually rivalrous and the twin identity errors merely spark pre-existing volatility. The thesis details how other central Girardian concepts function in the play. Girard's 'mimetic desire' is shown to have a role in generating *Errors*' tensions, where Girard claims these, "stem from the confusion of physical appearances only".¹¹ The thesis shows the play moves beyond domestic issues of desire and rivalry to address civic and community violence, scapegoating and catharsis, which are all associated with later stages of Girard's mimetic cycle (defined below). Though Girard sees *The Winter's Tale* as the first play in which Shakespeare reverses a sacrificial 'death and resurrection' pattern,¹² this thesis finds *Errors* to be at least a precursor to this, when it replaces the death of a scapegoat with the death of the illusion of enmity at its moving climax, finding, "a way out of the labyrinth" of human violence.¹³

René Girard's mimetic theory

Girard's wide ranging research into human culture and relations draws mainly on narrative works, treating texts as cultural artefacts capable of revealing the

¹⁰ Girard, *Theatre of Envy*, 111.

¹¹ Girard, "Comedies of Errors," 74.

¹² Girard, *Theatre of Envy*, 340 also 07, 34-42.

¹³ Girard, *Theatre of Envy*, 307.

true social dynamics underlying fictional scenarios.¹⁴ He began his career studying great European novels, publishing *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* in 1965.¹⁵ Though he found critical directions at the time emphasised individuality in literature, Girard reviewed the texts for similarity, to see if such lasting stories targeted core insights into humanity.¹⁶ He found a particular narrative pattern did indeed recur. He went on to draw on Greek drama, Freud and Lévi-Strauss, finding this pattern, associated with ritual sacrifice, also recurred in classical and world mythology, producing *Violence and the Sacred* in 1972. He investigated wider sources – cave art, drama, biblical scripture.¹⁷ Given its recurrence and specificity, Girard posited this pattern revealed something fundamental about human behaviour, and incrementally mapped its distinctive social dynamics.¹⁸ His major work, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (1978),¹⁹ lays out his full theory, integrating material on psychology and Judeo-Christian scripture from co-authors. Girard describes himself as, "an interpreter ... combining anthropological, archaeological and ethnological accounts to construct a general theory of culture and its origins".²⁰

¹⁴ Girard, *To Double Business*, e.g., 155-77.

¹⁵ René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel : Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965).

¹⁶ Pierpaolo Antonello and Joao Cezar de Castro Rocha, "Introduction: 'One Long Argument from the Beginning to the End'," in *Evolution and Conversion : Dialogues on the Origins of Culture*, ed. René Girard (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 1-12.

¹⁷ Girard, *To Double Business*.

¹⁸ Antonello and de Castro Rocha, "Evolution and Conversion," 1-12.

¹⁹ René Girard, Jean-Michel Oughourlian, and Guy Lefort, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (London: Continuum, 2003).

²⁰ René Girard, Pierpaolo Antonello, and Joao Cezar de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion : Dialogues on the Origins of Culture* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 103.

His mimetic theory is formulated around a central phenomenon which has multiple divergent social effects.²¹ That phenomenon he calls *mimesis*. This is not the conscious imitation discussed by Aristotle,²² but an innate, automatic, relatively subliminal imitation rising from the human brain.²³ Mimesis generates specific social patterns which develop – again through mimesis – into further patterns. The theory is then, both singular, in its core mechanism, and plural, in its effects. Girard plots the human propensity for mimesis as it plays out across a full spectrum of social experience. He investigates its role in social bonding, shows how it provokes conflict in relationships, contagiously inflames community violence, and advances social crises to war and violent scapegoating. In this sense, the theory can be called a cycle, with scapegoating events temporarily resolving community crises, though mimesis continues to generate interpersonal tensions. This ‘cycle’ occurs organically and varies in different conditions, with different manifestations of mimesis (for example, as desire or rivalry) recurring in different phases of the cycle or at different scales of social organisation. Its varying phenomena are closely connected but can manifest as social reversals or oppositions (for example, desire vs rivalry, crowd adulation vs condemnation). Despite this variability, this relatively predictable progression of mimetically driven social dynamics is referred to in this thesis as Girard’s *mimetic cycle*.

²¹ Antonello and de Castro Rocha, "Evolution and Conversion," 4-5.

²² Girard, *Theatre of Envy*, 59. Girard differentiates his use of the term from Aristotle’s.

²³ Jean-Michel Oughourlian, *The Mimetic Brain*, trans. Trevor Cribben Merrill (East Lansing, Mich.: Michigan State University Press, 2016), Introduction, Chapter 2 and throughout.

Six broad phases in this cycle, abridged from Girard's diverse theoretical descriptions for the purposes of this thesis, are outlined below: mimetic desire, mimetic rivalry, mimetic violence, mimetic contagion, mimetic crisis, and Girard's scapegoat mechanism. Key ways in which these relate to *The Comedy of Errors* or its critical analysis are included for illustrative purposes, and to indicate the kind of enquiry this thesis pursues.

First, a distinction is made between how the idea of identity is broadly treated in *Errors*' criticism and how Girard sees it. Critics see personal identity and the unnerving consequences of identity loss as a key theme in *Errors*, flowing from the Syracusan twins' arrival in town and the identity mistakes they prompt (discussed below). Lines from Antipholus(S)²⁴ (1.2.35-40) and Adriana (2.2.124-132) are said to underscore this theme,²⁵ proposing the self as permeable, 'watery', indistinguishable in an ocean of selves unless correctly recognised and claimed by others. Girard's conception of identity casts a new light on this theme and these lines, as it diverges from critical assumptions about individuality. He sees relationships as constitutionally mimetic, with bonding, learning and

²⁴ In this thesis, Antipholus and Dromio refer to the Ephesians; their counterparts are specifically indicated as Syracusan.

²⁵ Charles Whitworth, "Rectifying Shakespeare's 'Errors': Romance and Farce in Bardedistry (1991)," in *The Comedy of Errors : Critical Essays*, ed. Robert S. Miola (New York: Garland, 1997), 238. Brennan O'Donnell, "The Errors of the Verse : Metrical Reading and Performance of 'The Comedy of Errors' (1997)," in *The Comedy of Errors : Critical Essays*, ed. Robert S. Miola (New York: Garland, 1997), 401. Douglas Lanier, "'Stigmatical in Making' : The Material Character of 'The Comedy of Errors' (1993)," in *The Comedy of Errors : Critical Essays*, ed. Robert S. Miola (New York: Garland, 1997), 308. Also see T. G. Bishop, *Shakespeare and the Theatre of Wonder* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 87. Rolf Soellner, *Shakespeare's Patterns of Self-Knowledge* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1972), 64.; Eamon Grennan, "Arm and Sleeve : Nature and Custom in 'The Comedy of Errors'," *Philological Quarterly* 59, no. 2 (Spring 1980): 153. ; Erin Weinberg, "'Urging Helpless Patience' : Domesticity, Stoicism & Setting in The Comedy of Errors," *Early Modern Literary Studies*, Rome And Home: The Cultural Uses Of Rome In Early Modern English Literature (2016): 3.

socialisation founded in automatic imitation.²⁶ In particular, humans mimetically register and pursue one another's intentions and desires. In a Girardian sense then, identity, or 'self', is mainly 'other' determined. It is also inherently unstable, being influenced by multiple social interactions.²⁷ Girard notes how this provides evolutionary benefits:

It is this very mobility of desire, its mimetic nature, and this very instability of our identities, that makes us capable of *adaptation*, that gives the possibility to learn and to *evolve*.²⁸

With regard to *Errors*, in a Girardian sense, there is no initial, stable identity to lose. Rather, identity is always mutually suggested and mutable – still watery and permeable, but in this more fundamental sense.

Girard's concepts of *mimetic desire* and *mimetic rivalry* emerge from this relational mimesis. Because people mimic each other's desires, they inevitably fix on the same objects and find themselves competing: "imitation does not merely draw people together, it pulls them apart".²⁹ Girard says this perpetually stimulated envy underlies all social tensions, and is masterfully dramatised by Shakespeare.³⁰ Mimetic desire is a sense of wanting, not just an object someone has, but what they seem to *be* by having it.³¹ It is therefore illusory and frustrating, with each party seeming to the other, to block or

²⁶ Antonello and de Castro Rocha, "Evolution and Conversion," 1-12.

²⁷ Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 42-43.

²⁸ Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 43.

²⁹ Girard, *Theatre of Envy*, 3.

³⁰ Girard, *Theatre of Envy*, 8-135 (Chapters 1-15), 29 and 34-37.

³¹ Girard, *Theatre of Envy*, e.g., 98.

challenge realisation of the desire.³² Further, an object's desirability is inflated by the other's desire, just as stock prices rise due to perceived more than real value. This irritating, accelerating situation prompts people to oppose one another. When this happens, mimesis exhibits, paradoxically, as symmetrical opposition. These dynamics play out in *Errors* as social forces more than themes, with jealousy, paranoia and frustration underlying its unstable, inimical relationships which are so easily sparked into hostility by identity errors.

Girard's mimesis manifests socially as *mimetic violence* when rivals imitate one another's hostility. This escalates hostility and creates self-perpetuating cycles of reciprocal enmity – vengeance, feud, war.³³ In this echoed animosity, people lose any differentiation they had, becoming *mimetic doubles*.

This non-difference occurs between antagonists who are not always physical twins but who literally turn into intellectual and moral twins in the process of fighting each other, of being each other's rivals. They desire the same object ... regard each other with the same hatred and fascination.³⁴

In terms of *Errors*, conjunctions between symmetrical staging or language and escalating hostility are re-considered in this light. Its dialogues are often formed of rhymed, twinned retorts or perfectly opposed statements. Applying a Girardian lens, this thesis suggests language here not only evokes a *sense* of conflict, but indicates how conflict rises and escalates in reality, presenting a model of human violence that parallels Girard's.

³² Oughourlian, *Mimetic Brain*, e.g., Introduction and Chapter 1.

³³ Girard, *To Double Business*, 186. Also René Girard, Robert Pogue Harrison, and Cynthia L. Haven, "Shakespeare : Mimesis and Desire," *Standpoint*, no. 107 (2018).

³⁴ Girard, "Comedies of Errors," 70. Also Girard, Pogue Harrison, and Haven, "Mimesis and Desire," 9.

Girard's idea of *mimetic contagion* refers to how antagonism spreads in communities and crowds via mimesis.³⁵ As well as 'catching' one another's hostility, people explain the escalating troubles in terms of what their perceived enemies have done, giving rise to conspiracy theories. These also grow via imitation, until discontented tribes form around accusatory stances into agitated mobs:

[Communities] are subject to disturbances which tend to spread to the entire community contagiously ... toward ... a mimetic crisis, the moment when everybody at the same time is fighting over something ... caused by the mimetic belief of everybody that everybody else is responsible.³⁶

Erin Weinberg describes this effect in *Errors*: "affective consequences permeate from person to person through social ties", and relates this to an Elizabethan conception of the body as, "a porous vessel through which passions flowed."³⁷

The multi-directional adversity of a *mimetic crisis* is not readily eased, as the exasperation each person feels rises from chimeric interpersonal frustrations, and offensive actions simply provide more hostile material for others to mimic. Girard shows this grand crisis of mimetically rivalrous groups is symbolised in myth by twins or warring brothers – Cain and Abel and Romulus and Remus

³⁵ Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, e.g., 42.

³⁶ Girard, Pogue Harrison, and Haven, "Mimesis and Desire."

³⁷ Weinberg, "Helpless Patience," 3.

are examples.³⁸ Often read as a concern with identity or duality, *Errors'* chaotic antagonism, contrary stances and moods, evocation of interpersonal undifferentiation, and snowballing fights could also flow from the varying effects of mimesis. This thesis investigates the play in this light.

The final stage of Girard's mimetic cycle is his *scapegoat mechanism*.³⁹ As crowd contagion intensifies, resolution seems impossible. Mimesis however, eventually constellates unanimity, focusing mob attention on one arbitrary person.⁴⁰ As mimesis overwhelms individual morality,⁴¹ all blame and antagonism is projected at that target, and collective inflamed frustration unleashed, resulting in communal murder.⁴² This release occurs concurrently with sudden social unanimity and a cessation of troubles, as projected issues 'die' with the victim. Communally experienced and associated with awe, perhaps horror, this powerful catharsis re-sets community cohesion.⁴³ The victim, seen as both causing and resolving the crisis, seems all powerful. They may be deified and the event mythified then re-enacted when social agitation inevitably recurs.⁴⁴ The event can produce cultural taboos and prohibitions, as conditions that led to the crisis are avoided. Ritual re-enactment, requiring role

³⁸ Girard, *To Double Business*, 152, 86, 202. René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, trans. James G. Williams, English translation ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 12, 22, 63, 83-85. Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 42, 46, 75.

³⁹ R. Girard, P. Antonello, and J. Cezar de Castro Rocha Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 6-7.

⁴⁰ Girard, *To Double Business*, 94, 128, 87.

⁴¹ Girard, *I See Satan*, 187.

⁴² Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 27.

⁴³ Girard, *To Double Business*, 202.

⁴⁴ Girard, *To Double Business*. Also Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 28.

assignment and narrative, leads to social hierarchy and complex behaviour like symbolic substitution, so, Girard says, forms the basis of religion and culture.⁴⁵

The Comedy of Errors tracks this cycle. The play is concerned with the minutiae of household relations, especially where these are inflamed by jealousy, suspicion, misunderstandings and antagonism. It follows a trajectory of escalation whereby these small-scale confusions and disputes swell to encompass wider community relations, and it moves towards a civic crisis characterised by multi-directional complaints and accusations. This is brought to the brink of scapegoating in the play's final act (5.1), where the possibility this storm of mutual blaming will focus its frustrations on one chance victim becomes imminent. Several possible targets are held captive at this point: an elderly foreigner caught in the tit-for-tat enmity of warring Dukes, a guileless pair of travellers sheltering from the mob in an Abbey, an upstanding citizen and servant, misinterpreted, defamed and shackled by their own household.

Instead, however, the Abbess emerges from the Abbey to reveal the twins. Given this pointed Christian setting, an addendum is needed to explain Girard's reading of Christianity. Girard applies the same anthropological analysis to the Bible as to other texts, targeting its material rather than

⁴⁵ Girard, *To Double Business*, 199. Also Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 71, 76-77, 87-88. Also Craig Stewart, "Mimetic Theory - Full Course : An overview of the Mimetic Theory of Rene Girard," (YouTube.com, 2021). <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLbyoxBawd9NzJ2TwDWtX3jlosHF4yWPVU.Part 2>

metaphysical implications. He finds it diverges from myth's usual structure. Where myth obscures scapegoating, Christ's story exposes it.⁴⁶

For myths to effectively support the newfound solidarity emerging from scapegoating, they must sustain the community's shared illusion of the victim's culpability. This allows the group to successfully found a new state: one cleanly differentiated from the previous state of turmoil, which is associated with the vanquished party.⁴⁷ Cain and Abel, Romulus and Remus are again examples. Supernatural elements are often needed in such myths to explain events purely in terms of the victim's guilt, for example, superhuman powers may usefully explain away group murder – a victim chased off a cliff is said to have turned into a bird and flown away.⁴⁸ In these ways, scapegoating and sacrificial ritual are valuable cultural mechanisms that stabilise communities over time.⁴⁹

Girard then, differentiates Christianity from other religions – “myth is *against* the victim, whereas the Bible is *for* the victim”⁵⁰ – and sees it as ‘anti-religious’ in disclosing and rejecting scapegoating. This thesis argues this insight into Christianity reconciles *Errors’* contradictory Christian references – the play parodies religious form and the supernatural, yet highlights Christ's story; its denouement has a religious, mystical feel, but is at the same time purely

⁴⁶ Girard, *I See Satan*, Part 3, Chapters 9-12, specifically 146-47. Also Girard, *To Double Business*, 146.

⁴⁷ Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 116.

⁴⁸ Girard, *To Double Business*, 183, 78-98. Also Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 26-27.

⁴⁹ Girard, *To Double Business*, 202.

⁵⁰ Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 141.

material. The thesis proposes that in this, Shakespeare offers a Girard-esque reading of Christ's teachings as an alternative to scapegoating. The truth of the twin mistakes shows each individual in the mob to have been compelled by misapprehensions about the guilt or intent of others, so kills those delusions instead of any victim.

To re-cap, Girard does not focus on themes as much as recurring social patterns, seeing texts as anthropological documents that show how groups function.⁵¹ He sees social structures rising from innate biological and cultural blueprints, with scapegoat-based sacrificial ritual managing outbreaks of internal violence in communities.⁵² This differs from a conception of fiction as commenting on life, or even as reflecting social structures determined by power relations. Power analyses can link victimisation to particular demographics – culture, status, gender. Girard instead sees violence rising from a universal propensity for mimesis, so as latent in everyone. Though *exacerbated* by natural disaster or social inequity (itself partially a mimetic issue), the potential for violence is shared. Girard sees mob volatility as the primordial source of social crisis, and its resolution via violent scapegoating as the basis of cultural organisation. His work then, does not exactly focus on violence, rather, he sees human relations and culture constitutionally cohere or disintegrate in respect of mimesis and its violent implications.

⁵¹ Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 136, Note 16.

⁵² Girard, *To Double Business*, 202.

The Comedy of Errors

Given his focus on social behaviour and the cultural forms that record it, Girard readily illuminates Shakespeare, who also focuses on social behaviour and drew from similar sources – myth, drama, the Bible. Shakespeare’s scope is also vast. He scrutinises the micro and subjective, as well as the macro, state-level implications of marriage, moral dilemma, murder, insurrection and war, often showing how intimate interpersonal tensions unfold into epic public tragedies. His themes of time, love, death and community address the core of what it means to be human. Hage re-affirms the playwright’s self-evident range: “[he] applied his understanding of human psychology and societies to periods as varied as the War of the Roses, the Roman crisis of the first century BCE, and the Trojan War”.⁵³ T. G. Bishop finds *Errors’* concerns traverse, “linguistics, narratology, and anthropology”.⁵⁴ In broad terms then, Shakespeare and Girard both explore human relations as they influence history across an interconnected spectrum of scales, from domestic to societal.

They are also alike in avoiding clear-cut moral categorisation. Shakespeare dramatises the grey areas between comedy and tragedy with such nuance, the label ‘problem play’ indicates the ambiguity some of his plays present – the sense that life is not neatly explained by binaries of good and evil. He regularly spotlights the humanity of his cruellest villains. With Girard’s awareness of how

⁵³ Hage, "Necessary Victims," 126.

⁵⁴ Bishop, *Theatre of Wonder*, 81.

easily mimetic contagion galvanises mob violence, he says he and his theory are, "anti-crowd. After all, the crowd tends to be completely on the 'right' or on the 'left'".⁵⁵ Girard inverts expected readings of power relations, seeing power as a centre of attention, created by and dependent on viewers at its periphery. It is always unstable, with the actor at the centre interchangeable, their position contingent on fickle shifts in collective observer approval.⁵⁶

Richard Van Oort, explains idea this with respect to Shakespeare:

None of the kings in Shakespeare's history plays, despite their obvious centrality on stage and within the social order they represent, are free of resentment toward those around them, whom they imagine as rivals to the very centrality they themselves have usurped.⁵⁷

There is a fine line between sociological and dramatic mechanism, and this thesis suggests Shakespeare was well positioned to formulate a conception of social relations with the versatility of Girard's. Girard certainly believed, "the whole mimetic theory is present in Shakespeare in [a highly] explicit form",⁵⁸ and that his grasp of the dynamics of violent sacrifice was, "far superior to that of modern anthropology".⁵⁹ Girard found Shakespeare's work so compatible with his own, it expanded his thinking.⁶⁰ Girardian scholars agree that

⁵⁵ Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 17.

⁵⁶ E.g., Girard, *Theatre of Envy*, 184.

⁵⁷ Richard Van Oort, "Shakespeare and the Idea of the Modern," *New Literary History* 37, Critical Inquiries, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 325. See also Girard, *To Double Business*, 152.

⁵⁸ Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 26, 1-12. Also Girard, *To Double Business*, 152.

⁵⁹ Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 62.

⁶⁰ Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 1-12, 41-68, 64. Also Girard, Pogue Harrison, and Haven, "Mimesis and Desire," 8-13.

Shakespeare consciously theorised around social relations in his drama.⁶¹ This thesis shows *Errors* strongly reflects Girardian patterns, and that such patterns link it to other plays in the oeuvre, arguing there is some feasibility in the idea the two found a similar key to human relations. This is bolstered by their common access to and appreciation of Christian principles: alignment between them could rise from a similar interpretation of those precepts.

Despite separation in time, the two drew on similar narrative works, with a substantial period of overlap from classical antiquity to the early 1600s. As Girard sought patterns in myths and plays, Shakespeare drew vignettes and motifs from them, with *Errors* a relevant exemplar. Plautus was a foundational source – primarily *Menaechmi*, from which he took the premise of lost twins mistaken for one another, but also *Amphitro*, which furnished the scenario of a real husband locked out by a usurping lookalike.⁶² The play's tradition reaches back to Greek New Comedy,⁶³ with influences from early Italian theatre movements,⁶⁴ and closer to home, English miracle plays and London theatre of the 1580s-90s.⁶⁵ It strongly references Christian scripture,⁶⁶ with the Bible a key common influence on both *The Comedy of Errors* and Girard's later theory.

⁶¹ Hage, "Necessary Victims," 123-29. Also Van Oort, "Idea of the Modern," 327-33.

⁶² Girard, "Comedies of Errors," 66-69, 77-83. Also Miola, *Critical Essays*, 4-10.

⁶³ Harry Levin, "Two Comedies of Errors (1966)," in *The Comedy of Errors: Critical Essays*, ed. Robert S. Miola (New York: Garland, 1997), 115.

⁶⁴ Miola, *Critical Essays*, 13-15, also 183-98.

⁶⁵ Arthur F. Kinney, "Shakespeare's 'Comedy of Errors' and the Nature of Kinds," in *The Comedy of Errors: Critical Essays*, ed. Robert S. Miola (New York: Garland, 1997), 158, 65.

⁶⁶ Sources are drawn from Miola, *Critical Essays*, Introduction and throughout. and Charles Whitworth, "Introduction," in *The Comedy of Errors*, ed. Charles Whitworth, The Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

Shakespeare's ability to select potent social dynamics from diverse literary sources and meld these into abiding dramatic scenarios, parallels Girard's more academic process. Shakespeare's creative synthesis of disparate influences into a new dramatic form is a strong theme in *Errors'* criticism. He is seen to not only master, but transcend classical dramatic principles, abstracting new dramatic mechanisms from accepted practices. T. W. Baldwin notes his, "power of assimilation and growth", "brilliance of both grasp [of principle] and adaptation";⁶⁷ David Bevington, his, "creative reconfiguration of classical sources [with] the rich environment of the contemporary London theatre".⁶⁸ A. F. Kinney is particularly impressed by *Errors'* extensive and apt use of Christian iconography and how this is merged with other sources:

The native, classical, Christian, and Pauline traditions of drama are first exploited and then ... mingled, mixed, and metamorphosed.⁶⁹

Concluding his article, Kinney selects this comment on Shakespeare's creative process: "by adjusting the patterns of art, he would seem to be looking for that fictional ordering which could act as a powerful interpretive formula".⁷⁰

But despite this regard for Shakespeare's skill and *Errors'* erudite allusions, critics can be circumspect about its depth of significance, often taking it at its farcical face value. Analysis, as reviewed below, rarely probes the play's

⁶⁷ T. W. Baldwin, "Brave New World (1965)," in *The Comedy of Errors : Critical Essays*, ed. Robert S. Miola (New York: Garland, 1997), 98-99.

⁶⁸ David Bevington, "'The Comedy of Errors' in the Context of the Late 1580s and Early 1590s (1997)," in *The Comedy of Errors : Critical Essays*, ed. Robert S. Miola (New York: Garland, 1997), 340, 35-53.

⁶⁹ Kinney, "Nature of Kinds," 178.

⁷⁰ Philip Edwards, *Shakespeare and the Confines of Art* (London: Methuen, 1968; repr., 1981). Quoted in Kinney, "Nature of Kinds," 177.

ubiquitous slapstick violence, its political execution, or how its relationships generate conflict. These are, respectively, connected to identity errors, dismissed as a mechanical necessity, or not examined systematically. Girard's observation that the twin motif throughout myth and literature represents processes associated with mimetic violence,⁷¹ and his certainty Shakespeare explored this, brings the play under new investigation. This thesis then, counters critical trends by showing *Errors'* many beatings and spats are routine and not solely connected to twin errors, its opening civic violence articulates its core issues, and its relationships consistently generate wider conflict, and they do so in a recurring way. Where *Errors'* criticism can be self-referential – plot or medium focused – Girard's mimetic theory then, takes the play into wider symbolic and anthropological territory.

The reason criticism often doesn't address *Errors'* violence is quite plain. It is counter-intuitive to dwell on the violence of a comedy. To do so with *Errors* – "perhaps the most uncomplicatedly funny of all Shakespeare's plays"⁷² – seems especially contrary. The play's absurd premise – two sets of identical twins unknowingly occupy the same town for a day – immediately suggests mechanical superficiality. Moreover, this does translate into a plot structured around accidental twin swaps and raucous, knockabout humour, these tropes

⁷¹ Girard, *To Double Business*, 186. Also Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 51-52. Also Girard, *I See Satan*, 63.

⁷² David Bevington, "Introduction to The Comedy of Errors," in *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. Hardin Craig and David Bevington (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1973), 80. Quoted by Grennan, "Arm and Sleeve."

dominating any reflective moments. There are only glimpses of the profound, poetic expression that distinguishes Shakespeare and engages commentators. Critical analysis can therefore react to *Errors'* hectic veneer or be preoccupied with a few select lyrical lines. Even when its darker tones are noticed, it is certainly not seen as outlining the sacrificial violence of humanity.

Above all, the twin errors provide an overt, mechanically true explanation for *Errors'* arguments, which belays further scrutiny and prompts themes of identity confusion. Harold F. Brooks typifies *Errors'* key recognised, but circular, rationale: "trust in mere appearance results in illusion and mistakes of identity, thus dislocating relationship, and so disrupting order".⁷³

Girard's focus on mimesis as the primary driver in human conflict therefore forces an untypical investigation into the play. His formulation of how disorder arises is simpler: relationships are inherently difficult as they are founded in mimesis, which creates, then escalates, interpersonal conflict. This thesis tests for and finds strong evidence of this formula in *Errors*. It deliberately looks past identity errors to target relational conflict occurring outside those mistakes, finding that *Errors* comments on how human relations are troublesome in and of themselves. With regard to plot for instance, the protagonists' identity troubles do not begin with the Syracusan twins' arrival.

⁷³ Harold Brooks, "Themes and Structure in 'The Comedy of Errors' (1961)," in *The Comedy of Errors : Critical Essays*, ed. Robert S. Miola (New York: Garland, 1997), 85.

Antipholus of Syracuse's identity is already adrift when he arrives, his wistful lines signalling this theme to critics (1.2.35-40) are uttered *before* he first encounters the 'wrong' Dromio. The city is already at war, and relationships already strained in Antipholous of Ephesus' household – his wife Adriana prone to envisaging lurid sexual betrayals as he regularly turns up late for lunch. The analysis then, interrogates this relational background.

Errors was long seen as Shakespeare's slightest play, exploiting the shallowest comic form: farce. In *Shakespeare and Violence*, Foakes examines histories and tragedies in preference to comedies, dismissing *Errors* in a few lines that characterise critical views: "such apparent violence, typical of farce, is fun for an audience, apparently as a vicarious release of impulses they have repressed".⁷⁴ In surveying its critical history, Miola agrees this is what "conventional critical and theatrical wisdom" has said –

that *Errors* is essentially farce; that [its dramatic] frame is irrelevant to or incompatible with the main action; that the characters are merely caricatures; ... that Luciana must be a simpering contrast to the more complex Adriana; ... that the verse is unremarkable or immature.⁷⁵

Miola's 1997 collection of essays strengthened appreciation for *Errors*. Critics acknowledged its diverse sources and clever plot, which engineers a cascade of interconnected comic collisions within a condensed Aristotelian unity. G. R. Elliot says, "in sheer composition [it] surpasses most of [Shakespeare's]

⁷⁴ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 8.

⁷⁵ Miola, *Critical Essays*, 35.

early works and some of his mature ones",⁷⁶ and Charles Whitworth, "it is extraordinarily well-plotted, even rigorously so, a model of classical style."⁷⁷ Others laud its variety of poetic forms: "the play is ... a virtuoso display of the phonetic resources of the language".⁷⁸ But while *Errors* began to be taken more seriously, its weight was seen to lie in mastery of language and dramatic form more than reflection on humanity, let alone violence.

Eamon Grennan's 1980 article exemplifies this focus on form, his in-depth linguistic analysis finding only that the play is centrally about language. He demonstrates *Errors'* expressive capacity, showing how well it stages clashes between order and chaos with abrupt changes in tone and rhythm and its many puns which disrupt speech conventions.⁷⁹ But he takes language to not only realise, but constitute the play's meaning, theme and purpose. In this, Grennan sacrifices depth of meaning for self-reference, seeing *Errors* as commenting solely on language's ability to create illusions, "language and reality are seen, quite simply, to have more than one meaning".⁸⁰ In lionising language as driving the play's action, even seeing it acting independently of will, he forgoes commenting on the human intentions driving that language:

⁷⁶ Also George Roy Elliott, "Weirdness in 'The Comedy of Errors' (1939)," in *The Comedy of Errors : Critical Essays*, ed. Robert S. Miola (New York: Garland, 1997), 58.

⁷⁷ Whitworth, "Introduction," 6.

⁷⁸ O'Donnell, "Metrical Reading," 419.

⁷⁹ Grennan, "Arm and Sleeve."

⁸⁰ Grennan, "Arm and Sleeve," 162. Also Reto Winckler, "Profound Farce : William Shakespeare's The Comedy of Errors as Farcical Scepticism," *Cahiers Élisabéthains* 97, no. 1 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0184767817750668>.

The pun recognizes the refusal of language to be confined within its conventional borders. [There is] deliberate emphasis upon the anarchic independence of language, its natural tendency to contrive a reality at odds with the conventional, would-be objective truth.⁸¹

This strips *Errors'* characters of their "refusal to be confined" and of the hasty paranoias that this thesis finds creates their mistaken, antagonistic reality. Grennan concludes that while Shakespeare goes on to address "the most important questions of existence", in *Errors* he is merely, "coming to terms with the conventions of his art".⁸² Bishop also epitomises this medium focused reading: "The resuscitation of community through clarification of the vital significance of narrative turns out to be the play's deepest impulse".⁸³

In keeping with this tendency to interpret the play in terms of itself, *Errors'* motifs are often seen as simply amplifying its language or plot. While *Errors'* motifs do amplify its events, critics anachronistically leave them as signs without considering their wider import as symbols. Bonds, for instance, recur in the play in the form of words, actions or props, and variously, as conceptual or physical, affirming or constricting. This indicates a strength of purpose, but critics discuss bonds only in terms of storyline ironies: the play opens with a bound prisoner and ends with his release; Antipholus beats people with a rope and is later bound by one. The twin motif is doubled by Shakespeare who adds a second set to Plautus' plot. But its significance for critics stays within the

⁸¹ Grennan, "Arm and Sleeve," 159-60.

⁸² Grennan, "Arm and Sleeve," 162-63.

⁸³ Bishop, *Theatre of Wonder*, 87.

confines of theatre – the twins are simply multiplying devices that push the action to absurdity⁸⁴ or a trick to ensure a happy ending.⁸⁵ Many note the twins are like the play's puns – they look or sound the same but mean different things.⁸⁶ Again, the symbol is taken no further than language – twins subvert meaning, like puns, causing chaos; puns evoke chaos created by twins. *Errors'* many opposed stances and tones are similarly seen to merely reify the narrative of family life and civic order fractured then restored.⁸⁷

Even where precedent suggests more significance, *Errors'* farcical presentation confounds depth of interpretation. Foakes shows Shakespeare often relates human violence to nature's tempests,⁸⁸ but sees *Errors'* storm as "little more than part of the machinery to start in motion the complications of the plot".⁸⁹ He examines *Pericles'* storm – its births, deaths, separations and unlikely rescues a "matter for joy and tears"⁹⁰ – but not the chance separate rescues of Egeon, Emelia and newborns in *Errors'* storm, where, "Fortune had left to both of us alike/ What to delight in, what to sorrow for" (1.1.104-105). *Lear's* storm is, "a symbolic embodiment of the confusion and discord in the kingdom",⁹¹ but not *Errors'*, though it is central to Egeon's crucial story, and he, caught in the

⁸⁴ Brooks, "Themes and Structure," 81.

⁸⁵ E.g., Barbara Freedman, "Reading Errantly: Misrecognition and the Uncanny in 'The Comedy of Errors' (1991)," in *The Comedy of Errors: Critical Essays*, ed. Robert S. Miola (New York: Garland, 1997), 265.

⁸⁶ Levin, "Two Comedies of Errors." Also Miola, *Critical Essays*, 26. O'Donnell, "Metrical Reading," 402, Note 13 summarises references to the twins as puns.

⁸⁷ E.g., Grennan, "Arm and Sleeve," as above.

⁸⁸ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, e.g., 10, 184, 85, 93.

⁸⁹ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 183-84.

⁹⁰ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 185.

⁹¹ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 184.

"enmity and discord" of city states (1.1.5). Foakes inspects the magical restorations of Pericles' wife, and Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*, which echo Egeon's unexpected reprieve and family reunion. But rather than prompting deeper enquiry into *Errors*, this simply reduces the gravity of *Pericles'* finale – "it is a conventional comic resolution like that in *Errors*".⁹²

In reacting to *Errors'* supernatural elements, critics discuss an ineffable dark undertone that works against its surface amiability, calling this – wonder,⁹³ thoroughly fey, weird, uncanny,⁹⁴ an atmosphere of religion or illusion,⁹⁵ a pervasive "motif of madness".⁹⁶ This disturbing element emerges particularly in performance. Several reviewers of Clifford Williams' 1962 production of *Errors* were struck by this undercurrent: "behind the mistaken identities and manic confusions of farce there are often genuinely dark and disquieting forces at work".⁹⁷ However, this sense of darkness is not taken to indicate *Errors'* has serious views on religion or the supernatural, it merely uses their language for effect as, "a kind of figurative substrate of images and associations".⁹⁸

Recent criticism does not fully recover this underestimation of *Errors'* depth or symbolic significance. Reto Winckler agrees critics skirt around farce's lowbrow

⁹² Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 186.

⁹³ Bishop, *Theatre of Wonder*, in title and throughout.

⁹⁴ Respectively, Lanier, "Stigmatical in Making." Elliott, "Weirdness."; Freedman, "Reading Errantly."

⁹⁵ Richard C. McCoy, *Faith in Shakespeare* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁹⁶ Winckler, "Profound Farce," 6 and 9-10.

⁹⁷ Miola, *Critical Essays*, 488. quoting Michael Billington. See also, several similar instances in Whitworth, "Introduction," 70-71.

⁹⁸ Bishop, *Theatre of Wonder*, 86, also 82-84. Also, for example, McCoy, *Faith in Shakespeare*, 49.

stigma, missing *Errors'* sharpest points.⁹⁹ He mounts a strong defence of farce, canvassing definitions to show it showcases the surface mechanics of relating and their absurdity. He argues for *Errors'* potent use of this stark form in presenting, "uncomfortable truths about the human condition", making it, "one of Shakespeare's most philosophically profound plays". But for Winckler, this means it reveals the fragility of meaning in social discourse¹⁰⁰ more than tendencies to violence in the human heart. Simon Palfrey and Emma Smith's book on *Shakespeare's Dead*, traverses the oeuvre to find a preponderance of death, which even, "seems always to hang over Shakespeare's comedies",¹⁰¹ without seeming overly concerned that this death is mostly associated with murder. Erin Weinberg comes closest to *Errors'* home truths: "it is a play in which violent passions threaten domestic order", expanded from farce into, "a far deeper domestic drama of jealousy and false appearances",¹⁰² though she sees Christian Stoicism underlying its focus on passions, not sacrificial violence. Girard's anthropological model of human violence allows a deeper analysis.

Structure and methods

This thesis establishes the broad nature and locus of violence in *The Comedy of Errors* then traces how Girard's mimetic cycle develops in the play. It begins

⁹⁹ Winckler, "Profound Farce," 5-6.

¹⁰⁰ Winckler, "Profound Farce," 6.

¹⁰¹ Simon Palfrey and Emma Josephine Smith, *Shakespeare's Dead* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2016), 48.

¹⁰² Weinberg, "Helpless Patience," 1.

by examining *Errors'* main action, linking it to the mimetic rivalry and desire of the cycle's early stages. It then considers the play's opening and closing frame, connecting it to later mob violence and scapegoating phases of the cycle.

Chapter 1 establishes the play is substantially concerned with interpersonal conflict. It considers where that conflict is centred and how it escalates, showing protagonist responses, more than twin errors, determine whether life in Ephesus is experienced as order or chaos, heaven or hell. The chapter considers ubiquitous, trivial micro-violences occurring in the play's domestic contexts, but also notes its trajectory towards larger violence.

Chapter 2 dives more deeply into these household tensions, establishing mimetic desire is at work there. Sisters Adriana and Luciana are shown to emblematised mimetic dynamics more subtly, but as effectively as the twin Dromios who echo each other's insults through a locked door (3.1). Adriana's febrile jealousy is spotlighted, and both sisters shown to inflame the troubles in Ephesus. The chapter finds Shakespeare targets mimetic opposition itself as a social ill, more than any moral stance voiced by protagonists.

Chapter 3 considers *Errors'* opening, which centres on Egeon's death sentence (1.1). The brevity of this scene belies its import, as it signals issues of civic and sacrificial violence. Egeon is proposed as a Christ-like victim, his fate determined by whether those around him demonstrate restrained enquiry and

Christian mercy, or reactive, pagan vengeance. The chapter argues Shakespeare had opportunity to witness not only spontaneous violent mob victimisation, but deliberately choreographed scapegoating in his milieu, positioning him to appreciate the sacrificial mechanics Girard describes.

Chapter 4 shows *Errors'* refusal to blame or exonerate any one protagonist indicates an awareness of the arbitrary, compelling nature of mob violence as emphasised by Girard, this sensibility around innocence supporting the play's moving denouement. That finale is proposed as an immersive re-creation of Christ's revelation of this truth of the seductive power of human scapegoating. The chapter closes by showing how the dynamics of sacrifice, especially of communal murder at the height of mimetic crisis, manifested viscerally in Elizabethan theatrical settings.

Girard's theory is incrementally detailed as illustrative junctions arise in the thesis. Mimetic violence – self-fuelled imitation of hostility – is encountered in Chapter 1, and mimetic desire and its reversals in Chapter 2. Chapters 3 and 4 address mob violence as it approaches sacrificial scapegoating. Girard's 1991 book, *A Theatre of Envy*, is a foundational source for the thesis, especially where the Girardian analysis presented resonates with Girard's view of other plays in the oeuvre. His article on *Errors* is also used this way.¹⁰³ *Evolution and*

¹⁰³ Girard, "Comedies of Errors."

Conversion, published late in Girard's career (2008), distils and consolidates his body of work.¹⁰⁴ It is used in conjunction with Girard's essays on myth from his 1988 collection *To Double Business Bound*, in describing anthropological aspects of his theory.¹⁰⁵ Material on Girard's reading of Christianity is drawn mainly from his book on this topic – *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 2001.¹⁰⁶ Other articles by Girard are referenced, including his article on comedy, "Perilous Balance: A comic hypothesis".¹⁰⁷ Personal interviews with Girard¹⁰⁸ and lectures on his theory¹⁰⁹ furnish a broad background understanding of the issues involved in this thesis. Jean-Michel Oughourlian's 2016 book, *The Mimetic Brain*, addresses the psychiatry of mimesis.¹¹⁰

Critical analysis of *Errors* is used throughout the thesis to interrogate findings, with Robert Miola's 1997 compendium of *Errors* research a key source.¹¹¹ Girardian insights are also tested against authors writing on Shakespearean themes that recur across the oeuvre, for example, Lisa Hopkins on marriage in Shakespeare,¹¹² Richard McCoy on Christian faith,¹¹³ and T. G. Bishop on the

¹⁰⁴ Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*.

¹⁰⁵ Girard, *To Double Business*.

¹⁰⁶ Girard, *I See Satan*.

¹⁰⁷ René Girard, "Perilous Balance : A Comic Hypothesis," *Comparative Literature* 87, no. 7 (December 1972).

¹⁰⁸ The Golden Thread, "Rene Girard | The Scapegoat | Complete 5-part CBC 'Ideas' series with David Cayley (2001)," (YouTube.com, 2021).

¹⁰⁹ Stewart, "Mimetic Theory."

¹¹⁰ Oughourlian, *Mimetic Brain*.

¹¹¹ Miola, *Critical Essays*.

¹¹² Lisa Hopkins, *The Shakespearean Marriage : Merry Wives and Heavy Husbands* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

¹¹³ McCoy, *Faith in Shakespeare*.

sense of “wonder” in the plays.¹¹⁴ Two scholars in particular are used this way:

R. A. Foakes and Meredith Anne Skura.

Foakes furnishes a valuable background understanding of the concerns of Shakespeare’s most violent plays.¹¹⁵ As well as storms, other emblems of violence recur in Foakes’ review, though he tends not to see these as constituting a pattern or model.¹¹⁶ They include: opening lines that present violent contexts which set a play’s concerns;¹¹⁷ the genesis of violence in envy among close friends or relations,¹¹⁸ often referencing Cain and Abel;¹¹⁹ the spread of violence from violent contexts or leaders to their families and states;¹²⁰ and human nature as foundationally violent.¹²¹ These are proposed as recurrent patterns, even principles, when seen in Girardian terms, and as centrally Shakespearean when shown to manifest in *Errors*, his lightest play.

In *Shakespeare the Actor and the Purposes of Playing*,¹²² Skura compiles diverse evidence showing how stage actors experience playing in sacrificial

¹¹⁴ Bishop, *Theatre of Wonder*.

¹¹⁵ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*.

¹¹⁶ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, e.g., with regard to revenge 130, also 13.

¹¹⁷ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 54, 62, 71, 74-5, 79, 114, 35, 44-5, 47-9, 76-7, 84-6.

¹¹⁸ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 16, 25-27, 52, 74, 109, 11, 13, 14-15, 19-20, 23-25, 28-30, 37, 41, 48, 76.

¹¹⁹ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 9, 15-16, 18, 25-27, 39, 40, 43, 52-53, 71, 74, 109, 11, 13-15, 19-20, 23-25, 28-31, 37, 41, 47-48, 55, 76, 95.

¹²⁰ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 147-48, 65. Further examples of mythic ‘twins’ or warring brothers Girard, *Theatre of Envy*, 274.

¹²¹ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 10, 16, 17, 29, 79, 138, 67, 80-81, 203.

¹²² Meredith Anne Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor and the Purposes of Playing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

terms.¹²³ She highlights the volatile dynamics between audience, as mob, and actor, as god/victim, as being particularly overt in Shakespeare's era and of particular interest to him.¹²⁴ Her evidence of theatre and Shakespeare's drama as being concerned with sacrifice, is connected to Girard's similar views. Though independent, Skura's research strongly highlights Girardian principles at work in Shakespeare. She sees many of the plays, like *Errors*, depicting worlds in which, "the unstable structure of violent opposition – between male and male, male and female – matters more than one's position in it".¹²⁵

Where the thesis touches on Christianity as linking Shakespeare, Girard and *Errors*, it does not try to represent Christian views, referencing only Girard's particular reading of Christianity as that relates to *Errors*. This both confines discussion to a manageable scope and elucidates his unusual perspective. Another relevant area not dealt with by this thesis is the relationship between comedy and violence. Again, this omission deliberately focuses discussion and recognises *Errors'* comedy has received more scholarly attention than its sacrificial violence. That said, there are important connections between comedy and violence, especially in the case of slapstick, that could valuably be

¹²³ Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 1-8, 26-28, and throughout.

¹²⁴ Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, the actor experience - Chapter 1 and throughout; Shakespeare's interest in sacrifice - throughout.

¹²⁵ Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 135.

brought to a Girardian reading of *Errors*. Nicholas Brookes, for instance, notes that before Shakespeare, tragedy was, "largely violent moral farce".¹²⁶

To consolidate – this thesis applies René Girard's model of human relations to *The Comedy of Errors*, delivering new insights into the play and usefully illustrating Girard's theory with Shakespeare's entertaining dramatic scenarios. In doing so, it builds one small bridge between Girardian and Shakespearean scholarship. The value of a Girardian analysis is confirmed by the potency with which it brings to light unnoticed features of *Errors*, links those overlooked features to other plays in the oeuvre, and illuminates apparent contradictions in the play. The thesis finds support for Girard's view that Shakespeare explored the dynamics of human violence in terms similar to his own. Because Girard's views are informed by a wide array of theoretical arenas and address the origins of culture, they encompass more data and wider timescales than most literary views. His wider anthropological perspective is therefore often found to align with but transcend *Errors* analyses. Shakespeare's time tested play, with its conflictual relations, escalating brawls and threatened execution, concomitantly substantiates Girard's proposals about human nature.

Surveying Shakespeare's most violent plays, R. A. Foakes posits extreme violence as an aberrant impulse, emerging from unfathomable primeval

¹²⁶ Nicholas Brooke, *Horrid Laughter in Jacobean Tragedy* (London: Open Books, 1979), 7.

shadows.¹²⁷ Girard sees it germinating in quotidian domestic routine, and is willing to hazard that all human myth is, "the still misunderstood record of countless Cains killing countless Abels".¹²⁸ While it may seem bleak that Girard points to the violence of humanity, and suggests Shakespeare does too, this thesis finds the opposite. Both thinkers demonstrate a radical acceptance of violence as a formative force in human relations, allowing them to unerringly and compassionately bring their students and audiences to also apprehend the humanity of violence.

¹²⁷ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 8, 57, 61, 73, 74, 77, 79, 113, 07, 26, 30, 46, 92.

¹²⁸ Girard, *To Double Business*, 197.

Chapter 1

Domestic violence



Figure 1. The locked door scene, from *The Lord Chamberlain's Men* 2017 production of *The Comedy of Errors*.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Photograph by Jack Offord, *TLCM The Comedy of Errors at Raglan Castle*, <https://theatreweekly.com/all-male-shakespeare-with-comedy-of-errors-from-the-lord-chamberlains-men/>

This chapter begins by establishing the large degree to which *The Comedy of Errors* revolves around violence, and the general nature of that violence. As well as the many beatings that punctuate and intensify the action, a somewhat disturbing public exorcism is highlighted. While the play's abuses and arguments seem mostly harmless, conducted as they are in an off-hand manner, this kind of casual violence is linked to extremes of violence in other Shakespearean plays. The play's focus on the trivialities and frustrations of domesticity is shown to accord with Shakespeare's view of marriage as a cornerstone of wider social stability. This Girardian relationship between the micro and macro, and the play's trajectory toward more extreme violence, is accented as *Errors'* arguments spread to the streets.

The chapter goes on to consider precisely how conflict arises and develops in *Errors*, noting its tensions pre-date the Syracusan twins' arrival in Ephesus. Its conflicts are shown to rise out of this established substrate of habitual, domestic contention, and to be accelerated by knee-jerk attack and retort behaviours typifying Girard's mimetic violence. To ground this, the first of *Errors'* street brawls, emblematically staged around a locked door, is analysed (3.1). The scene strongly elucidates how defensive, mimetic antagonism both escalates hostilities and homogenises all those engaged in it. Analysis shows how Shakespeare uses language not only to express a sense of social chaos, but to orchestrate it. It is argued the scene references the warring brothers of myth in its relational dynamics and twin motif.

Ubiquitous violence

The Comedy of Errors may be one of Shakespeare's most violent plays – in terms of frequency if not severity of violent acts. Words relating to beating occur more often in *Errors* than any of the other plays. Charles Whitworth sees this violence as the reason it is labelled as farce –

in particular the physical violence of which the two servant Dromios are the main victims. Their increasingly irritated and uncomprehending masters ... resort to beating and threats ... on several occasions.¹³⁰

But "several occasions" is underplaying it. The early scenes are riddled with beating references: Dromio recounts a history of beatings and re-directed anger from his master and mistress, is threatened several times and beaten twice (1.2, 2.1). His lines go on to be dominated by plaintive listings of blows received. He feels, justifiably, "If I last in this service, you must case me in leather" (2.1.86). This culminates in an unambiguously damning, sustained polemic from him in Act 4,

I have served him from the hour of my nativity to this instant, and have nothing at his hands for my service but blows. When I am cold, he heats me with beating. When I am warm, he cools me with beating. I am waked with it when I sleep, raised with it when I sit, driven out of doors with it when I go from home, welcomed home with it when I return (4.4.30-40).

which is, indeed, closely followed by a beating (45). His Syracusan counterpart is beaten just as often, doubling this already hyperbolic statement of violence.

¹³⁰ Whitworth, "Introduction," 43.

As well as outright violence, there are many threats of violence. The Syracusan twins draw swords on a crowd (4.4.145-148), Antipholus threatens Adriana: "But with these nails I'll pluck out those false eyes" (4.4.105). There are *reports* of violence. A messenger reports another threat ("He cries for you, and vows, if he can take you,/To scorch your face and disfigure you"¹⁸²⁻⁸³), and says Antipholus and Dromio have beaten maids and molested a Doctor:

O mistress, mistress, shift and save yourself!
My master and his man are both broke loose,
Beaten the maids a-row, and bound the Doctor,
Whose beard they have singed off with brands of fire,
And ever as it blazed they threw on him
Great pails of muddled mire to quench the hair (5.1.168-175).

And there are *predictions* of violence. This messenger anticipates murder: "And sure – unless you send some present help – /Between them they will kill the conjurer" (178-179). All these are accompanied by hectic stage business, derogatory remarks, reprovals and agitated retellings – a third of the play comprises outraged reports of what has already happened.¹³¹ Violence takes up a huge proportion of *Errors'* runtime, even though much of it is notional.

Casual violence

The off-hand domestic argument throughout the play is conspicuously casual. Playing host to goldsmith Angelo and merchant Balthasar, Antipholus readily breaks off polite discourse to chastise Dromio and, as quickly, resumes courteous chat:

¹³¹ Winckler, "Profound Farce," 13.

ANTIPHOLUS: I think thou art an ass.

DROMIO: Marry, so it doth appear
By the wrongs I suffer and the blows I bear.
I should kick being kicked, and being at that pass,
You would keep from my heels, and beware of an ass.

ANTIPHOLUS: *[to Balthasar]* You're sad signor Balthasar. Pray God our cheer.
May answer my good will, and your good welcome here (3.1.14-20).

When he finds he is barred from his house, Antipholus is rapidly and comprehensively drawn into a battle with servants over entry, despite his clients' presence – his "obtrusive cheeriness gives place to rage, which in turn yields to merry vengefulness".¹³² He repeatedly, heatedly beats at the door and abuses kitchenmaid Luce: "Do you hear you minion" (54), "Thou baggage, let me in" (57), "You'll cry for this, minion, if I beat the door down" (60). The ruckus is extended by his refusal to back down and determination to force entry (81). Balthasar dissuades him, warning of loss of reputation, but Antipholus has already shown a distinct lack of decorum in public with little compunction.

The informality of these exchanges make the incident's humour more accessible, but this casual violence establishes a ground for later fights and has resonances with more serious violence in Shakespeare. Foakes sees Shakespeare's casual violence indicating a desensitisation to violence.¹³³ *Othello's* Iago is, "a becalmed soldier who is addicted to violent action", with a "careless attitude" to conflict, and trivial incidents in that play rapidly escalate

¹³² Elliott, "Weirdness," 64.

¹³³ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*.

to dangerous.¹³⁴ He argues Lear's violent habits create a climate of abuse in his household, infecting its members and leading to the play's savage extremes. Foakes describes this climate, "in which 'his countenance likes me not' is sufficient excuse for a beating", in terms reminiscent of *Errors*, with people lashing out in anger, and shows Lear's, "licence to violence", creates civil war and decimates his family.¹³⁵ Shakespeare then, regularly presents violence as moving from casual to brutal, with *Errors'* plot proceeding on this course. Though it never reaches extremes, its incidental violence holds that potential.

A later scene, where Antipholus and Dromio are forcibly bound and subjected to an exorcism, makes this potential clearer (4.4.40-131). The perpetrator is a 'Doctor Pinch', engaged by Adriana to 'cure' her husband's presumed madness (54). Skura notes "pinching" is a bearbaiting term describing the biting attacks of dogs on the bear at the centre of the ring, especially while, "the victim was not only pinched but chained".¹³⁶ She identifies this motif throughout Shakespeare's work, seeing *Errors'* exorcism in these terms:

Here the image of a bear maddened by pinching dogs becomes a figure for a husband at the mercy of a nagging, jealous, 'pinching' wife ... Antipholus, like Talbot and Falstaff, is surrounded and put on display. Humiliated by the public arrest, by his frustrating powerlessness ... Antipholus accuses his wife of collecting a vicious audience, "a *damned pack* / To make an loathsome abject scorn of me."¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 136-38.

¹³⁵ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 142-48.

¹³⁶ Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 205.

¹³⁷ Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 205, Skura's emphasis.

Antipholus' reciprocal molestation of the Doctor and threat to "pluck out [Adriana's] false eyes", rise from this event. Those eyes, he says, "would behold in me this shameful sport" (4.4.105), again referencing bearbaiting. Skura claims such Elizabethan entertainments strongly influenced Shakespeare – references to bearbaiting, "often carry symbolic weight, even in the comedies".¹³⁸ This view is endorsed by applying a Girardian lens to the scene, which would see its events in terms of mob victimisation of an innocent falsely accused of madness. This bearbaiting reference then, deepens the resonance of *Errors'* chains and bonds motifs and signals the play's interest in victimisation.

Errors' domestic antagonism also spreads to the streets, with family violence played out in the marketplace again having serious implications elsewhere in Shakespeare. *Romeo and Juliet's* opening brawl, which presages tragedy, starts in the street with servants, quickly drawing household heads out in their pyjamas (1.1). Foakes notes the quotidian violence in *Henry VI Part 2* which,

has not to do with generals and soldiers fighting wars, but with the kinds of violence that were practiced in or familiar to the London of Shakespeare's time, and it involves all levels of society, commoners especially.¹³⁹

This play, included in Foake's review of Shakespearean violence, spends more time examining household intrigue than battlefield bloodshed. Foakes describes particularly an episode between two women in the play: "Margaret calls for her fan and humiliates the proud duchess by boxing her ears,

¹³⁸ Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 205.

¹³⁹ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 44.

pretending she has mistaken her for a servant".¹⁴⁰ If such instances of domestic irritation have a bearing on larger violence and wars in other plays of the oeuvre, *Errors*' many beatings can be credited with significance.

Domestic violence

Errors' ubiquitous conflict is centred in household relationships, supporting Foakes' view that Shakespeare's violence often germinates in such settings,¹⁴¹ and Girard's, that all human violence does. Sir Phillip Sydney, writing in Shakespeare's time, defined comedy as, "an imitation of the common errors of our life",¹⁴² and critics seeking introspective soliloquies or gruesome acts in the play miss this: its deliberate focus is everyday, domestic antagonism. Its opening references foreign lands, but its core is lunch and its rituals:

Dromio's urgent concern over such matters as tardiness for dinner, the condition of food, household plans gone awry, and the anger of his mistress, is by no means exceptional ... voiced attention to the seemingly unremarkable events of day to-day life occupy the two Antipholuses and their servants with striking regularity.¹⁴³

Harry Levin sees this "intensive domesticity",¹⁴⁴ as does Erin Weinberg – *Errors* is, "selectively concerned with ... the domestic sphere".¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁰ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 44.

¹⁴¹ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, see Notes 89 and 91.

¹⁴² Quoted in Levin, "Two Comedies of Errors," 113.

¹⁴³ Joseph Candido, "Dining out in Ephesus : Food in 'The Comedy of Errors' (1990)," in *The Comedy of Errors: Critical Essays*, ed. Robert S. Miola (New York: Garland, 1997), 204.

¹⁴⁴ Levin, "Two Comedies of Errors," 128.

¹⁴⁵ Weinberg, "Helpless Patience," 11.

Within this sphere, the play targets marital relations, in keeping with many of Shakespeare's works. Hopkins shows his strong interest in marriage: "no other dramatist of the period so insistently offers us ... multiple weddings".¹⁴⁶ *Errors* opens with a marriage torn apart by a storm, then scrutinises Adriana and Antipholus' relationship, which presents a complete counter example to conduct promoted in church services and Protestant literature of the time. Paul's letter to the Ephesians, "exhorts husbands to be attentive and courteous to their wives",¹⁴⁷ and *Points of Huswifery* of 1573 counsels:

At bed and at board, howsoever befall,
Whatever God sendeth, be merry withall.

No brawling make
No jealousy take.

No taunts before servants, for hindering of fame,
No jarring too loud, for avoiding of shame.¹⁴⁸

Errors' central spouses so provocatively contradict such tracts, it indicates didactic purpose.

That purpose may be to link domestic stability to societal stability. Hopkins certainly ties Shakespeare's focus on marriage to his view of it as fundamental to social cohesion: "marriages function in Shakespeare ... to ensure the maintenance and perpetuation of the structures of civilised society as a whole".¹⁴⁹ Erin Weinberg endorses this in terms of *Errors*, arguing the play

¹⁴⁶ Hopkins, *Shakespearean Marriage*, 8-9, also 6-7.

¹⁴⁷ Weinberg, "Helpless Patience," 21.

¹⁴⁸ Candido, "Dining out in Ephesus," 217-18.

¹⁴⁹ Hopkins, *Shakespearean Marriage*, 13.

promotes harmonious marriage as the basis of peaceful Christian living and is strongly tied to Paul's *Ephesians* which, "stresses that unity under Christ begins in the domestic sphere".¹⁵⁰ *Errors* then, especially in its movement towards community violence, is not just about domesticity and marriage, but the role these micro-institutions play in maintaining wider social harmony. In this it displays a Girardian awareness of how micro-violence in intimate relations can lead to social crisis.

Errors' motifs also clearly point to the significance of marital disharmony as a precursor to wider social violence. Given Foakes' view, that Shakespeare's storms signal human violence,¹⁵¹ and Hopkins', that he, "relentlessly uses marriage as the mainspring of tragedy",¹⁵² *Errors'* opening tempest should be considered. In that storm, Egeon and Emelia bind themselves and two babies each to opposing ends of a ship mast floating in the agitated sea, where they are, "encountered by a mighty rock,/Which being violently borne upon,/Our helpful ship was splitted in the midst" (1.1.100-103). The visual symmetry here asks to be read emblematically. The obstacle that splits the newlyweds hints at emotional as well as physical separation, and flags the possibility that *Errors'* other marriage could also be torn apart. Antipholus and Adriana oppose one another throughout the play, as though floating precariously on that mast.

¹⁵⁰ Weinberg, "Helpless Patience."

¹⁵¹ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 183-84.

¹⁵² Hopkins, *Shakespearean Marriage*, 8-9.

Taken with all the above, this symbolism shows *Errors'* storm bears out Foakes' view, even if it is only a storm in a teacup.

Endemic violence

Errors presents a pervasive ambience of violence that pre-dates the identity mistakes which appear to commentators to cause its arguments. As the main action opens, Adriana has already beaten Dromio for the delayed lunch (1.2.46-7), and he relates a lifetime of beatings (4.4.30-40). She regularly scolds Antipholus about presumed dalliances: "It was the copy of our conference" (5.1.62-65), and Antipholus is routinely late, warning guests of Adriana's temper *before* he is locked out: "you must excuse us all/My wife is shrewish when I keep not hours" (3.1.1-2). Fully expecting her wrath, he recruits them in a plan to allay it: "Say that I lingered with you at your shop/To see the making of her carcanet" (3.1.3-4). He agrees she *often* scolds him about the Courtesan: "My wife—but, I protest, without desert/Hath oftentimes upbraided me withal" (3.1.113-4). So Grennan is not correct in saying Antipholus experiences the lockout events as "inexplicable" and "remarkable".¹⁵³ Antipholus' failure to attend lunch and Adriana's apparent lockout do not indicate new conditions, they simply pique existing frustrations. *Errors'* marriage retains the leading characteristic of the "Punch-and-Judy" marriage in *Menaechmi*.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Grennan, "Arm and Sleeve," 156.

¹⁵⁴ Levin, "Two Comedies of Errors," 122.

This history of conflict negatively distorts protagonists' perceptions around the identity errors, taking the play in its contentious direction. Adriana is quick to embrace a madness diagnosis for Antipholus not just because it makes sense of his current strangeness, but because it seems to explain his usual attitude. She tells the Abbess, "This week he hath been heavy, sour, sad,/And much, much different from the man he was" (5.1.45-46), using the madness theory to explain the discontent she felt before the foreign twins arrived. This expresses the history of the marriage's fall into defensiveness and disillusion, not only the confusion of the moment. It is funny and poignant, but the madness idea also spurs Adriana to forcibly hospitalise her husband.

Pre-existing, accepted patterns of antagonistic relating prevent characters recognising and interrogating anomalies. The spouses *always* mindlessly blame problems on Dromio, so mix-ups associated with him are not fully investigated. Antipholus(S) expects silly banter from his man, "A trusty villain, sir, that very oft,/When I am dull with care and melancholy,/Lightens my humour with his merry jests" (1.2.19-21), so his nonsensical reports seem to be just that (1.2.68-70). Both Dromios are inured to bearing the burden of their masters' moods – Dromio(E) as a punching bag; Dromio(S) as a clown – and they follow this script despite the mounting absurdity of their punishments. The inter-city war means Syracusans expect enmity from Ephesians, and interpret strangers' unexpected recognition of them in this problematic light.

Mimetic violence

These habitual, inimical behaviours and expectations then, more than twin mix-ups, thwart calm investigation and resolution of issues, despite the neutrality of the cause and proximity of the solution. This is emblematised superbly by the locked door scene in Act 3 (3.1.29-85). Existing defensive habits and assumptions here collide with chance conditions to spark a volatile altercation precisely when the resolution of the twin issue comes most within reach. The Ephesian twins are locked from their house, their places taken by the Syracusans. The argument that ensues as they try to enter, positions one Dromio each side of the door, next to but hidden from the other.

In Girardian terms, the way this scene configures symmetrically around a doorway and is expressed as a series of echoed insults, makes it an ideal representation of the mythic archetype of warring brothers made identical by mirrored violence. The Dromio twins, like all warring siblings, tribes or states, are *so close yet so divided*, the door to resolution at hand, but closed. Girard shows such reciprocal 'face-offs' rise out of strongly bonded mimetic relationships when rivalry inevitably subverts positive imitative energy:

Due to the physical and psychological proximity of subject and model, the internal mediation [i.e., imitation] tends to become more and more symmetrical ... [and] symmetry cannot but produce doubles ... at this moment of intense rivalry.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 41-42.

While the Dromios were separated at birth, their cartoonish twinship neatly instantiates this double edged interpersonal bonding in its rivalrous phase. The following examines the scene (given at Appendix A), arguing for its aptness as a mimetic figure that describes conflict rising from historical frustrations, escalating via reciprocal animosity, and devolving into undifferentiated chaos as all participants become alike in their enmity.

The scene's speech patterns dramatise the reciprocity of mimetic violence in several ways. Brennan O'Donnell shows Shakespeare shifts to a distinct rhyming doggerel style for the dispute,¹⁵⁶ which differs so markedly from the language around it, it is visually evident in the First Folio (Figure 2).¹⁵⁷ With its repeated, rhymed phrases, this style amplifies the scene's mirrored, tit-for-tat exchanges and underpins its retaliatory rhythm. The argument starts with Dromio(E) calling for servants, "Maud, Bridget, Marian, Cicely, Gillian, Ginn!" (3.1.31). The foreign Dromio inside is nervous: he is in a town hostile to Syracusans, in the house illicitly, and ordered to bar all entry under threat of a beating (2.2.209-21). He reacts combatively, with "Mome, malt-horse, capon, coxcomb, idiot, patch!" (31-32). Here he echoes, as O'Donnell says, "not only the meter, but the pauses and alliteration of his brother".¹⁵⁸ Dromio(E) immediately mirrors that hostility, repeating the insult 'patch', "What patch is made our

¹⁵⁶ O'Donnell, "Metrical Reading," 407.

¹⁵⁷ William Shakespeare, *The Norton Facsimile of the First Folio of Shakespeare : Based on Folios in the Folger Library Collection.*, 2nd ed., ed. Charlton Hinman (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1996).

¹⁵⁸ O'Donnell, "Metrical Reading," 407.

porter?" (36). The spat advances this way, with Syracusan Dromio boldly mimicking the phrasing of each enquiry as he rebuffs it:

DRO.(E) What patch is made our porter? My master stays in the street.
DRO.(S) Let him walk from whence he came, lest he catch cold on's feet.
ANTIPHOLUS Who talks within there? Ho, open the door!
DRO.(S) Right, sir, I'll tell you when, an you'll tell me wherefore (3.1.36-43).

In mimetic theory, such mirroring expresses, and leads to, the undifferentiation characteristic of mimetic conflict, where rivals, consumed by matching each other's hostile actions, become alike.¹⁵⁹ Differences in character and status vanish because the conduct of all involved descends to this lowest common denominator of mutual provocation. Strengthening the idea that imitation is part of the trouble is the acceleration in Dromio(E)'s agitation when he finds the usurper has appropriated not just his position but his name. He becomes really outraged when he thinks he is being mimicked: "O villain, thou hast stol'n both mine office and my name!" (44), the exclamatory language marking a jump in intensity from his previous relatively neutral queries (36-43).

The doggerel is also deliberately low-brow. O'Donnell sees it as a reversion to "the antiquated measures of the knockabout farces of popular theatre",¹⁶⁰ and Levin, as an older, unsophisticated style from early translations of

¹⁵⁹ Girard, *Theatre of Envy*, e.g., 274-75.

¹⁶⁰ O'Donnell, "Metrical Reading," 407.

Menaechmi.¹⁶¹ Yet all characters in the scene use it, whether high status or low. In this, O'Donnell says Shakespeare, "emphatically homogenized the individual voices [so] ... all voices sound virtually identical".¹⁶² He says this expresses players' turbulent emotions as twin errors cause identity loss. However, it also signals the homogenisation of mimetic violence. While the rhyming insults dramatise the dynamics of mimetic rivalry, the blanket use of doggerel dramatises its levelling effect. That is, the lowbrow, paired insults that all players resort to demonstrate *how* individual voice and identity are lost, rather than only what that feels like.

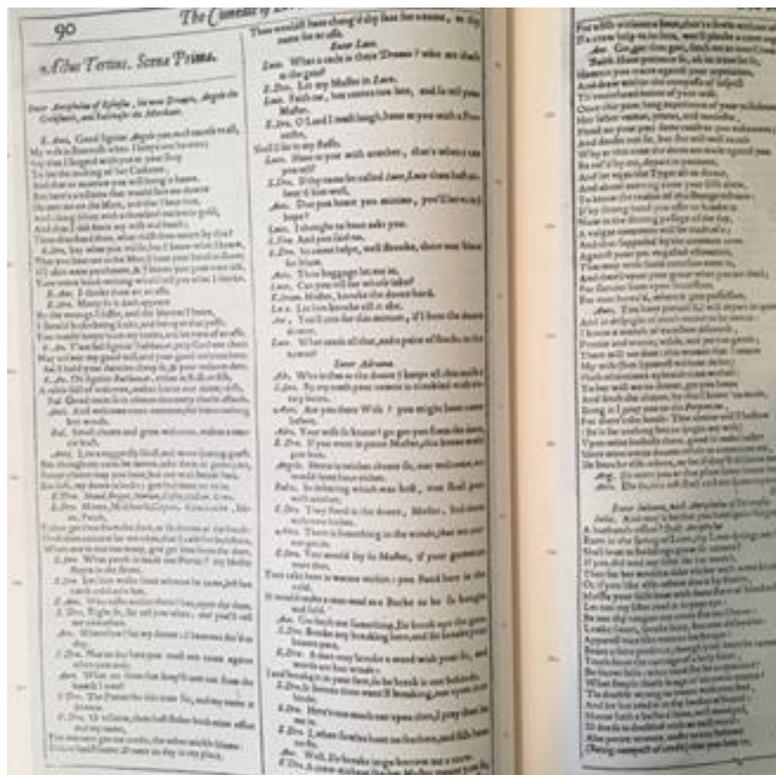


Figure 2. The locked door scene as laid out in the First Folio shows the shift to rhyming doggerel.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Levin, "Two Comedies of Errors," 128.

¹⁶² O'Donnell, "Metrical Reading," 407.

¹⁶³ Author's photograph of Shakespeare, *First Folio*, 90-91.

The doggerel may also express the subjectivity of identity loss, but it should be noted, no one in the scene strictly experiences that loss. Dromio is outraged by his imitator, but does not question his own identity, in fact, he *offers* it to his usurper, seeing it as a burden – referring to his office and name:

The one ne'er got me credit, the other mickle blame.
If thou hadst been Dromio today in my place,
Thou wouldst have changed thy place for a name (3.1.45-47).

Luce addresses him by name and he answers her by name (48-49). Antipholus, does not encounter his interloper and is not overly surprised by the lockout, as discussed. Adriana stays true to her self-focused character (64-65), and Luce is utterly unmoving, self-assuredly embracing her clear, stable role as guardian of the threshold (48-49). Certainly the speech patterns reference the twin theme, especially if that theme targets mirrored enmity. But also, and more fundamentally, they dramatise a relational mechanism, showing how imitated anger lowers the tone of social interactions and equalises participants.

This enmity-driven undifferentiation allows reversals in the usual hierarchy governing social interchange. Masters behave like commoners and servants order their master from the door. Levin describes how Shakespeare develops the *Amphitryon* source material,

to the very pitch of ... dramatic subversion ... with the outsider inside and the insider excluded, the stranger in possession of the house and the householder cast into outer darkness. Both parties are translated.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ Levin, "Two Comedies of Errors," 128. Girard also sees insiders/outsideers switched, Girard, "Comedies of Errors," 69.

In using the term "translated", he refers to the shape shifting of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a play Girard says epitomises the reversals involved in this phase of mimetic conflict – characters are translated into one another's roles via rivalrous desire.¹⁶⁵ How desire functions in *Errors*' is discussed in Chapter 2, but for now, it is clear similar role swapping occurs in *Errors*' doorway scene:

Servants exert power over masters. ... Servant berates master in shared lines and couplets that give the underling the last words.¹⁶⁶

Syracusan Dromio backchats cheekily to the Ephesian Antipholus knowing his own master is inside (38-39). However, servant Luce more directly assumes authority, consciously refusing *her own master* entry: "DROMIO: Let my master in/ LUCE: Faith no, he comes too late/And so tell your master." (48-49). While it is unclear whether she understands the twin swap (56-57), this does not detract from her direct defiance: she debars her master and invites his knowledge of this. This confirms a background household anarchy unrelated to twin mistakes, hierarchy perhaps weakened by marital argument. Luce could not take Adriana's side here if the household were not already divided.

The nature of that feud is seen in a brief exchange as the scene ends. Adriana herself denies Antipholus, their lines echoing in brusqueness and structure,

ANTIPHOLUS(E)	Are you there, wife? You might have come before.
ADRIANA (<i>Within</i>)	Your wife, sir knave? Go, get you from the door. (64-65).

¹⁶⁵ Girard, *Theatre of Envy*, 29-79.

¹⁶⁶ O'Donnell, "Metrical Reading," 407.

Antipholus does not question this, as it matches her usual tone (for example, "Ay, ay, Antipholus, look strange and frown:/Some other mistress hath thy sweet aspects./I am not Adriana, nor thy wife.", 2.2.113-115). O'Donnell says:

Wife repulses husband with a line that mimics his speech rhythm and closes the couplet with a brilliant trisyllabic rhyme. The sound of the line makes it the verbal equivalent of a slammed door.¹⁶⁷

In short, it does not provide a platform for conflict resolution.

Instead, man and master beat the door aggressively, Antipholus calling for a crowbar. Many threats are made and blows delivered – absurdly, to the door, the one impassive, non-provocative actor in the scenario. The door, which at any point might cease to be a barrier if protagonists changed approach, emblematically underlines the extent to which human reaction and acrimony more than material conditions create conflict. Acrimony is shown to be especially incendiary when it is reflected sharply back to its progenitor via imitation. With duplicate Dromios ranting at both its faces, the door then, is also a metaphorical mirror.¹⁶⁸

In these many senses, the lockout scene is a striking representation of Girardian mimetic rivalry and the personal and social levelling it causes. While Levin and O'Donnell identify its homogenising vernacular speech and rhymes, they see these as primarily evoking the feeling of identity confusion. O'Donnell

¹⁶⁷ O'Donnell, "Metrical Reading," 408.

¹⁶⁸ Noted by Ralph Hage, interview by author, 18 April 2021.

says, the language devolves into a "gaggle of echoic repulses", which are, "an aural correlative to the baffling loss of identity each character is undergoing".¹⁶⁹ Grennan extends this slightly to suggest *Errors'* chaos arises from words (puns) and people (twins) displaying variable, unexpected meanings.¹⁷⁰ These views acknowledge the immense poetic capacity of Shakespeare's language to bring events and experiences alive, but avoid the intentions that drive language. The above Girardian analysis does not discount such observations. But it proposes this scene also shows how hostile mirrored speech causes identity loss: people lose character and social distinction in combatively imitating each other's hostility. Rebounding, matched insults – "echoic repulses" – make people alike, and inflame violence. Rather than language being "correlative" to the action, or creating chaos by being indeterminate, a Girardian lens shows language here causes social conflict and undifferentiation when driven by aggressive or defensive imitation. Shakespeare's orchestration of interpersonal reactivity is as impressive as his expressive language, and supports the idea he thought like a social theorist.

Further, by associating this reactivity with symmetrical staging that amplifies the twin motif, Shakespeare's use of that motif is broadened. It brings it into accord with mythic and biblical symbolisation that connects warring brothers to social crisis. Foakes' finding, aired earlier, that Shakespeare often references

¹⁶⁹ O'Donnell, "Metrical Reading," 408.

¹⁷⁰ Grennan, "Arm and Sleeve," 162.

Cain and Abel when dramatising violence, endorses this proposal.¹⁷¹ In all, the above analysis suggests *Errors'* doubled twins are an extended metaphor on the dynamics of mimetic violence. In Girard's words, "the doubles ... are more than a theme; they are the unperceived reciprocity of violence among men".¹⁷²

Conclusion

Violence in *The Comedy of Errors* is more anticipated than realised. It is casual, comic, trivial – revolving around household annoyances. Yet it is pervasive – the play's fabric is woven with conflict and several factors point to this light violence having weighty implications. Unguarded, off-hand hostility is a precursor to extreme violence in more overtly violent plays of the oeuvre. *Errors'* stormy domestic relations generate the wider neighbourhood squalls that elsewhere presage tragedy. On its way to a community level tornado of cross-accusation, the play has the Ephesian twins bound and persecuted, in a scene referencing the cruel sacrificial sport of bearbaiting. *Errors* in fact deals with serious themes known to interest Shakespeare: the trajectory of violence from micro events in close families to wider brutality or war; the institution of marriage as a key determinant of civic stability; mob violence.¹⁷³ It also accords with Girard's view of human violence, which he says germinates in intimate relationships and proceeds towards communal killing of an innocent victim.

¹⁷¹ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 9, 11, 13-16, 18-20, 23-31, 37, 39-41, 43, 47-48, 52-53, 55, 71, 74, 76, 95, 109.

¹⁷² Girard, *To Double Business*, 152.

¹⁷³ As per Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*. Hopkins, *Shakespearean Marriage*. and Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*. respectively.

Finding this evidence of violence and consistency with Girard, this chapter examined how conflict arises in the play. It looked beyond the identity errors that seem to generate its tensions, to discover these tensions are habitual. They pre-date the foreign twins' arrival in Ephesus, providing a base from which violence escalates. Analysis of the locked door scene in Act 3 ties all these findings together. The scene furnishes a ready-made dramatisation of mimetic violence. Its deliberately mirrored antagonisms do not just accent motifs and emotions, but are the means by which anger rises, gets out of hand and upturns social order. Shakespeare's end line rhymes and repetitions demonstrate the chaotic, contagious, levelling effects of retaliation, aligning his twin motif with that of myth.¹⁷⁴ Although the play's violence is at the trivial end of the scale, *The Comedy of Errors* nevertheless elucidates core elements of both Shakespeare and Girard's conception of violence.

¹⁷⁴ Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 42, 46, 75. Also Girard, *To Double Business*, 152, 86, 202.

Chapter 2

Hysterical violence



Figure 3. Luciana, Adriana, the Kitchenmaid and the Courtesan team up with Dr Pinch to bind and exorcise Antipholus in Trevor Nunn's 1978 production of *The Comedy of Errors*.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁵ Photograph by ITV/Rex, *Sublime ... Judi Dench, second from left, with Richard Griffiths, far right, in The Comedy of Errors*, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/apr/02/best-shakespeare-productions-the-comedy-of-errors>.

Chapter 1 showed *Errors'* violence is minor, but also pervasive and mimetic, with the lockout scene's symmetrical insults perfectly emblematising the escalation, homogenisation and reversals of mimesis (3.1). Identity errors were found to reveal, more than cause, the play's tensions. Chapter 2 investigates the relational origins of these interpersonal stresses, especially whether mimetic desire and rivalry fuel them. It does this by examining the relationship between Adriana and her sister Luciana, starting by outlining why these women provide a valuable case study. Girard's model of mimetic desire is applied to posit that Antipholus is a contested object in their relationship, and the mild reciprocated friction of the sisters' opening exchange, like the lockout scene, highlights their similarity more than their contrast. The role each sister plays in inflaming or de-escalating Ephesus' disturbances is then reviewed. To balance critical views, which tend to focus on the sisters' softer aspects, the chapter considers less examined lines and actions in assessing their motives.

Foakes argues that an antagonistic exchange between Eleanor and Margaret in *Henry VI Part 2* (discussed above, p.48) helps to connect domestic friction to state violence in that play. He also notes, "the emulation between Eleanor and Margaret is prominent."¹⁷⁶ This chapter examines relations between Adriana and Luciana in the context of these connections between micro and macro violence, and between mimesis (emulation) and violence.

¹⁷⁶ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 44.

Hysteric violence

According to Foakes, Shakespeare's inclusion of headstrong, often violent women in his plays indicated movement away from Christopher Marlowe: he "went beyond Marlowe in developing a range of powerful female characters ... who compete with men on their own terms".¹⁷⁷ Foakes suggests Shakespeare was influenced by, "violent Italian *novelle* collected in William Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*" (1566-1575), noting Painter, "seems above all interested in the 'sundry kinds of cruelty' ... carried out by 'fierce and unpredictable women'".¹⁷⁸ Foakes also shows Shakespeare expands single violent source characters into several protagonists, in order to explore extra dimensions of violent situations, and includes female characters when he does this.¹⁷⁹

This suggests Shakespeare was interested in how women interacted with, or shared culpability for violence, and argues for the significance of the female characters created for *The Comedy of Errors*. In realising his version of Plautus' *Menaechmi*, Shakespeare expanded the wife's role into the central, more substantial Adriana: "the stock jealous wife of Roman comedy becomes ... a real woman, jealous certainly, but also agonized".¹⁸⁰ Also added is Luciana, seen by Grennan as, "Shakespeare's most substantial single addition ... her very

¹⁷⁷ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, notably Joan, Margaret, and Tamora, 57, 36.

¹⁷⁸ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 32. quoting from R. W. Maslen, *Elizabethan fictions : espionage, counter-espionage, and the duplicity of fiction in early Elizabethan prose narratives* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

¹⁷⁹ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 57.

¹⁸⁰ Whitworth, "Introduction." Also Levin, "Two Comedies of Errors," 124.

presence ... betrays some important emphasis".¹⁸¹ The dramatic priority of these women is also indicated by how early they appear in the play – two full scenes before Adriana's husband, Antipholus of Ephesus.

Mimetic rivalry

The sisters' introductory scene presents a light quarrel, Adriana bewailing her errant husband and Luciana preaching patience and obedience (2.1). Their banter is mild, and each has a reasoned position, but it is also an exchange of provocations, delivering some short, sharp notes:

LUCIANA: ... Then let your will attend on their accords.
ADRIANA: This servitude makes you to keep unwed.
LUCIANA: Not this, but troubles of the marriage bed.
ADRIANA: But were you wedded you would bear some sway.
LUCIANA: Ere I learn to love, I'll practice to obey (2.1.25-29).¹⁸²

Where the doggerel-ridden lockout fracas presents opposition at its starkest, the sisters' scene softens conflict between the women with civilised language.

Yet their polarity is still marked by abrupt, rhymed – mirrored – retorts:

ADRIANA: Look when I serve him so, he takes it ill.
LUCIANA: O, know he is the bridle of your will.
ADRIANA: There's none but asses will be bridled so.
LUCIANA: Why, headstrong liberty is lashed with woe (2.1.10-15).

And while the homilies Luciana parrots are overtly virtuous, they paint Adriana as deficient, contrasting her behaviour and attitudes to the highest conventional standards. They echo St Paul's ideals and solemn Puritan dictates

¹⁸¹ Grennan, "Arm and Sleeve," 150.

¹⁸² Shakespeare, *Comedy of Errors*. All future line references are from this edition.

around marriage, which stressed, "less the evils of voracious female sexuality ... and more the benefits of pliant femininity".¹⁸³ Rolf Soellner shows, "the argument that the subjection of female to male was the plan of Creation had formidable theological and legal authority".¹⁸⁴ Luciana's aphorisms then, position her as loftier than her sister. Her more covert point is perhaps that she would make a better wife than Adriana. Adriana, in turn, argues for greater female liberty and emphasises Luciana's lack of a husband. Such mirrored antagonism indicates a mimetically bonded relationship that has fractured around rivalry, splitting the pair into taking symmetrically opposed stances.

Such twinned pairs are seen throughout Shakespeare's plays, often as childhood friends of the same sex: "Great emotional energy is invested by many of his characters in homosocial friendships and activity".¹⁸⁵ Celia and Rosalind in *As You Like It*, and Polixenes and Leontes in *The Winter's Tale*, typify these relationships: "We were as twinned lambs that did frisk i'th' sun,/And bleat the one at th'other" (1.3.61-75).¹⁸⁶ The tragic events of the latter play, which rise from Leontes' radical jealousy, exemplify the inherent, rivalrous, corrosive flipside of these friendships.¹⁸⁷ This emerges when the mutually imitative impulses that have joined the friends encounter a person,

¹⁸³ Hopkins, *Shakespearean Marriage*, 79; Dympna C. Callaghan, "The Ideology of Romantic Love : The Case of Romeo and Juliet," in *The Weyward Sisters: Shakespeare and Feminist Politics*, ed. Dympna C. Callaghan, Lorraine Rae Helms, and Jyotsna G. Singh (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1994).

¹⁸⁴ Soellner, *Self-Knowledge*, 71-51.

¹⁸⁵ Hopkins, *Shakespearean Marriage*, 12.

¹⁸⁶ *The Winter's Tale*, William Shakespeare, *The New Oxford Shakespeare : Modern Critical Edition*, ed. Gary Taylor et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹⁸⁷ Girard, *Theatre of Envy*, Chapters 33-37.

object or success that differentiates them or cannot be shared. Their relationship is then troubled by feelings of disparity or competition, and the mistrust and conflict flowing from that. Girard describes this paradox: "Even in these lambs – indeed, especially in them – the potential for evil is enormous and perfectly continuous with the innocence in which it is rooted."¹⁸⁸

Girard uses *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* to demonstrate the role of mimetic desire in this.¹⁸⁹ Friends Proteus and Valentine 'fall in love' with the same woman, as one imitates the other's invitingly displayed desire for her. They then, necessarily, 'fall out' with one another. The sense of *desire* here, as opposed to material need, is crucial. Mimetic desire is piqued by the ineffable prestige, advantage or cachet something appears to confer on someone, felt as a yearning for the other's apparent being. In common parlance, this is envy, which, "covets the superior *being* that neither the someone nor something alone, but the conjunction of the two, seems to possess".¹⁹⁰

In this context, it becomes clearer that Adriana and Luciana display similarity in their twinned acerbity, that this indicates a common Shakespearean structure, and that structure conforms to Girard's model of mimetic rivalry. The sisters'

¹⁸⁸ See Girard, *Theatre of Envy*, 14-15 and 322-24 for discussion of 'twinned lamb' friendships. Hopkins independently verifies this pattern in Shakespeare: "[with *The Winter's Tale*] as in the early comedy *As You Like It*, it appears that the court can be clearly labelled as a place of jealousy and brotherly rivalry (much emphasis is placed on the quasi-fraternal relationship between Polixenes and Leontes)" (Hopkins, *Shakespearean Marriage*, 62.).

¹⁸⁹ Girard, *Theatre of Envy*, Chapter 1, 9-20.

¹⁹⁰ Girard, *Theatre of Envy*, 4.

envy centres on Antipholus, or at least intangible desire associated with him as 'husband'. Such sisterly rivalry is evident in *King Lear*, with Foakes noting that in its, "carefully orchestrated" violent closing, "the two elder sisters cannot control their mutual passion for Edmund, and turn on one another ... they die by mutual violence".¹⁹¹ *Two Gentlemen*, written early like *Errors*,¹⁹² also displays the violence a mimetic love triangle can engender – Proteus attempts to rape the contended woman. In *Errors*, Shakespeare uses comedy to sublimate this violent potential. How this obscured rivalry plays out is described below. First however, the sisters' general capacity for violence is examined.

Adriana

Taking the sisters separately, Adriana is the most obviously truculent. She beats and threatens the Dromios as heedlessly as the Antipholus twins do: "Ay, and let none enter, lest I break your pate" (2.2.221). She incessantly berates her husband with, as the Abbess says, "the venom clamours of a jealous woman [that]/Poison more deadly than a mad dog's tooth." (5.1.69-70). Indeed, Adriana depicts her own scolding as relentless,

It was the copy of our conference.
In bed he slept not for my urging it;
At board he fed not for my urging it.
Alone, it was the subject of my theme;
In company I often glanced at it.
Still did I tell him it was vile and bad (5.1.62-65).

¹⁹¹ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 148.

¹⁹² Whitworth, "Introduction," 6.

Adriana also reveals a visceral appreciation for violence in an emotive appeal to the Syracusan Antipholus whom she thinks is her tardy husband (2.2). This speech swings through varied emotions as Adriana plies then reprimands the confused stranger, grappling with his bewilderment. G. R. Elliott says it exemplifies Shakespeare's ability to, "sharpen the style in accordance with the emotion".¹⁹³ It also shows how the twin errors reveal underlying tensions – Adriana's simmering suspicions (shown to be unfounded in Chapter 4, p.127) are piqued by Antipholus(S)' cautious silence, itself a product of the inter-city feud: "his bearing turns Adriana's suspicion into a settled conviction".¹⁹⁴

Many critics, even when probing Adriana's antagonism, note only the speech's most lyrical lines where she declares wifely devotion –

Ah! Do not tear away thyself from me,
For know, my love, as easy mayst thou fall
A drop of water in the breaking gulf,
And take unmingled thence that drop again
Without addition or diminishing,
As take from me thyself, and not me too (128-132).

Elliott sees Adriana's, "angry exaggeration" as, "potentially ... violent":

We cannot imagine Rosalind or Beatrice exclaiming to a servant, "Back, slave, or I will break thy pate across". But it is quite natural for their forerunner, Adriana, to speak thus.¹⁹⁵

Yet he concludes the speech, with its lyrical "drop of water" lines, reveals Adriana's "better nature". Candido picks particularly nostalgic lines from it to

¹⁹³ Elliott, "Weirdness," 64.

¹⁹⁴ Elliott, "Weirdness," 63.

¹⁹⁵ Elliott, "Weirdness," 62-63.

support his view of the speech as conciliatory (116-120),¹⁹⁶ Weinberg focuses sympathetically on Adriana's "yearning" and "desperation".¹⁹⁷ However, the 'water' lines are only a sixth of the speech and are surrounded by others which contrast markedly in tone, with each other and the favoured lines. This volatile variability becomes most clear when the speech is read aloud, as this demands rapid shifts in delivery to match tonal changes. Strings of repeated vocables prompt increases in emphasis, as though a reiterated idea must be brought home with extra volume, until Adriana changes tack. The speech's oscillation is traced below, to show Shakespeare depicts emotional instability, more than one mood, rising from Adriana's jealous concern with Antipholus' said affair.

Adriana begins with jaded sarcasm, many pauses marking her heavy irony:

Ay, ay, Antipholus, look strange and frown:
Some other mistress hath thy sweet aspects
I am not Adriana, nor thy wife (113-115).

With no response, rolling, unbroken iambic rhythms, appeal to nostalgia:

The time was once when thou unurged woudst vow
That never words were music to thine ear,
That never object pleasing in thine eye,
That never touch well welcome to thy hand,
That never meat sweet-savoured in thy taste,
Unless I spake, or looked, or touched, or carved to thee (116-121).

But recurrent phrasing forces an increase in emphasis and emotion, escalating the appeal towards a reproachful 'I' in line 121, that pointedly implies some

¹⁹⁶ Candido, "Dining out in Ephesus," 209.

¹⁹⁷ Weinberg, "Helpless Patience," 3-4.

'other'. The ensuing succession of verbs (spake, looked, touched, carved), intensifies this tone of reproach, to deliver self-pity along with sweet nostalgia.

Confused by more silence, Adriana moves to the soft, devoted tone of the 'water' lines. Though beautifully expressed, this sentiment of unity is short lived. Again meeting silence, Adriana turns from harmony to contention, expressing an anger that blooms into florid rhetoric, her vivid imaginings evoking rape and vengeful marital savagery:

How dearly would it touch thee to the quick
Shouldst thou but hear I were licentious,
And that this body, consecrate to thee,
By ruffian lust should be contaminate?
Wouldst thou not spit at me, and spurn at me,
And hurl the name of 'husband' in my face,
And tear the stained skin of my harlot brow,
And from my false hand cut the wedding ring,
And break it with a deep divorcing vow? (133-141)

Elliot sees the abrupt shift here, "How direct and powerful is the style here over against the neat, conventional rhetoric of the preceding!".¹⁹⁸ When speaking these lines, it is hard not to become feverishly accusatory, as repeated 'and what's more' phrases ratchet emotion up to the ominous "deep divorcing vow". This sense of high drama is amplified by serial curt verbs depicting violent acts: spit, spurn, hurl, tear, cut, break. Adriana merges images of criminal assault – her body "stained" and "contaminated" "by ruffian lust" –

¹⁹⁸ Elliott, "Weirdness," 64.

with images of her own lust, seeing herself as a "harlot", "false" and "licentious". Grennan describes these lines in similar terms,

Her direct verbal assault upon her husband is ... forthright in its rhetorical nature. She repeats the same phrase and employs a diction under the rhetorical influence of the sermon, using to pointed effect such Latinate words as "licentious," "consecrate," "contaminate," as well as the more homely "spit," and "spurn".¹⁹⁹

Adriana intends this 'in flagrante' scene as a rhetorical mirror to Antipholus' presumed infidelity, but its turgidity betrays how much her imagination creates that infidelity and revels in its melodrama. Lest anyone take her histrionics too seriously, Shakespeare has Adriana declare this vision is an extrapolation: "I know thou canst, and therefore see thou do it!" (142). The lines concluding the exchange also hint her tears are self-induced, "no longer will I be a fool,/To put the finger in the eye and weep" (206-208), suggesting an actor's trick. These hints accord with a distinct lack of textual evidence of an actual affair (see p.127).

Perhaps appalled at the salaciousness her fluency has revealed, Adriana changes tone again, to close with pious disgust. With this she shifts attention from any prurience on her part to Antipholus' supposed sins, assuring listeners that if she is "strumpeted", it is "by [*his*] contagion",

I am possessed by an adulterate blot;
My blood is mingled with the crime of lust.
For if we two be one, and thou play false,
I do digest the poison of thy flesh,
Being strumpeted by thy contagion (143-147).

¹⁹⁹ Grennan, "Arm and Sleeve," 157.

When vocalised, the febrile dynamics of the speech and Adriana's emotive insecurity emerge. Her thinly contained anger is picked up by Roger Rees, an actor, who necessarily takes the speech as a whole, where critics are selective:

They are ... confronted by a woman, who greets Antipholus with a fierce, menacing "where have you been darling?" ... Adriana goes crazy when she isn't recognised and keeps on at poor Antipholus so much that he agrees to have dinner with her.²⁰⁰

Softer emotions are present in the speech – kinder readings are not wrong – but its fully considered dramatic purpose is to reveal existing tensions and emotional instability. At the very least, audience attention could not be held if all 36 lines were delivered with the lilting humility of the 'water' lines. As well, some fascination with Antipholus' said dalliance and her imagined role in that drama must be admitted on Adriana's part. Pertinently, Girard sees emotional instability and fascination with infidelity as hallmarks of mimetic desire, explored below (p.80).

Adriana's motility is characteristic, and specific in the poles it swings between: self-validation and other-blame. Grennan sums up Adriana: "Her speeches abound in extravagant imagery, rhetorical questions and irritable logic ... [and] the conventionally pathetic diction and imagery of emotional appeal".²⁰¹ After the speech, she moves quickly from defensiveness (171-75), to appeal (176-79), to

²⁰⁰ Roger Rees, "'The Comedy of Errors': Reflections of an Actor," in *The Comedy of Errors: Critical Essays*, ed. Robert S. Miola (New York: Garland, 1997), 503-04.

²⁰¹ Grennan, "Arm and Sleeve," 157.

accusatory jealousy (181-84), her struggle turning on who is at fault. In her “rhetoric of abuse and self-pity”, she is torn between accusation and defence. Earlier in the play (2.1), fretting over Antipholus’ lateness, she flips between blaming herself then him, erring on the latter, with line 96 epitomising her sense of blame as a hot potato and her final position: ‘it’s not my fault, it’s his’:

Hath homely age th’alluring beauty took
From my poor cheek? Then he hath wasted it.
Are my discourses dull? Barren my wit?
If voluble and sharp discourses be marred,
[his] Unkindness blunts it more than marble hard.
Do their gay vestments his affections bait?
That’s not my fault: he’s the master of my state.
What ruins are in me that can be found
By him not ruined? Then is he the ground
Of my defeatures. My decayed fair
A sunny look of his would soon repair (2.1.90-100).

While Adriana’s “drop of water” lines seem to be an exceptional expression of deeper feelings, when taken in context, they better support the idea she is trapped in ever-shifting defensiveness. The lines are also popular because they echo Syracusan Antipholus’ musings on self (1.2.36-40), shoring up the play’s assumed theme of identity loss. But by embedding her ‘water’ lines within others, that are more deflective than reflective, Shakespeare associates Adriana’s troubles instead, with her immersion in a paradigm of fault and guilt. In this he points to a key aspect of scapegoating – accusation. Girard reads the biblical concept of ‘Satan’ as the, “systematic accusation that bursts forth” from a mimetic crowd, as they passionately accuse then punish a victim.²⁰²

²⁰² Girard, *I See Satan*, 35.

Luciana

In a similar sentimental trap, critics often emphasise contrast between Adriana and her sister, holding Luciana to be a counter example. Levin sees her as a "*raisonneuse*,"²⁰³ provided by Shakespeare as a, "mouthpiece of moderation, so that the twins can take their place in the great Shakespearean debate on marriage".²⁰⁴ Soellner sees her as central to a romance allegorising the natural hierarchical relationship of wives to husbands and men to God. He upholds her counsel to Adriana as utterly valid, both in its reflection of Renaissance views and value to Adriana.²⁰⁵ However, Luciana's later reasoning, when persuading her (supposed) brother-in-law to be kinder to Adriana (3.2.1-29), contradicts this impression of moral rectitude. She advises, not that he learn to love his wife as his own body or cease philandering, but that he work harder to disguise any infidelity and lack of love:

Muffle your false love with some show of blindness ...
Look sweet, speak fair, become disloyalty;
Apparel vice like virtue's harbinger.
Bear a fair presence though your heart be tainted:
Teach sin the carriage of a holy saint.
Be secret-false (3.1.7-15).

These lines show a kind of compassion, but their many oppositions disturb this effect. Luciana suggests real vice be covered by false virtue, true sin by pretend saintliness. Grennan sees this as "radically different" to her former view:

Luciana severs the institution of marriage from all external supports and leaves it ... a device to order ... the surface appearances of sexual

²⁰³ Levin, "Two Comedies of Errors," 124.

²⁰⁴ Levin, "Two Comedies of Errors," 124.

²⁰⁵ Soellner, *Self-Knowledge*, 71-75.

relationships ... transforming the "Lord of the wide world" (2.2.21) into a small-time Machiavel of marital politics."²⁰⁶

Douglas Lanier agrees her "unexpectedly Machiavellian" approach is a complete about-face:

distinctions between false and true ... bearing and heart, saints and sinners, virtue and vice [would be erased]. Such a world of well managed simulacra ... would obliterate the world she earlier proffered.²⁰⁷

This turnaround shows Luciana's previous stance doesn't indicate her full character or the 'right' side of a debate on marriage, but is tied into the rivalrous dynamic she has with Adriana. That she thinks Antipholus is indeed having an affair further indicates the complexity of the relationships.

Luciana also readily jumps on the Dromio abuse bandwagon – not stopping at one insult, "snail", but pounding home her view with both "slug" and "sot":

Why prat'st thou to thyself, and answer'st not?
Dromio, thou Dromio, thou snail, thou slug, thou sot (2.2.196-97).

And she does not decorously demur when Adriana attempts to label Antipholus as mad and have him seized (4.4). Luciana's lines here, again have a sympathetic ring, but interpret the desperate behaviour of the pursued Ephesian twins to their disadvantage, supporting ostracisation of them, "Alas, how fiery and how sharp he looks!" (51), "Ay me, poor man, how pale and wan he looks" (109), "God help, poor souls, how idly do they talk!" (130), "God, for thy mercy, they are loose again!" (145). Alone these comments might be harmless,

²⁰⁶ Grennan, "Arm and Sleeve," 151.

²⁰⁷ Lanier, "Stigmatical in Making," 311-12.

but in the struggle they are echoed by others: the Courtesan, "Mark how he trembles in his ecstasy" (52); and Adriana, who, lovingly, overrides Antipholus' clear denial,

ANTIPHOLUS: Peace, doting wizard, peace! I am not mad.

ADRIANA: O that thou wert not, poor distressed soul (59-60).

There is a fine line between the solicitous care the women profess here and the physical suppression they instigate and pursue as they unify around a damning diagnosis. Weinberg's investigation into Galenic medicine, influential when *Errors* was written, gives weight to this darker reading. In this philosophy, the body was permeable to emotional influence, so illness, including mental illness, could be used to imply moral failing or infection. Weinberg ties this aspect of Galenic practice into *Errors*' moral code mix, pointing to its drawbacks: it, "provides a framework for blaming the patient for the illness that arbitrarily afflicts him or her".²⁰⁸ Reading Antipholus as a victim here also accords with Skura, who chooses this scene to exemplify Shakespeare's use of bearbaiting motifs and sacrificial scenarios as discussed.

Finally, Luciana incites Adriana to defy the peace-bringing Abbess in the play's climactic final Act (5.1). The exchange between the Abbess, Adriana and Luciana

²⁰⁸ Michael C. Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England : Physiology and inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton*, vol. 34 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Quoted in Weinberg, "Helpless Patience," 9 and 13.

at this high point is revealing. It begins with an incisive assessment of Adriana's behaviour from the Abbess:

... his sleeps were hindered by thy railing ...
... his meat was sauced with thy upbraidings ...
... his sports were hindered by thy brawls ...
The consequence is, then, thy jealous fits
Hath scared thy husband from the use of wits (71-86).

Luciana jumps to defend her sister,

She never reprehended him but mildly
When he demeaned himself rough, rude, and wildly.
(*To Adriana*) Why bear you these rebukes, and answer not? (87-89)

Her defence contradicts previous evidence of Adriana's not so mild reprimands. It positions Luciana as 'for' her sister and 'against' Antipholus, playing into accelerating opposition between them. It urges Adriana to respond argumentatively to the Abbess. As in other instances quoted, while she remains within the characterisation of a mild, well-mannered woman, Luciana simultaneously helps promote a widening rift between Adriana and her husband, and to stir the community turbulence forming around this.

Mimetic desire

The sisters have been shown to fully participate in *Errors'* cumulative frictions. What remains is to see whether their conflictual instability is linked to mimetic desire – the phenomenon Girard sees as generating group tensions. Those who see the sisters presenting two sides of a debate on women's role in marriage, naturally contrast their characters. However, their polarised yet echoing quarrels and moral instability suggest the overarching issue of

mimetic opposition is more significant in the play, or at least more sustained by Shakespeare, than any one side of a debate. This is a shift from seeing the playwright's dualities as resolvable into right or wrong, or as rumination on duality per se. It proposes dualities are presented as symptoms of a human propensity for imitation that catalyses both amity and enmity, generating multiple contradictions in social relations. This shift in perspective is centrally a Girardian one, as Antonello and de Castro Rocha summarise here:

[Mimetic theory] forces us to think, not in a dialectical sense, as in a system of clear-cut oppositions, but by antinomies, that is, by conciliating polarized elements of phenomena which inevitably appear paradoxical, because they are generated by a single, yet ambivalent, basic cognitive mechanism: imitation.²⁰⁹

Girard's mimetic desire is unstable because it is founded in suggestion and imitation. It yearns after an illusion, thriving in the fantasy of possessing a contended object, but once ownership is achieved, this evaporates, "desire dies of its own fulfilment".²¹⁰ Antithetically then, mimetic desire is inflamed by rejection (as Adriana's desire for Antipholus is) or prohibition (as Luciana's may be), and deflated by possession. In *Two Gentlemen*, Proteus first gets a girlfriend, Valentine imitates him, then lauds his Silvia as paramount. Proteus abandons his original love object and both men's desires lock onto Silvia. In *Errors*, the suggested nature of desire is present when Antipholus(S) picks up Adriana's declarations of love for him (2.2), but transfers them to her sister (3.2),

²⁰⁹ Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 4-5.

²¹⁰ Girard, *Theatre of Envy*, 118.

ADRIANA: [I] Am better than thy dear self's better part. (2.2.126).

LUCIANA: That's my sister.

ANTIPHOLUS(S): No,/ it is thyself, mine own self's better part. (3.2.61).

Desire's contrariness is seen in the way both Antipholi avoid Adriana's intense desire: her husband is habitually absent, the Syracusan prefers Luciana who (overtly) repels him. This perversity is comically echoed in Dromio(S)' extreme abhorrence for the kitchenmaid who claims him for her husband:

As from a bear a man would run for life,
So I fly from her that would be my wife. (3.2.159-160, 70-160).

Mimetic desire also generates contradictions because it is heightened by others' desire, "our desires are not really convincing until they are mirrored by the desires of others".²¹¹ The more others covet someone, the higher their value appears to be. The more Adriana imagines the Courtesan desires Antipholus, the more desirable he seems. Her jealousy touts his desirability, and envious response to this from Luciana further inflates it. Fervent desire then, can spring up and die back on the turn of a dime – its flames fanned by suggestion or rivalry then doused by realisation, afflicting one person then another as they pursue each other's goals, elevating a desired object to an ideal one minute, defaming them the next.²¹²

²¹¹ This is evident in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which Girard says maps these illusions and reversals, the love potion device effecting the instability and interchangeability of the four lovers' mimetic attractions. Girard, *Theatre of Envy*, 14.

²¹² Girard, *Theatre of Envy*, Chapters 3-7, pp29-79.

The idea that Adriana is excited by the lascivious potential of Antipholus' affair accords with Girard's view of many Shakespearean romances. Girard sees mimetic desire creating a vortex of instability in these relationships, as lovers pursue a romanticised chimera of one another. Desdemona's desire for Othello, says Girard, is initially suggested by her father's, "hunger for the terrifying adventures of Othello", so fixes on this exotic aspect of the Moor.²¹³ Othello's anxious jealousy then, has some ground, as Desdemona's desire *is* directed at 'someone' other than him.

Girard also notes that such illusory drivers inevitably expire: "in the routine of married life, a husband's exotic value cannot fail to evaporate".²¹⁴ Before marrying, Antipholus was a heroic soldier lauded by the Duke (5.1.161, 190-195). His aura of desirability may have diminished when he became an ordinary merchant, Adriana's visions of infidelity keeping a fantasy based desire alive. Girard discusses the effect of imagined unfaithfulness on desire noting the, "fascination with the alleged promiscuity of their present or future wives" in Othello, and Claudio in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Foakes also says Shakespeare connects envisioned infidelity to heightened passion and violence. Both Hamlet and his father's Ghost, "have a kind of voyeuristic horror in imagining what goes on in the 'incestuous sheets' of the 'royal bed'".²¹⁵ In

²¹³ Girard, *Theatre of Envy*, 183-84 and 293.

²¹⁴ Girard, *Theatre of Envy*, 293.

²¹⁵ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 121, also 25.

Errors, Shakespeare plays with the frisson of infidelity as Adriana addresses intimate invitations to the wrong Antipholus, and he, as her husband, propositions her sister. Bevington notes Shakespeare's focus on this aspect of the drama, though Plautus, "shows little interest in the phenomenon".²¹⁶

The clearest parallel to Adriana however – seen in her self-questioning, fevered jealousy – is Othello himself. She could be a caricatured prototype for Shakespeare's jealous lovers, driven mad and towards violence, by self or other-fuelled delusions of betrayal. Though she is female and her jealousy doesn't eventuate in violence, the dynamics match those associated with Othello and Leontes, who are, as Hopkins says, "erroneously but uncontrollably jealous";²¹⁷ and this also describes Claudio and Troilus. This kind of jealousy signals mimetic desire driven by competition or insecurity in the context of mimetic relationship. Othello compares himself unfavourably to Cassio; uncertain Claudio absorbs his superior's suggestions; Leontes' jealousy is tightly bound up with Polixenes. Girard says *Troilus and Cressida* cogently depicts the destructive force of this. Troilus is most passionate about Cressida when she is in the Greek camp, unavailable. This frames in miniature the rivalrous loop of the Trojan war, the value of Helen constantly inflated by each side's sense of the other's desire for her. Girard quotes Troilus early in the play: "Fools on both sides: Helen must needs be fair/When with your blood you

²¹⁶ Bevington, "Errors in Context," 344.

²¹⁷ Hopkins, *Shakespearean Marriage*, 164.

daily paint her thus." (1.1.93-94),²¹⁸ but shows his viewpoint is corrupted as he ruminates on Cressida's infidelity: "the insanely jealous Troilus of the end ... is full of murderous thoughts".²¹⁹

In this context, Adriana's jealousy can be seen as bound up with mimetic rivalry, not only with the un-named 'Courtesan', but with Luciana. Luciana holds up wifely ideals when Adriana is most insecure in her status as wife, sharpening that self-doubt and affirming Antipholus' wayward behaviour:

A man is master of his liberty.
Time is their master, and when they see time
They'll go or come. If so, be patient sister (2.1.7-9).

This incipient desire triangle is emphasised when Antipholus(S), as Adriana's husband, makes love to Luciana in romantic iambic rhymes, which she echoes:

ANTIPHOLUS(S): Thee will I love, and with thee lead my life.
Thou hast no husband yet, nor I no wife.
Give me thy hand.

LUCIANA: O soft, sir, hold you still;
I'll fetch my sister to get her good will (3.2.66-70).

Luciana's closing line is cryptic, and can be played as an escape tactic or an entranced capitulation. The latter is irresistible, as it heightens comedy and plot tension. Later Luciana avoids Adriana's direct questioning on this:

ADRIANA: Didst speak him fair?
LUCIANA: Have patience I beseech (4.2.16-17).

and the question is never overtly resolved in the play.

²¹⁸ Girard, *Theatre of Envy*, 149.

²¹⁹ Girard, *Theatre of Envy*, 150.

The sisters' subsequent solidarity as they try to subdue and 'cure' Antipholus, proves rather than disproves the influence of mimetic desire. Desire, driven by suggestion, lacks stability, but mimetic bonding remains, and turns from the discomfort of rivalry to the unity that victimisation of a third party provides.

They bond in their rejection of Antipholus:

ADRIANA: He is deforméd, crookéd, old, and sere,
Ill-faced, worse bodied, shapeless everywhere,
Vicious, ungentle, foolish, blunt, unkind,
Stigmatical in making, worse in mind.

LUCIANA: Who would be jealous, then, of such a one?
No evil lost is wailed when it is gone (4.2.19-24).

Confirming this shift to victimisation, is the way the reviled Courtesan is included in this new alliance of outrage (4.4.80-95,46). Mimetic accusation, "favors the strangest about-faces ... the most unexpected re-groupings".²²⁰ Girard sees Shakespeare grasps this, "essential paradox of *conflictual mimesis*", regularly portraying, "friends and brothers who turn enemies for no reason visible to a non-mimetic observer [or] deadly enemies become intimate friends for no visible reason either".²²¹ Girard's thesis is that interpersonal tensions created by the unfulfilled rivalry of mimetic desire plague families and communities, and ultimately lead to scapegoating. Antonello summarises scapegoating as –

a 'tool' for controlling the mimetic escalations of interspecific violence, when imitation ... diffuses dynamics of reciprocal contention and revenge in a given social group. Channelling collective violence and thrusting it upon a single individual, deeming him or her responsible for any crisis ... allows the community to ... reconcile its members.²²²

²²⁰ Girard, *I See Satan*, 22-23.

²²¹ Girard, *Theatre of Envy*, 18-19.

²²² Antonello and de Castro Rocha, "Evolution and Conversion," 6.

This process unfolds in microcosm when Adriana, Luciana and the Courtesan abruptly turn from interpersonal antipathy to jointly pursue Antipholus.

Adriana's epiphany

In critical literature, much is made of Adriana's response when Luciana urges her to stand up to the Abbess. After the short silence drawing the prompt, Adriana is said to concede to the Abbess, when she says: "She did betray me to my own reproof" (5.1.90). This is seen as evidence of remorse and conversion – the point when unruly Adriana becomes patient and "bridled" (2.1.13) to her husband's will. In this, critics seek endorsement of Luciana's early morality in the defeat of Adriana's perspective. Laurie Maguire says, "Adriana the independent, meekly submits to the Abbess's rebukes";²²³ for Elliott, her, "difficult silence" is, "self-imposed penance";²²⁴ and for Levin, it is, "a lesson for Adriana, brought home by the gentle rebuke of the Abbess".²²⁵

Much less is made, however, of what Adriana does next, which by no means indicates reformed character. She immediately resumes vigorous pursuit of Antipholus: "Good people, enter and lay hold on him" (5.1.91). She engages the Abbess in an 'Oh no you won't!/Oh yes I will!' battle for twenty lines (5.1.92-112). True to form, Luciana then spurs Adriana to make an outraged appeal:

²²³ Laurie Maguire, "The Girls from Ephesus (1997)," in *The Comedy of Errors : Critical Essays* (New York: Garland, 1997), 381.

²²⁴ Elliott, "Weirdness," 68.

²²⁵ Levin, "Two Comedies of Errors," 132. Also Grennan, "Arm and Sleeve," 161.

"Complain unto the Duke of this indignity" (113), and Adriana vows to do so with such fervour the Duke will, "take perforce my husband from the Abbess" (114-117). The incident is a mirror of the lockout scene (3.1) – when faced with a locked door, both spouses stubbornly double down on entering rather than patiently enquire. Indeed Adriana begins the exchange demanding, "Let us come in, that we may bind him fast" (5.1.40). Weinberg agrees:

Expressing frustration instead of resignation, Adriana refuses to relinquish her active attempts to control her husband's recovery. ... [She acts] in complete opposition to the patience and passivity the Abbess advocates, opting instead for a public purgation of her passions.²²⁶

This is also clear in performance. In Trevor Nunn's musical production, Judi Dench's great skill is evident as she works hard to express reflective contrition at line 90 then regain the antagonistic energy needed to deliver lines 91-332.²²⁷



Figure 4. Adriana's so called epiphany – Luciana and Adriana (Francesca Annis, Judi Dench), in Trevor Nunn's 1978 production of *The Comedy of Errors*.²²⁸

²²⁶ Weinberg, "Helpless Patience," 10.

²²⁷ Trevor Nunn, dir., "The Comedy of Errors," By William Shakespeare. Perf. Judi Dench, Roger Rees, Francesca Annis, and Michael Williams. (London: ITV, 1978), DVD.

²²⁸ Photograph by ITV/Rex, *Francesca Annis and Judi Dench in The Comedy of Errors, ATV, 1978*, <https://screenplaystv.wordpress.com/2012/06/04/the-comedy-of-errors-royal-shakespeare-companyatv-1978/>

Romantic readings of Adriana's pause hope optimistically that her problematic antagonism has been resolved via self-reflection. This expresses faith in modern ideas of self-development or Christian penitence, but above all, in a happy ending – Soellner:

In the end, she finds herself: she is subdued enough ... to acknowledge the Abbess' harsh sermon ... A new Adriana has emerged. She understands her proper relationship to her husband just at the moment when Antipholus of Syracuse finally finds Luciana, the Abbess is miraculously revealed as the wife of Egeon, and all self-estrangements and self-transformations come to an end.²²⁹

This overlooks how blithely Adriana sustains attack throughout the charged final scene. She exaggerates Antipholus' actions, even when reporting them second-hand, stretching truth to defend her position, exposing her husband to public castigation:

A most outrageous fit of madness took him,
That desp'rately he hurried through the street,
With him his bondman, all as mad as he,
Doing displeasure to the citizens
By rushing in their houses bearing thence
Rings, jewels, anything his rage did like (5.1.139-144).

She compounds his defamation, suggesting he is possessed, "Witness you/That he is borne about invisible" (186-87). Girard observes:

Shakespeare frequently illustrates the human tendency to endow the accidental and the insignificant with a completely unfounded negative significance for the purpose of stigmatizing and scapegoating.²³⁰

Adriana's surprised line (5.1.90) may simply be a response to the Abbess's discovery of her nagging. In jumping to her own defence, Adriana

²²⁹ Soellner, *Self-Knowledge*, 75.

²³⁰ Girard, *Theatre of Envy*, 207.

inadvertently reveals she hounds Antipholus day and night, trapping herself (62-65). She remarks on the Abbess' use of this material to incriminate her: "She did betray me to my own reproof" (90). Weinberg sums up: "The Abbess uses Adriana's admissions to expose the wife's active role in infusing every domestic activity with jealous rage".²³¹ Optimism that counts the line as full rehabilitation is too generous. Caught in an all too human pattern of attack and defence, Adriana is consistently an agent of friction in the play.

Catharsis

There is a stronger argument for Adriana's reform at the play's denouement (5.1.131-415). She takes part in succinct exchanges that unravel the identity errors after the twins' appearance, but barely, with only 5 of 85 lines here. In these, she simply states the fact of the twins or clarifies events: "I sent you money, sir, to be your bail,/By Dromio, but I think he brought it not" (383-84, 332, 370, 372). These lines, or more pertinently, her uncharacteristic quietness, could be elaborated on in performance. Weinberg argues strongly for this:

By ultimately choosing silence over superfluous words and tears, Adriana demonstrates a drastic change in character in which her inaction speaks louder than words.²³²

But Adriana and Antipholus do not clearly reconcile – the text does not, alone, support harmonisation between the warring couple, "the director may contrive

²³¹ Weinberg, "Helpless Patience," 8.

²³² Weinberg, "Helpless Patience," 11.

a forgiving embrace, but nothing in the text requires it".²³³ Hopkins shows Shakespeare often does this: "repeatedly dramatises incomplete, improper or interrupted [marriage] ceremonies which both enact and emblematises the tensions he sees within the institution of marriage".²³⁴ The significance of Adriana's silence is also undermined by a general muting of voices in these closing moments. All players are subdued, using single lines to convey factual observations, as though the sudden revelation of the doubles has left them in a state of awe, stripped of their capacity to elaborate or equivocate. Her lack of lines is unexceptional. Luciana has none, though Antipholus of Syracuse offers her another love invitation. Most notably, no lines come near the tenderness of those delivered by Dromio to close the play: "We came into this world like brother and brother,/And now let's go hand in hand, not one before another" (427-28).

Adriana's quietness is part of a wider transformation, the sudden, unanimous silence here arguing for a communal effect. It recalls Girard's description of what happens to an angry, rampaging mob when they violently dispel their antagonism onto a scapegoat. Their frenetic enmity becomes unity, the driving priority of their complaints is appeased and deflated, they are shocked at their actions. The intractable crisis magically disappears. Girard describes this:

²³³ Alexander Leggatt, "Shakespeare's Comedy of Love: 'The Comedy of Errors' (1974)," in *The Comedy of Errors: Critical Essays*, ed. Robert S. Miola (New York: Garland, 1997), 143.

²³⁴ Hopkins, *Shakespearean Marriage*, 12.

Once the scapegoat has been unanimously eliminated, the people find themselves without enemies and, lacking fuel, the spirit of vengeance becomes extinguished. After so much trouble this seems miraculous and the community [is] awed, first by the raging conflict and then by its resolution.²³⁵

In *Errors*, there is no final victim, though several contenders are at hand. The twin revelation instead kills the illusion of ill will players have sustained in pursuing their accusations, effecting an alternative to violent catharsis.

Conclusion

Adriana's anxieties and reactions are human and understandable, and she often expresses love along with reprimands: "My heart prays for him, though my tongue do curse" (4.2.28). Moreover, her faults do not absolve Antipholus or other protagonists – Chapter 4 shows they all contribute to Ephesus' troubles. Adriana does, however, unquestionably escalate rather than ease *Errors'* simmering volatilities. While this evaluation of both sisters may seem harsh, it confirms the omnipresence of overt and covert minor violence in the play. This reinforces findings that *Errors* targets the intimate relational antagonism that underpins community violence, as per Girard's model.

The chapter also showed the sisters, like other Shakespearean relationships, to be grappling with the volatile energies of mimetic desire. The sisters' opening quarrel, in prefiguring the combative symmetry of the lockout scene (3.1), confirmed that polarised stances in *Errors* don't just present opposite sides of

²³⁵ Girard, *Theatre of Envy*, 204.

a debate, but reify mimetic opposition per se, as inflammatory. This was also confirmed by looking past a superficial contrast between the sisters, to find Shakespeare refuses to ratify Luciana's view on marriage, either by presenting her as consistently 'good', or having Adriana reform on cue. Girard's focus on recurring patterns in social dynamics and the universality of mimetic effects, found a parallel between Adriana's jealousy and Shakespeare's jealous men. Both women are impelled by motile mimetic impulses and drawn towards mob victimisation. In this, the chapter moves towards upcoming discussion of scapegoating and catharsis.

Chapter 3

Civic violence



Figure 5. Antipholus and Dromio are bound by order of Adriana and Dr Pinch in the American Players Theatre 2016 production.²³⁶

²³⁶ Photograph by Liz Lauren, *Comedy of Errors* slideshow, <https://americanplayers.org/plays/the-comedy-of-errors-2016>

Preceding chapters examined the main body of *The Comedy of Errors*, establishing its concern with violence and alignment with René Girard's theory. The focus was on micro violence expressed in intimate relations, and the early stages of Girard's mimetic cycle. Mimetic desire, rivalry and jealousy were shown to create relational instability in the play, and mimetic hostility, to escalate such tensions, causing classic Shakespearean reversals in hierarchy, morality and allegiance. It was proposed Shakespeare sees rivalrous debate itself as the nexus of social friction. In its trajectory from minor domestic, towards more severe civic violence, *Errors* was shown to align with Girard's model and Shakespearean plays that address extreme violence.

Chapter 3 pursues this continuum between micro and macro violence by examining the dramatic frame surrounding *Errors*' main action and the larger civic violence described there. Going beyond the frame's mechanical functions, analysis draws attention to the war at the play's start, which sets a violent context affecting protagonists and plot. The chapter then considers the death sentence arising from that war, which raises issues of conscience by contrasting retributive justice with Christian mercy. Proposing Egeon to be a figure for Christ, the chapter argues for Shakespeare's strong interest in the sacrificial victim, surveying aspects of his milieu that could have intensified this interest, motivated his work, and given him insight into how sacrificial processes and cathartic mechanisms could be orchestrated dramatically.

This material supports the idea Shakespeare understood the social dynamics associated with later stages of Girard's mimetic cycle, when antagonistic mobs move towards unanimous scapegoating, when the, "growing resentment people feel for one another ... conflates into a bigger resentment towards a random element of society".²³⁷ It argues Shakespeare's experience as an actor playing to a fickle Elizabethan crowd gave him particular insight into the victim's position in a mob, with this theme clearly signalled in *Errors*. Two real scapegoating incidents Shakespeare experienced or may have read about are recounted. This both elucidates Girard's scapegoat mechanism more concretely and links *Errors* to the dynamics of that mechanism.

Violent contexts

Shakespeare gives Plautus' plot a dramatic frame, set up in the opening scene and resolved in the play's final lines. The importance of this frame is signalled by its deliberate inclusion, by its length – it comprises over a quarter of the action – and by the fact it is highly engineered. The opening scene delivers Egeon's sad tale of long past separation from wife and family. This informs audiences of the split twins so they can laugh at the identity mistakes, and promises an eventual family reunion so they invest in Egeon and his family. Duke Solinus also announces Egeon's pending execution, anchoring the comedy by raising the stakes of each mistaken identity and chaotic argument.

²³⁷ Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 60.

Critics focus on these mechanical and dramatic functions. Levin says the opening scene, "contributes an emotional tension at the very outset to what would otherwise have remained a two dimensional drama";²³⁸ Palfrey, "Death provides a formal frame ... Without it the action would be lax".²³⁹ However, the scene does more than this. It presents a significant violent context in which to parse the main action: the war between Ephesus and Syracuse which potentially compels the execution of innocent Egeon. The following unpacks how Shakespeare highlights the moral significance of this war by precisely characterising it, positioning it as cardinal, and carefully managing the relational dynamics between Solinus and Egeon.

The Ephesus/Syracuse war is decisively characterised as ongoing and violent in the play's first lines, with the words enmity (1.1.5), discord (5), rancorous (6), outrage (6) and bloods (9) appearing in quick succession. The towns are "adverse" (15), signalling their opposition and its deleterious effects; their fights are "mortal and intestine jars" (11) – fatal, internally complex, physical shocks. If not seen as a convenient prop for a farcical plot, but in the terms it is presented, the war is not incidental, but grave. Authorities of both communities, "solemn Synods" (13), have made legal provision for the summary execution of the other's citizens if they enter town boundaries.

²³⁸ Levin, "Two Comedies of Errors," 125.

²³⁹ Palfrey and Smith, *Shakespeare's Dead*, 48.

The feud is also indeterminate. While “rancorous outrage” (6) indicates long standing resentment, no original cause is discussed, nor is any reconciliation in train, the Synods having only provided for mutual murder. Hierarchical order seems unsettled: the Syracusans are “seditious” (12) – factious, mutinous – and the Ephesians’ chain of command vague. While the Duke claims the law can’t be changed by “princes” (142), he later overrides it in half a line (5.1.392). Adding to this sense of arbitrariness, those killed in Syracuse were mere merchants on business, “well dealing countrymen” (7) – innocents, like the harmless traveller Egeon. Yet in stipulating the cruel law, Solinus emphasises its lack of discrimination, twice repeating the word ‘any’ (three times in the First Folio),²⁴⁰ making it clear the feud targets all citizens, not just those in power or at fault,

Nay, more: if any born at Ephesus
 Be seen at [any] Syracusan marts and fairs;
 Again, if any Syracusan born
 Come to the bay of Ephesus, he dies (16-19).²⁴¹

Crucially, no executive power takes responsibility. Solinus bases his adherence to the law on the need for retaliation:

The enmity and discord which of late
 Sprang from the rancorous outrage of your Duke
 To merchants, our well-dealing countrymen,
 Who, wanting guilders to redeem their lives,
 Have sealed his rigorous statutes with their bloods,
 Excludes all pity from our threat’ning looks (1.1.5-10).

While he hints at reprieve often (for example, “We may pity though not pardon thee” (96)), this need to match his enemy’s ruthlessness prohibits him from

²⁴⁰ Shakespeare, *First Folio*.

²⁴¹ Whitworth follows Pope, deleting the extra ‘any’ on metrical grounds. Shakespeare, *Comedy of Errors*, 90, lines 16-17.

mercy. He distances himself from the bloody decision by pointing to the law and his enemy's deeds, as the Syracusan Duke may have done.

Having shown such levelling games of matched violence are often depicted as twins or warring brothers in myth and in Shakespeare, it is clear that here Shakespeare presents twinned warring cities, twinned vengeful Dukes. While the war's lack of a clear aim might argue for the dramatic redundancy of such details, lack of focus also characterises later stages of mimetic rivalry, when enemies lose sight of their original cause in fighting one another:

Rivals become more and more concerned with defeating the opponent for the sake of it, rather than obtaining the object, which eventually becomes irrelevant, as it only exists as an excuse for the escalation of the dispute. Thus the rivals become more and more undifferentiated, identical: doubles.²⁴²

Girard discusses this with regard to *Troilus and Cressida*, which examines the fruitless, drawn out Trojan war:

The formerly differentiated entities have turned into undifferentiated doubles ... Their violence has destroyed whatever object they desire in common, depriving their struggle of its significance.²⁴³

Foakes also sees this in Shakespeare's Trojan War:

Shakespeare repeatedly stresses the triviality of the motives that drive the [war] ... [It] has been going on for years, with 'Many a Greek and Trojan dead' (4.5.213) ... and seems at once pointless and carried on by a kind of inertia.²⁴⁴

²⁴² Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 42.

²⁴³ Girard, *Theatre of Envy*, 162-63.

²⁴⁴ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 166-67.

Though briefly sketched then, *Errors'* war is characterised as ill-defined and marked by the retributive killing of innocents. This aligns it with Girard's view of human conflict as centred in endlessly reciprocated hostility more than difference. It also aligns *Errors* with other plays in the oeuvre, confirming patterns of mimetic violence recur in Shakespeare, as Girard suggests.²⁴⁵

The war's leading place in the highly economical plot also signals its significance. Hage shows Shakespeare's violent opening contexts establish, "an atmosphere of violence ... a constant expectation of violence influencing all participants",²⁴⁶ as does *Errors'* war. On entering Ephesus, the first thing Antipholus of Syracuse encounters is an "atmosphere of violence" stemming from the inter-city feud: "This very day a Syracusan merchant/Is apprehended for a[r]rival here" (1.2.1-7).²⁴⁷ This increases his wariness and prompts him to disguise himself, working against his quest to find his brother.

Many of Shakespeare's dramas open with violent civic contexts that determine their action and meaning. Foakes notes the climate of violence pervading *King Lear*, "is vividly registered in the opening scene",²⁴⁸ and that wars open and

²⁴⁵ Girard, *Theatre of Envy*, 160-296 and throughout.

²⁴⁶ Hage, "Necessary Victims," 134, 29-30.

²⁴⁷ The First Folio gives 'a rival', which was later emended (e.g., in Shakespeare, *Comedy of Errors*, 97.) to 'arrival'.

²⁴⁸ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 144.

"condition" the most violent plays.²⁴⁹ As well, Shakespeare associates his violent openings with the destructive, retributive loop of mimetic violence – whether at the micro or macro level. *Romeo and Juliet* pinpoints the play's central issue – paired warring families – in its first lines: "Two households both alike in dignity/... From ancient grudge, break to new mutiny".²⁵⁰ Foakes, says

Henry IV Part 1 –

establishes at once a deep hostility ... [and] opposition between two closely related powerful aristocrats. ... [who] emblemize the deep hostilities ... that bring about ... the Wars of the Roses.²⁵¹

He concludes, "civil dissension in the play is focused in mindless rivalries between close relatives".²⁵² *Macbeth* opens with inverted order, storms, and battles. For Richard Van Oort, this begins a sustained critique of the warrior culture of medieval Scotland, which is inherently unstable because succession relies on cycles of retributive murder.²⁵³ The same unresolving, rivalrous civic conditions opening Shakespeare's most tragic plays then, also open *Errors*.

Written soon after *Errors*, *Romeo and Juliet* provides other parallels with the comedy, showing that, just as Shakespeare's violent contexts affect individuals, those individuals can add to community and state woes. Hage shows in

²⁴⁹ Specifically *Titus Andronicus*, *Othello*, *Pericles*, *Coriolanus*. Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 54, 176-77, 84-86. Foakes gives many other instances of violent openings without collecting these into a pattern: 62, 71, 74-5, 79, 114, 135, 144-5, 147-9.

²⁵⁰ Shakespeare, *New Oxford Shakespeare*, *Romeo and Juliet*, 1.0.1-3.

²⁵¹ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 39-40.

²⁵² Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 39-40.

²⁵³ Richard Van Oort, "Violence and Politics in Shakespeare's 'Macbeth' and Kurosawa's 'Throne of Blood'," in *Mimetic Theory and Film*, ed. Paolo Diego Bubbio and Chris Fleming (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019)., agreeing with Harry Berger, "The Early Scenes of MacBeth : Preface to a New Interpretation," *ELH* 47, no. 1 (1980), <https://doi.org/10.2307/2872436>.

Romeo and Juliet, "banter among friends can lead to a threat of civil war",²⁵⁴ forensically breaking down the acceleration of violence in its opening scene.²⁵⁵ Tension shifts from light yet strained repartee between servants, to duelling masters, to community uproar. The number of people embroiled in the fight rapidly escalates with the severity of violence. Regardless of alliances, defensive moves are taken as offensive, and de-escalation is confounded, mimetic bravado inflaming the situation. This echoes *Errors'* neighbourhood fights, which grow so quickly from small mistakes. The two plays' swelling conglomerate crowds of servants, masters, husbands, wives, citizens, are similar, as is their humour. *Romeo and Juliet's* brawl starts with Gregory mocking Sampson, and ends with Capulet's wife mocking her husband. Hage says, "what Shakespeare wants to reveal through this critical distance [of humour] is that this fight is without a real object".²⁵⁶ The causes underwriting the Capulet/Montague feud are as lost in time and habitual hostility as those propping the Ephesus/Syracuse feud.

As well as providing dramatic tension then, *Errors'* opening war is another emblem of mimetic violence, so links the play's micro and macro violence. This accords with Girard's view of war, which he sees as functioning on mimesis as much as intimate relations do – it is simply, "an escalation to the extremes, ... in

²⁵⁴ Hage, "Necessary Victims," 129-30.

²⁵⁵ Hage, "Necessary Victims," 129-37.

²⁵⁶ Hage, "Necessary Victims," 135.

order to win, you have to imitate your enemy constantly."²⁵⁷ Hopkins notes Shakespeare, "subjects the workings of the microcosm to precisely the same kinds of examination as he does those of the macrocosm".²⁵⁸ A Girardian lens takes this further, showing Shakespeare depicts their social dynamics as equivalent, with rivalry recurring fractally at all levels of cultural organisation. In the drama of mimetic violence, as Hage says, "the roles are the same; only those occupying them change".²⁵⁹ As the wider civic feud threatens to foil Egeon's family reunion, and the play's domestic squabbles embroil businessmen, clerics and Dukes, it becomes clear Shakespeare also sees the domestic and civic arenas not only as alike, but as mutually infecting.

Issues of conscience

The civic chaos in *Romeo and Juliet* is halted only by the Prince, who uses violence to suppress violence, threatening to execute any who continue to fight. Hage shows Shakespeare's rulers often try to suppress internal violence by instigating war or select violence – forfeiting individual lives – and sees the containment of violence with violence as a core ethical issue in the plays.²⁶⁰

This issue emerges strongly in the duologue between Duke Solinus and Egeon in the opening scene (1.1.1-35,95-96,120-122,139-157), with Solinus' qualms about the

²⁵⁷ Girard is paraphrasing Carl von Clausewitz, Girard, Pogue Harrison, and Haven, "Mimesis and Desire," 12.

²⁵⁸ Hopkins, *Shakespearean Marriage*, 8-9.

²⁵⁹ Hage, "Necessary Victims," 135.

²⁶⁰ Hage, "Necessary Victims."

execution spotlighting Christian 'conscience' – at the time, a new Lutheran sensibility of a "radically private relationship between God and personhood".²⁶¹

The two men's attitudes are repeatedly contrasted – the Duke frequently expresses uncertainty about the execution; Egeon unhesitatingly accepts, even welcomes it as a "comfort" (26). This seesawing starts with Egeon plainly stating his readiness to die: "Proceed Solinus, to procure my fall/And by the doom of death end woes and all" (1-2). Negating this, Solinus demands Egeon "plead no more" (3), though no pleading has occurred; and far from proceeding, he begins to justify the ruling, as discussed. This delays action to no purpose – he arrives back at the law's already established finality twenty lines later. Egeon again simply concurs (26-27). Still Solinus stalls and seeks discussion, asking Egeon to relate his circumstances. This enables the useful history, but Egeon again makes his feelings clear: he'd rather just die (31). Solinus shows great interest in the traumatic tale, delaying the execution twice more by prompting Egeon to continue when he balks (95,120). Duke Solinus finally officially defers the beheading. Unchanged, Egeon restates his position: this delay does not help him, only "procrastinate[s] his lifeless end" (156-57). In the few lines not comprising Egeon's history, Solinus delays the execution five times and Egeon states his readiness to die as often.

²⁶¹ Palfrey and Smith, *Shakespeare's Dead*, 12. Also Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 29-30, 38, 83, 109. Also Hage, "Necessary Victims," 126.

This casts Solinus' defence as an exercise in self-motivation, ironically undermining its validity. Taking *Errors'* opening as purely mechanical, critics often miss Egeon's compliance²⁶² and rarely see Solinus' hesitancy,²⁶³ but his ambivalence is palpable. His dogged insistence on the law's intractability is patently unnecessary – Egeon is a willing victim. Egeon's sad tale only intensifies Solinus' justifications (146-47), until he clearly reveals the conflict he feels between the law and his soul's instinct for leniency:

- 1 Now trust me, were it not against our laws,
- 2 Which princes, would they, may not disannul,
- 3 Against my crown, my oath, my dignity,
- 4 My soul should sue as advocate for thee (1.1.141-44).

Depending on interpretation, these lines pinpoint Solinus' struggle with his conscience. In some editions, the line "Which princes, would they, may not disannul", refers to city laws only, definitively positioning them as absolute.²⁶⁴ However, in the First Folio the line embraces Solinus' crown, oath, dignity.²⁶⁵

This broadens the meaning to encompass issues of conscience:

- 1 Now trust me, were it not against our laws,
- 3 Against my crown, my oath, my dignity,
- 2 Which princes, would they, may not disannul,
- 4 My soul should sue as advocate for thee.

This order allows reference to the sacrosanct nature of hereditary crowns and personal ethics. It observes the limits of earthly authorities to alter birthright,

²⁶² E.g., Levin, "Two Comedies of Errors," 125. Egeon's self-sacrificing stance is sometimes noted, e.g., Kinney, "Nature of Kinds," 161.

²⁶³ With the exception of Bishop, *Theatre of Wonder*, 75.

²⁶⁴ Shakespeare, *Comedy of Errors*, 96. Whitworth agrees with Theobald's original adjustment arguing "disannulment is less clearly predicable of crowns, oaths and dignities", which are "different orders of things".

²⁶⁵ Shakespeare, *First Folio*. Note that it is also unclear is whether the second 'against' carries the meaning of the first – 'prohibited by' – or means 'rejecting'.

allegiance or integrity, marking a difference between externally imposed law and internally imposed ethical imperatives. It shows Solinus' hesitancy around the execution hinges on conscience – he tries to adhere to justice, but his soul argues for mercy. While the execution's delay shows compassion, in light of Egeon's pointed equanimity it also gives Solinus respite, allowing him to temporarily hand his dilemma to providence, giving him time to reconcile the action with his conscience.

This dialogue in fact presents an argument between a law that supports pagan vengeance, and principles of Christian mercy, giving it both Christian and Girardian resonances. Kinney shows justice is associated with retribution elsewhere in Shakespeare.²⁶⁶ He connects the opposition of justice and mercy in *Errors* to the liturgical texts for Holy Innocent's Day, and to traditional English Passion play cycles which stage a battle between Justice and Mercy in their final stages.²⁶⁷ Kinney sees Solinus and the Abbess personifying these precepts in *Errors*, with Christian mercy prevailing: "at the end of the play, the law is ... made (eternally) subordinate to the Abbess, as Justice is made subordinate to Mercy in numerous scriptural plays".²⁶⁸

²⁶⁶ Kinney, "Nature of Kinds," 175.

²⁶⁷ Kinney, "Nature of Kinds," 175.

²⁶⁸ Kinney, "Nature of Kinds," 165-67, 73.

While the Duke's vacillation underscores the precariousness of Egeon's fate for an audience, it also presents them with a moral dilemma: under what conditions can violence be justified by a Christian state? This is deliberately posed – every delay and recycled argument Solinus initiates increases the clarity with which it is set before viewers and the time they have to consider it. The morality of war was a topical, persistent question at the time, as Christian principles clashed with the reality of constant war in Europe: "religious passions were inextricably linked to national security".²⁶⁹ In response to pacifism, both Protestant and secular rationales for war were promoted,²⁷⁰ and the vital protective and assertive capacities of a warlike state stressed.²⁷¹

Solinus' delay also articulates serious questions around the ethics of revenge, another insistent issue of the era, with classical and Christian values again pulling the culture in two directions.²⁷² Classical myths lauding the heroism of vengeful warriors were taught alongside biblical precepts, so educated men such as Shakespeare encountered a contradiction between, "a quasi-Senecan desire for revenge, and a Christian inhibition against taking life".²⁷³ Foakes shows Shakespeare exploited this when dramatising violence, here summarising Hamlet's dilemma, but also encapsulating Solinus' –

²⁶⁹ Palfrey and Smith, *Shakespeare's Dead*.

²⁷⁰ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 29-30.

²⁷¹ Hage, "Necessary Victims," 126.

²⁷² Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 18, 108, 10, 35.

²⁷³ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 121.

The heroic [classical] code he associates with his father urges him to action, while the Christian code ... condemns revenge and inhibits him from murder most foul.²⁷⁴

Foakes says *Errors* exemplifies Shakespeare's mixing of classical and Christian allusions,²⁷⁵ with Bishop recognising the deeper implications of this:

By fusing Plautus' rambunctious plot with ... allusions to St Paul (as though Plautus and Paulus were anagrammatic twins), Shakespeare's hybrid tests their respective modes of narration, as though asking 'Which kind of story, if any, can help us stave off death?'²⁷⁶

Solinus' conspicuous delay then, though less drawn out than Hamlet's, shows *Errors* raises core Shakespearean questions around the ethics of controlling violence with violence, and of revenge. This aligns the play, and Shakespeare, with Girard's proposition that reciprocal violence, in all its forms, is the nexus of personal and social ills.

Egeon as a Christ-like sacrificial victim

Shakespeare's portrait of Egeon as exceedingly pitiful intensifies these issues, and positions him as a quintessential Christ-like victim. The old man is a foreigner, entering Ephesus as a last resort in a fruitless search. He is lost, alone, impoverished, a victim of fate caught in inter-city enmity. How he should be played is set out in Act 5: feeble, white haired, of waning sensibility:

Though now this grainèd face of mine be hid
In sap-consuming winter's drizzled snow,
And all the conduits of my blood froze up,

²⁷⁴ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 128., quoting John Kerrigan, *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 186.

²⁷⁵ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 111.

²⁷⁶ Bishop, *Theatre of Wonder*, 74-75.

Yet hath my night of life some memory,
My wasting lamps some fading glimmer left,
My dull deaf ears a little use to hear (5.1.312-317).

His pathos is amplified by his docile forbearance, a Christian acceptance of fate as God's will, also seen in his past encounter with death, which he, "would gladly have embraced" (1.1.68). In Girard's review of myth, he finds, "victims are ... often chosen among physically challenged people or foreigners ... infirmities, or unpleasant traits are mistaken for guilt".²⁷⁷ He references Christ, quoting Isaiah 53:3, "he was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering".²⁷⁸ Skura shows this Christ role is encountered throughout Shakespeare: "the Man of Sorrows accepts his fate, subordinating himself to the necessity of his sacrifice and to the Father who has forsaken him."²⁷⁹ Kinney sees Egeon as, "the first innocent of many" in the oeuvre.²⁸⁰

Shakespeare's recurring scapegoat roles are one of many indications he regularly encountered the dynamics of violent scapegoating and applied these in his drama. Christ's Passion, with its highly conscious revelation of sacrificial processes could have given him further insight into scapegoating. Shakespeare was infused with the religious sensibility of his time and extensively versed in Judeo-Christian scripture. Describing the era, Palfrey stresses the "*presentness*

²⁷⁷ Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 50.

²⁷⁸ Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 50.

²⁷⁹ Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 7, 211.

²⁸⁰ Kinney, "Nature of Kinds," 161.

of the spiritual stakes, their urgency and intimacy".²⁸¹ Foakes says the Bible was, "the most powerful cultural influence in Britain", and points to Shakespeare's, "intimate knowledge of it ... evident throughout his plays and poems".²⁸² For Girard, Shakespeare was an, "incomparable reader of the Bible".²⁸³ The clearest sign of *Errors'* Christian sensibility is its location in the holy city of Ephesus where St Paul encountered sorcerers when preaching early Christianity (Acts 19:17-20).²⁸⁴ Another is the liturgical importance of the date of *Errors'* only contemporary performances in 1594 and 1604: 28 December, Holy Innocent's Day, which address, "errors and forgiveness ... the dispersal and reunion of families".²⁸⁵

Shakespeare would have been highly aware of tortures and executions taking place in his city connected to the era's religious wars – even "failure to attend Anglican services could bring strict penalties".²⁸⁶ Baldwin argues one execution was a model for *Errors* – the hanging of two Catholic priests at Holywell Priory in 1588. This Priory was in Shoreditch where Shakespeare lived, and next to the theatre he was associated with. The place Egeon is to be executed, "The place of death and sorry execution/Behind the ditches of the abbey here" (5.1.120-122) has, "exactly the topography of Holywell Priory, which was not duplicated in

²⁸¹ Palfrey and Smith, *Shakespeare's Dead*, 12.

²⁸² Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 135.

²⁸³ Girard, *I See Satan*, 99.

²⁸⁴ Kinney, "Nature of Kinds," 161, 64.

²⁸⁵ In Miola, *Critical Essays*, 11. Also Kinney, "Nature of Kinds," 174.

²⁸⁶ Palfrey and Smith, *Shakespeare's Dead*, 10.

any other such building in London". As the Priory's only hanging, Baldwin says, it would have been conspicuous to theatre goers, who would have had no trouble, "recognizing and appreciating Aegeon's plight. It was no improbable fiction; it was a grim possibility for all".²⁸⁷

Elizabethans were engaged by violence, and Shakespeare could regularly observe spontaneous crowd victimisation in his society. As well as being thrilled by bearbaiting and other blood sports, Skura shows Elizabethans, "participated enthusiastically in publicly sanctioned attacks on victims of the scaffold, the stocks, and the whipping post".²⁸⁸ Kate Flaherty and Edel Lamb note 1590s London was known for its riots and an "unprecedented degree of highly politicised disorder".²⁸⁹ By 1595, says Skura, theatre itself drew "some 15,000 spectators a week", as the only place crowds could gather for community or "ritualistic" activities, other than "sermons and executions".²⁹⁰ Flaherty emphasises, "the significance of the early modern playhouse as a space for the expression of the emotions of the crowd".²⁹¹ Even folk mumming plays of the time affirmed life through, "regenerative festive violence".²⁹²

²⁸⁷ Baldwin, "Brave New World," 93-94.

²⁸⁸ Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 203.

²⁸⁹ Matt Williamson, "'Cry Clubs for Prentices': (Not) Performing Riot in Thomas Dekker's 'The Shoemaker's Holiday'," *Shakespeare* 14, no. 3 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450918.2018.1504813>. Quoted in Kate Flaherty and Edel Lamb, "Introduction : Shakespeare and Riot," *Shakespeare* 14, no. 3 (2018): 202, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450918.2018.1499672>.

²⁹⁰ Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Quoted in Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 33.

²⁹¹ Flaherty and Lamb, "Shakespeare and Riot," 202.

²⁹² Ira Clark, "Comic Violence on the Late Tudor and Early Stuart Stage : A Theory and an Application," *Exemplaria* 13, no. 1 (January 2001): 258-59, <https://doi.org/10.1179/exm.2001.13.1.253>.

Shakespeare's engagement with the structure of sacrifice however, becomes most tangible in Skura's book connecting the many sacrificial references in his drama to his acting experiences. He was an actor throughout his career and, "his contemporaries knew him first as an actor".²⁹³ Skura compiles Shakespeare's writing on acting from his plays and poetry with contemporary and modern reports of the acting experience. A strong central theme emerging from all these sources is the sacrificial positioning of the stage actor:

He stands alone before a crowd which can make him its idol – or its victim ... the theatrical confrontation takes on the excitement of the hunt, recalling ... the plenitude of mob emotion.²⁹⁴

Skura sees this sacrificial actor/audience relationship as pervasive in Shakespeare, especially as experienced in, "the 'Wooden O', the charmed circle in which an audience enshrines or entraps the player".²⁹⁵ While Christ's suffering is referenced in narrative through the ages, Skura shows Christian mystery plays, and Shakespeare, specifically emphasise a circular structure: a group surrounds and taunts a central trapped Christ figure.²⁹⁶ She proposes two contemporary social contexts instantiated performance as sacrifice for Shakespeare: bearbaiting and these mystery plays, "culminating in the baiting and crucifixion of Christ"²⁹⁷ or butchery of a substitute animal. Skura says Shakespeare connects the bear's suffering to Christ in his work, noting the

²⁹³ Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 1.

²⁹⁴ Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 4.

²⁹⁵ Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 8. See also 225-34..

²⁹⁶ Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 209.

²⁹⁷ Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 7.

"language of the bear ring appears at climactic moments", when a victim is surrounded and attacked.²⁹⁸ She uses the scene where Antipholus is bound and publically harried (4.4) to exemplify Shakespeare's sacrificial configuration, and notes other plays with bearbaiting scenes, such as *The Merchant of Venice*, go on to elaborate on the victim's position. Egeon can be seen to form part of this thematic focus. Skura also believes Egeon's self-sacrificing stance, "characterizes the texts in which Shakespeare comes closest ... to speaking in his own voice".²⁹⁹

Skura's evidence shows Shakespeare was particular interested in sacrificial victimisation – she says the mob/victim motif is part of an extensive applied exploration of the dynamics of sacrifice.³⁰⁰ In this, her work supports Girard and Girardian scholars, who claim Shakespeare's frequent use of sacrificial motifs and dynamics is part of a comprehensive analysis of violence realised across the oeuvre, with its implications developed in his drama.³⁰¹

Choreographed scapegoating

Having noted Shakespeare's general cultural environment, the following details two real events in his purview that show how sacrifice can be

²⁹⁸ Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 7.

²⁹⁹ Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 215.

³⁰⁰ Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 1-9 and throughout.

³⁰¹ GIRARD: Girard, *Theatre of Envy*, throughout. Also Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 62-64, 124-26. Also Girard, *To Double Business*, 151-53. GIRARDIAN SCHOLARS: Richard Van Oort, *Shakespeare's Big Men: Tragedy and the Problem of Resentment* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), particularly Chapter 1, 3-11. Van Oort, "Idea of the Modern." and Hage, "Necessary Victims," particularly 151.

deliberately engineered to serve a social purpose. This usefully illustrates Girard's scapegoat mechanism, and offers new sources of influence for *Errors*.

The first incident – “The Horrible Miracle of Apollonius of Tyana”,³⁰² as Girard names it – strongly resonates with *Errors* in its Ephesian setting, crowd scenes and figures of Egeon and Pinch the exorcist.³⁰³ While Girard doesn't link this event to Shakespeare, he sources it from Philostratus,³⁰⁴ whose third century record of it could have been read by the playwright. Burrow, for instance, describes Shakespeare's, “wide sphere of reading”, encompassing, “Plutarch, Greek prose romance, a sprinkling of Lucan, the distiches of Cato, a dash of Homer, and perhaps some of Philostratus”.³⁰⁵ The ‘miracle’ involves the stoning of an old man very like Egeon at ‘the theatre’ in Ephesus (Philostratus account is given at Appendix B). With St Paul's *Letter to the Ephesians* known to strongly influence *Errors*,³⁰⁶ it should be noted Paul himself was nearly stoned to death (Acts 14:27-28), and was embroiled in a riot when preaching at the theatre in Ephesus (Acts 19:28-32).

³⁰² Girard, *I See Satan*, 49-70.

³⁰³ Note that Whitworth and Miola discuss the 3rd century Greek legend, Apollonius of TYRE as a source for *Errors*. Whether Philostratus' real Apollonius of TYANA inspired this legendary Apollonius of TYRE is an interesting question but out of scope of this thesis. Whitworth, "Introduction," 27-37. Miola, *Critical Essays*, 15-17.

³⁰⁴ Girard, *I See Satan*, 49-70. See also Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 27.

³⁰⁵ Colin Burrow, "Shakespeare and Humanistic Culture," in *Shakespeare and the Classics*, ed. A. B. Taylor and Charles Martindale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 9.

³⁰⁶ E.g., Kinney, "Nature of Kinds," throughout. Also Miola, *Critical Essays*, 10-13. Also Weinberg, "Helpless Patience," throughout.

The event involved an Apollonius of Tyana – “a celebrated guru of the second century after Christ. Among the pagans his miracles were viewed as superior to those of Jesus”.³⁰⁷ The citizens of Ephesus asked him to cure their persistent plague, so he led them to the theatre, pointing out a wretched beggar –

what seemed an old mendicant artfully blinking his eyes as if blind, and he carried a wallet and a crust of bread in it; and he was clad in rags and was very squalid of countenance.³⁰⁸

Apollonius tells them that stoning the old man will cure their troubles, and after some reluctance, they are persuaded to proceed with this, and it ‘miraculously’ ends their plague:

As soon as some of them began to take shots and hit him with their stones, the beggar ... gave them all a sudden glance and showed that his eyes were full of fire. Then the Ephesians recognised that he was a demon, and they stoned him so thoroughly that their stones were heaped into a great cairn around him. After a little pause, Apollonius bade them remove the stones and acquaint themselves with the wild animal which they had slain.³⁰⁹

Girard shows this ‘miracle’ is a clever manipulation exploiting the operation of mimesis in crowds and the curative effects of scapegoating. ‘Plague’ in ancient texts, says Girard, was a combination of bacterial and social infection, with one inflaming the other.³¹⁰ He argues the Ephesian’s plague was largely social –

³⁰⁷ Girard, *I See Satan*, 49.

³⁰⁸ Girard, *I See Satan*, 27., quoting Flavius Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, trans. F. C. Conybeare, 2 vols., Loeb Classical Library, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1912).

³⁰⁹ Girard, *I See Satan*, 49-50., quoting Flavius Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*.

³¹⁰ René Girard, "The Plague in Literature and Myth," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 15, A Special Classics Issue on Myth and Interpretation, no. 5 (1974).

an epidemic of mimetic rivalries ... a war of *all against all*, which, thanks to the victim selected by the diabolical cleverness of Apollonius, is transformed miraculously into a reconciliation of *all against one*.³¹¹

Girard says, the Ephesians' initial refusal is, "the sole ray of light in this dark text", but the guru prompts a first few stones to be thrown. With this behavioural model, the kill is quickly accomplished via mimetic contagion:

The same Ephesians who had pity on the beggar a moment earlier now demonstrate a violent emulation of one another that is so relentless ... our surprise can only equal our sadness.³¹²

Also highlighted by Girard is the ready demonisation of the victim, whose mangled body is later taken to prove his demonic shape-shifting powers:

With a ridiculous grandiloquence [Apollonius] denounces the beggar as "enemy of the gods". To make the violence possible, he must demonize the individual he has selected as victim.³¹³

Girard supports his reading by referencing the ancient Greek practice of killing *pharmakoi* – "real collective assassinations of individuals similar to the beggar of Ephesus". Like Egeon, these were, "social nobodies: the homeless, those without family, the disabled and ill, abandoned old people."³¹⁴

Errors' exorcism parallels this real Ephesian incident in other ways. Its crowd mimetically adopts the madness diagnosis. Antipholus' frenzy increases when he is bound, just as the beggar's eyes become "full of fire" when he is attacked. Like Apollonius, Pinch is a strange mix of magician, physician and priest.

³¹¹ Girard, *I See Satan*, 53.

³¹² Girard, *I See Satan*, 56. Girard offers Jesus' directive to a similar crowd, INHIBITING the throwing of the first stone, as an example of positive mimesis that gradually disperses the angry crowd.

³¹³ Girard, *I See Satan*, 56.

³¹⁴ Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 76.

Though he uses Christian terms, his approach hinges on demonisation, “the fiend is strong within him” (4.4.108). Pinch though, only has to amplify existing hysteria and outrage to achieve this:

COURTESAN: Mark how he trembles in his ecstasy.
PINCH: Give me your hand, and let me feel your pulse.
ANTIPHOLUS: There is my hand, and let it feel your ear. [*He strikes Pinch*]
PINCH: I charge thee, Satan, housed within this man,
To yield possession to my holy prayers (4.4.54-56).

The scene highlights a distinction *Errors* makes between the supernatural and Christianity, as its florid invocations contrast markedly with the Abbess’ quiet, material twin revelation. This dichotomy can mislead critics trying to fix Shakespeare’s intention as either Christian (mystical) or non-Christian (material). Taking Shakespeare’s mockery of religious figures as a lack of personal faith, they assume his miraculous-feeling endings don’t reference Christianity, and are staged purely for theatrical effect:

[Shakespeare] invests little faith in priests or would-be transcendent spiritual mediators. His most characteristic churchmen are ineffectual, belated, verbose or fraudulent. ... In so far as [he] invests in death-redeeming acts, the agents tend to be pagan, medicinal or *coups de théâtre*. At such moments, Shakespeare’s purposes are always more theatrical than confessional.³¹⁵

Girard’s view of Christian purpose as centrally to reveal the truth of scapegoating, offers another option. If Shakespeare also saw this singular, material truth as representing the heart of Christianity, this would reconcile the irreverence with which he presents Pinch’s mystical posturing, with the reverence of Act 5’s de-mystifying twin unveiling.

³¹⁵ Palfrey and Smith, *Shakespeare's Dead*, 17-18. Also McCoy, *Faith in Shakespeare*.

A second example of choreographed scapegoating comes from a source definitively linked to *The Comedy of Errors* – the *Gesta Grayorium*, which recounts *Errors*' first performance in 1594.³¹⁶ Beyond presenting the play, it is unknown how involved Shakespeare was in these events, however, they recall his drama and display cognisance of the mechanisms of scapegoating.

The *Gesta Grayorium* shows *Errors* was part of a Christmas season mock pageant at Gray's Inn. These "revels" were designed as ritualistic, to inculcate those studying court decorum into ceremonial practice. However, the rowdy audience encroached onto the stage, and the event devolved into such disorder a mock trial was held to ascertain the culprits. Lanier summarises:

The Crown read mock judgements ... against a "Sorcerer or Conjurer that was supposed to be the cause of that confused Inconvenience". The accused answered ... "that those things which they all saw and perceived sensibly to be the very deed done ... were nothing else but vain Illusions, Fancies, Dreams and Enchantments, and to be wrought and compassed by the Means of a poor harmless Wretch, that never heard of such great Matters in all his life."³¹⁷

Lanier says redefining the events as illusions placated agitated authorities, allowing the faults of all involved to exist in the realm of theatre, and that –

the Prisoner's extraordinary deconstructive analysis ... leads almost inexorably to one conclusion: the trial serves only as an obvious case of ceremonial scapegoating ... designed to draw attention away from [administrative faults].³¹⁸

³¹⁶ "The 'Gesta Grayorium' Account [at Gray's Inn, 1594]," in *The Comedy of Errors : Critical Essays*, ed. Robert S. Miola (New York: Garland, 1997).

³¹⁷ Lanier, "Stigmatical in Making," 323.

³¹⁸ Lanier, "Stigmatical in Making," 323.

He calls the trial an “almost supernaturally efficacious art of managed display, here capable of purging a public stigma”.³¹⁹ Though recognising elements of purgation and sacrifice however, his analysis remains in the theatrical domain. Girard’s insight into the function of myth allows a wider view, showing scapegoating has a general pattern: “all cultural dramas ... are always the same essential drama” –

Collective violence [is channelled] against one arbitrarily chosen member of the community [so] this victim becomes the common enemy of the entire community, which is reconciled as a result.³²⁰

With this perspective, the “Night of Errors” narrative can be seen to match the scapegoating structure of myth that Girard proposes, with community peace gained at the expense of a mock ‘Prisoner’, a “poor harmless Wretch” –

The Unkindness that was growing betwixt the *Templarians* and us ... was now clean rooted out and forgotten, and that we now were more firm Friends, and kind Lovers, than ever before we had been.³²¹

Egeon is one of several seemingly incidental roles emphasising the arbitrary nature of mob or political violence in Shakespeare. A ‘Clown’ in *Titus*, caught in, “political enmities of which he is ignorant”, is heedlessly killed.³²² A messenger in *Antony and Cleopatra* is struck and threatened at knifepoint.³²³ Innocent poet Cinna is slaughtered by a mob in *Julius Caesar*. The latter scene usefully demonstrates Girard-esque principles at work in Shakespeare’s drama.

³¹⁹ Lanier, “Stigmatical in Making,” 325.

³²⁰ Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 118.

³²¹ “Gesta Grayorium.” Quoted by Lanier, “Stigmatical in Making,” 325.

³²² Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 55-56.

³²³ Shakespeare, *New Oxford Shakespeare*, 2.5.

For Foakes, this short scene shows “remarkable anticipation of modern interpretations of the psychology of crowds. In thirty-eight lines Shakespeare dramatizes the critical moment when a bunch of citizens becomes a mob”.³²⁴ The rampaging crowd demands Cinna’s name. Though he protests he is “Cinna the poet” not “Cinna the conspirator” (27,30), they tear him apart.³²⁵ Girard sees this brief scene caricaturing, so accenting, the senseless violence of the wider civic coup,³²⁶ and its language does verge on humorous – “tear him for his bad verses!” (28). Yet the dynamics match Girard’s description of the point when mimetic violence overrides individual morality in a mob lynching, and social contracts such as names become moot, as an actual killing takes place:

The moment of supreme crisis ... when pure revenge is working at all levels ... [the mob] can least give up violence, because they are angry, and their fury gets the better of them. At this ... moment of supreme rage ... when you are out of your mind, ecstatic in the way of violence – there is no scope, no possibility for social contracts.³²⁷

Foakes notes the scene, depicting uncontrolled, random group murder, was often cut from productions wanting to, “enhance the stature of Brutus”.³²⁸ This would collapse the realistically messy murder of Caesar Shakespeare presents into a neater trajectory from bloody sacrifice to renewed empire, delivering a better match for mythic structure. Its brevity then, belies its potency as a disruptor of neat moral conclusions. This concise cartoon encapsulates the central issues of human violence, as does *Errors’* tightly written frame.

³²⁴ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 163.

³²⁵ Shakespeare, *New Oxford Shakespeare. Julius Caesar*, 3.3.1-35.

³²⁶ Girard, *Theatre of Envy*, 205.

³²⁷ Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 89.

³²⁸ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 163.

Conclusion

This chapter presented evidence supporting the idea that Shakespeare applied Girardian-like principles in his drama. Text analysis showed opening violence in *Errors*, as with other plays in the oeuvre, indicates its key issues. In this case, its war was shown to question the sacrifice of lives for peace and present a dichotomy between retributive justice and Christian mercy. Analysis showed the war is driven by reciprocal animosity, just as *Errors*' micro violence is, demonstrating that Shakespeare presents the rivalrous mechanics of civic and domestic violence as analogous. He also depicts these arenas of violence as cross-contaminating, with small irritations leading to larger conflagrations, and feuds and wars influencing family arguments. This again aligns the play with Girard's cross-scale model.

Egeon was proposed as a Christ-like victim, and one of several minor roles in Shakespeare spotlighting arbitrary political violence. Shakespeare's interest in this scapegoat role was examined to show his milieu, with its bloody executions and sacrificial sports parsed via an intense Christian consciousness, would have fostered empirical understanding of sacrificial dynamics. Beyond spontaneous mob victimisation, Shakespeare had opportunity to study deliberate social manipulation via scapegoating, at Gray's Inn or in Philostratus' account of the 'miracle of Ephesus', which has clear resonances with *Errors*. Skura's evidence of Shakespeare's use of the victim motif throughout his work, supported Girard's view that Shakespeare theorised

around sacrificial violence.³²⁹ Girard's view of Christianity as centering on the rejection of scapegoating provided a way to reconcile Shakespeare's seemingly contradictory Christian referencing. An episode of mob violence in *Julius Caesar* revealed Shakespeare's sharp awareness of how mimetic amorality pushes crowds to atrocity, strengthening the idea that runaway negative mimesis motivates both micro and macro violence in Shakespeare.



Figure 6. The stoning scene from *Life of Brian*.³³⁰

³²⁹ Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 205.

³³⁰ Terry Jones, dir., "Life of Brian." (London: Handmade Films, 1979), DVD.

Chapter 4

Cathartic violence



Figure 7. Brian Mani as Egeon in the American Players Theatre 2016 production.³³¹

³³¹ Photograph by Liz Lauren, "Egeon, meanwhile, doesn't understand why his son and Dromio don't recognize him...", <https://americanplayers.org/assets/documents/2016-COE-Study-Guide.pdf>

The previous chapter discussed *Errors'* opening scene and the dichotomy between retributive justice and conscience-led mercy presented there. It looked past critical focus on the mechanical scene setting and tension building functions of the play's opening, to discover depth of characterisation and symbolisation in the subtext of Egeon and Solinus' brief dialogue. It scanned Shakespeare's broad cultural environment to evoke a sense of that culture's orientation to sacrificial violence. This showed Elizabethan England to be far more intensely aware of both the sublime and Satanic realities of sacrificial victimisation than present-day western culture.

To complete this look at the dramatic frame Shakespeare added to Plautus' plot, this final chapter examines the play's closing scene. In that, Shakespeare gathers his players together outside the Abbey, allowing their accusatory complaints and melodramatic accounts to collide and build to a crescendo of mystified apprehension, until the Abbess brings the two sets of twins together. At this, a silence falls on the angry crowd, who begin to piece together shared delusions and incomplete histories. The chapter first assesses the culpability of *Errors'* protagonists for this community argument. It finds Christian precepts again lie behind the scene's dramaturgy, suggesting Girardian aspects of Shakespeare's drama rise from a shared access to and appreciation of the Bible. The chapter then considers how Shakespeare achieves a highly moving cathartic effect at the play's end, proposing he leverages an expectation of violence against a sudden deflation of that, which is experienced as reprieve.

Skura's evidence of certain repeating dynamics in Shakespeare's drama then allows a review of key Girardian dynamics discussed in the thesis. In lieu of any actual sacrifice in *Errors*, Skura's evidence of theatre as sacrificial serves to illustrate the violent dynamics *Errors* carefully circumvents with its twin reveal. It also instantiates Girard's proposals about sacrificial dynamics generally.

Culpability

By the final scene of *The Comedy of Errors*, Shakespeare has orchestrated a situation where everyone, yet no one person, is accountable for the town's confusion. In this, it illustrates Girard's idea that in the context of mob violence, "the very notion of a culprit is absurd",³³² and aligns with Christian notions of the innocence of the victim and ignorance of the crowd. Strong arguments for and against all *Errors'* players can be found in critical analysis, this lack of agreement supporting the idea that blame, in *Errors*, is not easily assigned.

It has been argued Adriana and Luciana contribute to the town's troubles, but so do others, by subtle compliance or loud protest. Antipholus of Syracuse acquiesces to a lunch invitation clearly intended for another, and propositions the sister of the hostess – his said wife. He pockets gold given him in error, and aims to abscond with it. His foreign status and suggestibility give him some leeway here, but not so he can be seen as wholly innocent. The Abbess

³³² Girard, *Theatre of Envy*, 207.

seems above fault – she resists the mob’s mimetic sway, refusing to condemn Antipholus on Adriana’s frantic say-so, instead incisively questioning the situation. However, Weinberg notes how she catches Adriana out – “pretends to agree”, giving “false encouragement”.³³³ And Egeon twice points to her, as Emelia, as causing the play’s founding disaster. She prompts the fateful voyage wanting to show her sons to family:

My wife, not meanly proud of two such boys,
Made daily motions for our home return.
Unwilling, I agreed. Alas, too soon we came aboard! (1.1.58-60)

Her tears delay prompt abandonment of the ship:

Yet the incessant weepings of my wife,
Weeping before for what she saw must come, ...
Forced me to seek delays for them and me;
And this it was, for other means was none:
The sailors sought for safety by our boat,
And left the ship, then sinking ripe, to us (1.1.69-76).

Yet in hinting at her culpability, the otherwise innocent Egeon himself betrays something of the accusatory tension plaguing the play’s central marriage.

Wholly guilty parties are also hard to find. While Adriana’s faults have been enumerated, her frustration is understandable: Antipholus *is* undeniably late for lunch. In Elizabethan times, lunch was, “the central and most elaborate meal of the day”, and challenging for wives to prepare and host.³³⁴ Brooks says, “balked or broken feasts ... are recurrent symbols in Shakespeare of the

³³³ Weinberg, "Helpless Patience," 8.

³³⁴ Candido, "Dining out in Ephesus," 206.

breakdown of human fellowship and its pieties".³³⁵ The sisters transgress many social rules by entertaining Syracusan Antipholus and debarring the true head of their household, but they do so unknowingly. The 'exchanged husbands' scenario is in fact ideal for showcasing characters simultaneously innocent and guilty, semi-innocents who, "know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).³³⁶ Hage says this biblical precept, expressed by Jesus as the mob calls for his execution, arises throughout Shakespeare in the context of mob violence.³³⁷

Equally, there is no clear verdict of villainy for Antipholus. We repeatedly hear he is buying a bespoke gold love token for Adriana. Angelo describes him as, "Of very reverend reputation, sir/Of credit infinite, highly beloved" (5.1.5-8). Even when Adriana reports his demeanour as "heavy, sour, sad", she admits, "But till this afternoon his passion/Ne'er broke into extremity of rage" (5.1.45-48). And his rage is often presented sympathetically, as with the exorcism.³³⁸

Many critics see Antipholus as an adulterer, but the text does not endorse this. Antipholus explicitly says Adriana's accusations are unfounded (3.1.113), and in modifying *Menaechmi*, Brooks shows Shakespeare, "has gone far to exonerate the husband".³³⁹ Unlike brazen philanderer Menaechmus, Antipholus' dealings

³³⁵ Brooks, "Themes and Structure," 86.

³³⁶ All Biblical quotations are from *The Bible : Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha*, ed. Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett, Oxford World's Classics, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

³³⁷ Ralph Hage, interview by author, 18 April 2021.

³³⁸ Levin, "Two Comedies of Errors," 127.

³³⁹ Brooks, "Themes and Structure," 79.

with the Courtesan are businesslike, with no innuendo in evidence. She, also, has a non-romantic, material focus: "Give me the ring of mine you had at dinner/... And I'll be gone, sir, and not trouble you." (4.3.68-70) The Courtesan does not escape her share of blame for the troubles – she initiates the madness accusation. But this is not due to sexual resentment. She goes to Adriana with no shame over illicit affairs or animosity toward 'the wife': "My way is now to hie home to his house/And tell his wife that, being lunatic/He rushed into my house, and took perforce/My ring away" (4.3.80-95). However, while there are no grounds for Antipholus being an overt sinner, he certainly indulges in a behaviour familiar to readers of this thesis – retaliatory hostility. Antipholus declares he will lunch with the Courtesan specifically as retaliation for the lockout, "be it for nothing but to despise my wife" (3.1.119). In Weinberg's words, he is "determined to offend his offender".³⁴⁰

That is, *Errors* confounds attempts to distinguish innocence from guilt, good from bad. Egeon and the Dromios come closest to a sort of innocence, although Egeon's pitiful stance could also be seen as exceedingly clever in the pressure it puts on the compassionate Duke. The Dromios literally amplify the play's violence with loud complaints, and readily label others as mad (2.1.57). But they are not the scheming self-interested servants of *Menaechmi*, and as the unflinching targets of projected anger they also amplify *Errors*' scapegoat theme.

³⁴⁰ Weinberg, "Helpless Patience," 7.

In all, the play is remarkably even-handed, with two factors underpinning this. Its source plot was, unusually for the time, based on chance not intrigue – “there is no plotting or counterplotting in a Machiavellian sense”,³⁴¹ its confusions rise from accidental mistakings of one twin for another, not deceptive substitutions.³⁴² Levin says Shakespeare chose *Menaechmi*:

as the one object of his direct imitation within the sphere of Roman comedy; for it is altogether untypical in its all but complete reliance on chance, and not on contrivance, not mischief.³⁴³

Second, Shakespeare’s adjustments of it take all characters towards innocence.

If Shakespeare consciously grasped mob dynamics and scapegoating in Girardian terms, these choices make sense. A plot which does not condemn anyone is chosen then adjusted so crowd persecution of any one player cannot be justified. This is not impartial,³⁴⁴ amoral or contrary. It creates a classic mimetic crisis, which can “only be regarded as the responsibility of all citizens, or of none at all”.³⁴⁵ Positioned to reflect on victimisation for Holy Innocent’s Day, Shakespeare’s very human characters encounter only trivial interpersonal irritations, yet are nevertheless drawn into escalating civic agitation and a charged search for someone to blame it on. In this they deliver a caution to all viewers, not only the clearly wicked.

³⁴¹ Levin, "Two Comedies of Errors," 120.

³⁴² Kinney, "Nature of Kinds," 159.

³⁴³ Levin, "Two Comedies of Errors," 120.

³⁴⁴ Girard, *Theatre of Envy*, 198.

³⁴⁵ Girard, *Theatre of Envy*, 207.

Shakespeare then, leads the action to a concise evocation of Christ's revelation of the truth of human violence. Partisan anger is collapsed by the disclosure that everyone was misguided, no one person caused the strife, and the persecutors were behaving violently. Shakespeare does not oppose good with evil, innocent with guilty, but insists all are human. If he presents a moral, it hinges on behaviour under pressure. Blame and retaliation are contrasted with inquiry and forbearance, such as the Abbess, Egeon and the cautious Duke demonstrate. Sadly, as Girard says, "the prevailing mood is not one of self examination but of mutual recrimination and scapegoating".³⁴⁶

This conception of what Shakespeare engineers in *Errors* agrees with Girard's reading of the biblical idea of 'Satan'. Girard sees Satan as the interindividual and collective effects of mimetic violence.³⁴⁷ In this sense, Satan does not exist – in anyone, or in and of himself. He 'lives' in behaviours that create, drive, then violently resolve mimetic crisis. Hence the hypocrisy and absurdity of Pinch commanding Satan to leave Antipholus while binding and persecuting him. 'Satan', in the original Hebrew means among other things, 'the accuser', particularly an accuser of someone innocent.³⁴⁸ Girard says Satan is the, "accusation [of a victim] that bursts forth" from a crowd, who believe

³⁴⁶ Girard, "Comedies of Errors," 76.

³⁴⁷ Girard, *I See Satan*, 32-46 and throughout. 'Interindividual' is defined in Oughourlian, *Mimetic Brain*, xvii-xxiii, 33-38.

³⁴⁸ Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 141.

passionately in the victim's guilt as they violently attack.³⁴⁹ An official civic execution, such as Egeon's, may also effect peace in an angry crowd, as Pilate finds with Jesus' crucifixion:

The torture of a victim transforms the dangerous crowd into a public ... as captivated by the bloody spectacle as our contemporaries are by the horrors of Hollywood. When the spectators are satiated with that violence that Aristotle calls 'cathartic' ... they all return peaceably to their homes to sleep the sleep of the just.³⁵⁰

As *Errors'* players gather near the gallows, each accusing the other, Shakespeare presents a choice Girard articulates:

Either we succumb to the contagion of the mimetic snowballing effect and fall into the lie of victimisation, with mythology, or we resist this contagion and rise into the truth of the innocent victim, with the Bible.³⁵¹

Catharsis reconfigured

In *Errors'* final scene, Shakespeare mobilises key Girardian dynamics towards an emblematic finale aligned with Girard's reading of Christian purpose. Adriana and Antipholus appear as rivalrous twins, with adversarial attitudes but matched speeches. Accusation abounds, with many lines impelling a pointing finger. Conflict centres on the lies each thinks others tell, though these simply reflect differing experiences. As accounts clash, people see others as crazy, the dialogue peppered with insinuations of madness³⁵² till the Duke concludes, "you are all mated, or stark mad" (281). The misleading melodrama of the

³⁴⁹ Girard, *I See Satan*, 35.

³⁵⁰ Girard, *I See Satan*, 37. Also Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 131.

³⁵¹ Girard, *I See Satan*, 114.

³⁵² 5.1.33, 42, 70, 76, 84, 86, 96, 139, 141, 150, 152, 189, 213, 217, 245, 272, 280, 330.

supernatural is regularly invoked. In all this, Egeon returns, a reminder of Christ, sadder than ever and closer to execution. Adriana and Antipholus plead for Justice, but Mercy begs to be heard. Finally, this mystifying unreality is dispelled as the twins come to light. This physical reality undercuts the occult direction the situation is taking, literally de-mystifying it. Yet the play's ending deeply affects players and viewers, and critics describe it in mystical terms.³⁵³

Adriana and Antipholus have the longest speeches in the scene, with these neatly paired, presenting another vignette of mimetic rivalry. The two posture as outraged opponents, but express precisely the same sentiment: I – sane and saintly – have been horribly wronged by others – mad and malicious. Both start by addressing the Duke, their deferential manner strained, as both point out *he* instigated their troublesome marriage:

ADRIANA: May it please your grace, Antipholus my husband,
 Who I made lord of me and all I had
 At your important letters ... (5.1.136-38)

ANTIPHOLUS: Justice, sweet prince, against that woman there,
 She whom thou gavest to me to be my wife (5.1.197-98).

Adriana upsells Antipholus' "outrageous" (139), "desperate" (140) exploits, emphasising '*he* did this, *he* did that', the repeating pronoun indicating oppositional distance, where using his name might show marital alliance. Antipholus recounts her "shameless" (202), "vile" (236) "abuses" (199), declaring "strength and height of injury/Beyond imagination" (200-01), repeatedly noting

³⁵³ E.g., Grennan, "Arm and Sleeve," 162.

what 'she' did to him. It is irresistibly hilarious – they 'he' and 'she' like children caught fighting. Both end by petitioning the Duke – Adriana demands he seize Antipholus so she can 'help' him (159-60); Antipholus claims "satisfaction/ For these deep shames and great indignities" (252-53).

The crux of the trouble is again presented as accusation, aligning with Girard's interpretation of Satan as instantiated in problematic behaviours associated with rivalry.³⁵⁴ Antipholus in particular uses 'pointing' pronouns. In setting out his day, he indicts those around him: "that woman there" (197), "this woman locked me out" (218), "that gentleman" (226), "that goldsmith there" (219), "there did this perjured goldsmith swear me down" (227). This accusatory feel emerges strongly in performance, as Antipholus levels his finger and glares at individuals in the mob, refusing to play the bear. The scene also revives the struggle between justice and mercy, as the spouses demand: "Justice, most sacred Duke, against the Abbess!" (Adr. 133); "Justice, most gracious Duke, O grant me justice" (Ant. 190).

As the Duke attempts to resolve the mob's issues, Shakespeare again allegorises Christ's observation: "they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).³⁵⁵ Having ensured his players are neither innocent nor guilty, he now showcases how they are also neither right nor wrong in their view of the day. They all

³⁵⁴ Girard, *I See Satan*, 32-46 and throughout.

³⁵⁵ *King James Bible*, 111.

report events correctly, but as all were deceived, these truths are all honestly denied. Even Adriana and Antipholus are truthful, when they both use the same phrase: "this is false [he] burdens me withal" (209,266). Yet in this very human context of misconstruction and innocent mistake, mimetic accusation and defensiveness still create antagonism, as everyone stands by their own interpretation. The scene's opening encapsulates this, with Syracusan Antipholus denying he denied something. This denial of denial is both ridiculous and true, yet leads to drawn swords:

ANTIPHOLUS(S): Who heard me to deny or forswear it?

2ND MERCHANT: These ears of mine, thou knowest, did hear thee.
Fie on thee wretch! 'Tis pity that thou liv'st
To walk where any honest men resort.

ANTIPHOLUS(S): Thou art a villain to impeach me thus.
I'll prove mine honour and mine honesty
Against thee presently, if thou dar'st stand.

2ND MERCHANT: I dare, and do defy thee for a villain (5.1.13-32).

This illustrates how scapegoating arises in confusing or difficult situations, as people seek explanations.³⁵⁶ Taking their own viewpoint and behaviour as correct, each uses other's apparent errors or faults to account for anomalies. As everyone does this, mutually accusatory stances spark hostility, and other-focused blame is carried through to accusation of a scapegoat. In this way, victimisation can occur even if no one intends it. In a sense, all involved are innocent: the scapegoat innocent of causing the chaos; the lynchers unaware

³⁵⁶ Girard, *To Double Business*, Chapter 9 and 188, 48-51, 91-92, 211. Also Girard, *I See Satan*, 146-47.

their accusation is faulty. In Girard's words: "the ones who do the lynchings truly believe their scapegoats are guilty and therefore deserve to die. It is a lie, although they aren't aware of its content".³⁵⁷

The fallacy of the victim's guilt is sustained in scapegoating crises when the victim's demise *does* appear to resolve the chaos, and the enormity of what the group has done makes them more invested in this explanation. Girard shows this shared misconception obscures mythic texts, which are composed by the lynchers, so carry the lie forward through time, stabilising community perceptions around the events. Myths often effect this by using supernatural elements to account for the unacknowledged truth.³⁵⁸ This complicates the analysis of mythic texts because: "everybody is lying and no one is aware of it".³⁵⁹ In its final scene then, *Errors* again delivers a notably precise dramatisation of Girard's insights, mediated by a central Christian precept.

The long unrecognised obfuscation of scapegoating is, for Girard, the key distinction between pagan and Christian religion: the former perpetuates it, while the latter deliberately reveals the mechanics of scapegoating.³⁶⁰ Christianity dispenses with supernatural justification for victimisation, instead seeing divinity in its revelation. *Errors* indicates Shakespeare also takes this

³⁵⁷ Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 131.

³⁵⁸ Girard, *To Double Business*, Chapter 9 and 188, 48-51, 91-92, 211.

³⁵⁹ Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 131. Also Girard, *I See Satan*, 146-47. Also Girard, *To Double Business*, 191.

³⁶⁰ Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 61-62.

perspective, in its consistent rejection of pagan retribution and illumination of scapegoating behaviour. Egeon is an innocent sacrificed to city enmity, retaliation is opposed with Christian mercy, and no one player is inculpated, blocking any justified victimisation. It also consistently debunks superstitious beliefs which Girard says are, "quickly re-activated in times of crisis, when the problems of the community become unmanageable or even undefinable".³⁶¹ Whether the Syracusans' witchcraft paranoia³⁶² or Antipholus' perceived satanic possession, *Errors* shows these to be mistaken, reactive delusions.

The final scene targets supernatural ideation by contrasting it with the Abbess' natural *coup de théâtre*. As conflicting reports mystify all, the paranormal is increasingly called upon. Adriana intimates Antipholus is a demon, "I wot not by what strong escape/He broke from those that had the guard of him" (148-9), then escalates this:

Ay me, it is my husband! Witness you
That he is borne about invisible.
Even now we housed him in the Abbey here,
And now he's there, past thought of human reason (5.1.186-89).

Antipholus vividly recounts the exorcism's conjuring and ghouls, compounding his association with unnatural possession (235-48). Bystanders catch this disease, "I think you are come by miracle" (260); and the Duke sees it, "I think you all have drunk of Circe's cup" (270). He summons the Abbess, whose actions are an

³⁶¹ Girard, *To Double Business*, 192.

³⁶² 2.1.97-105, 3.2.148, 4.3.45-79, 4.4.158

antithesis to this rising demonisation: she dispels all imprecations by unveiling the plain, physical truth of the doubled twins.

This closing of *The Comedy of Errors* is widely spoken about in awed terms. Miola references, "a sense of deep wonder, almost miraculous", that, "astonishes audiences with its strange power and moving reunions".³⁶³ For Levin, the Abbess, "lays the spell of wonderment upon the concluding scene", Shakespeare making viewers aware of, "unpathed waters, undreamed shores, and things in heaven and earth that philosophy has not fathomed".³⁶⁴ Kinney sees, "the piling on of wonders that is the concluding moment".³⁶⁵ While credits roll on Trevor Nunn's filmed performance, the camera picks out weeping audience members, as the lightweight farce comes to, not a rollicking, but a deeply affecting end.³⁶⁶

Despite such reactions however, critics mostly avoid committing to serious Christian profundity.³⁶⁷ Two provide an overview: Richard McCoy, Christian author of *Faith in Shakespeare* (2013),³⁶⁸ and T. G. Bishop, whose *Shakespeare and the theatre of Wonder* (1996) takes a more secular view.³⁶⁹ Both see the

³⁶³ Miola, *Critical Essays*, 20 quoting Tetsuo Anzai and Tim Supple respectively. Also Kinney, "Nature of Kinds."

³⁶⁴ Levin, "Two Comedies of Errors," 130.

³⁶⁵ Kinney, "Nature of Kinds," 175 also 77.

³⁶⁶ Nunn, "Comedy of Errors."

³⁶⁷ McCoy, *Faith in Shakespeare*, names only two, 170 note 46.

³⁶⁸ McCoy, *Faith in Shakespeare*, 28-52.

³⁶⁹ Bishop, *Theatre of Wonder*, 1-16, 63-92.

play references Paul's Ephesians,³⁷⁰ but reject the idea Shakespeare has a centrally Christian purpose or creates authentic religious effect. They see his purpose as purely theatrical and his inspiration is language's evocative power – "how language can deliver the world as a gestated presence to us for naming and recognition".³⁷¹ Here Bishop comments on language and drama as tools more than how Shakespeare deploys them. He says Shakespeare takes from Paul, a "figurative substrate of images and associations in which incarnation is the principal trope for all kinds of unification",³⁷² anachronistically underselling incarnation – the principal Christian, and then cultural, symbol of divinity.

Similarly, McCoy says Shakespeare, "often employs religious language to enhance his play's dramatic impact" but –

despite this religious aura, [the] happy ending is only seemingly providential, the product of a poetic and theatrical design rather than a Godly purpose. The "blessed power" that delivers those who wandered in illusions is a stage trick that is itself another illusion and plot device.³⁷³

This again is self-evident: dramatists use language and staging to create effect. It draws a divide between that effect and "Godly purpose", firmly corralling Shakespeare, and poetry, from religion. McCoy's subtler distinction is between "poetic faith", as per Coleridge, and Christian faith: the latter being more irrevocably held than the temporary "suspension of disbelief" required to

³⁷⁰ McCoy, *Faith in Shakespeare*, e.g., 44. Bishop, *Theatre of Wonder*, 75, 87-92.

³⁷¹ Bishop, *Theatre of Wonder*, 89 also 84-85.

³⁷² Bishop, *Theatre of Wonder*, 87.

³⁷³ A. P. Reimer, *Antic Fables : Patterns of Evasion in Shakespeare's Comedies* (London: Manchester University Press, 1980). Quoted in McCoy, *Faith in Shakespeare*, 49.

engage with theatrical performance.³⁷⁴ However, this fails to acknowledge it is possible to understand a play is not real, while deeply feeling its effects. To deny the possibility theatre can deliver spiritual insight, almost undercuts the point of theatre. To deny theatre can actually be religious, is more complex, but seems to draw a questionable boundary around God's sphere of action. Levin reconciles this unnecessary divide when he says *Errors'* effect, though clever, is, "also disturbing and profound".³⁷⁵

Girard puts *Errors'* catharsis in a new light, seeing scapegoating re-enactment as the basis of ritual, religion and theatre, and these as intimately connected.³⁷⁶ He shows ritualised sacrificial catharsis, with its re-unifying effect, helps communities manage violence.³⁷⁷ Repetition of narrative, and role designation, leads to cultural configuration over time; the victim, associated with a sudden cathartic "abatement of rage", providing a centre of signification in this:

The threshold of culture is related to the scapegoat mechanism, and ... the first known institutions are closely related to its deliberate and planned re-enactment ... a form of 'staging' in the shape of a killing of a surrogate victim had to be set in place.³⁷⁸

In this context, though theatre is removed from ritual and religion by agreed convention, the effects it produces are founded in sacrifice. 'Catharsis'

³⁷⁴ McCoy, *Faith in Shakespeare*, 4, 1-27.

³⁷⁵ Levin, "Two Comedies of Errors."

³⁷⁶ Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 47-51.

³⁷⁷ Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 49.

³⁷⁸ Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 76-77.

especially, derives etymologically from human sacrifice.³⁷⁹ In many cases, this relationship is obvious, especially when a drama designates a clear villain and satisfactorily elucidates their demise. Yet *Errors* makes no final kill. Why then, is it as notably cathartic as it is?

The closing moments of *The Comedy of Errors* are cathartic because they create the conditions of catharsis but replace expected violence with mercy. They make the distinction between unthinking victimisation and open hearted clemency suddenly highly tangible for players and viewers. The players race to the brink of sacrifice, the audience cheering them on. The scene is set for this aggregate crowd to turn against Antipholus. Egeon's plight is also brought centre stage, where he is denied by his own son as the bell tolls. When the Abbess then brings the Syracusans forward, *Errors'* violent possibilities are collapsed, the players' illusions killed instead of a victim. Moreover, when she unexpectedly reveals herself as Emelia, the audience's distance from the action also collapses: "we have thought ourselves superior to the errors and assumptions of the ignorant characters, but we too have been deceived".³⁸⁰ Viewers must confront at once their own fallibility and Egeon's full humanity, as his sad history becomes very present and real. They sense their laughter might have driven the victim – this long lost husband and father – from the cliff. The ending sublimates that laughter, which has all along implicated them

³⁷⁹ Girard, *I See Satan*, 51. Also Girard, *To Double Business*, 153.

³⁸⁰ McCoy, *Faith in Shakespeare*, 48 quoting Russ McDonald.

in the mood of victimisation, to tears of pity and relief, at Egeon's, and their own, narrow escape. While Shakespeare's language and supreme dramatic orchestration *effect* this in many ways – loud slapstick action is replaced by quiet, sober stillness – this staging has purpose. It is underpinned by acute awareness of the potential for sacrificial violence in human nature, and the humanity of its innocent victims.

Girard's idea that Shakespeare understood the mechanics of scapegoating illuminates how this ending could have been conceived. If true, the playwright might have understood catharsis to be founded in the horrified awe felt by a crowd after a communal kill. He may have seen the lynchpin of Christianity as the revelation of this sacrificial aspect of human history. He may have felt this insight to be powerfully affecting, all the more so because of its confronting reality. He may have deliberately replicated Christ's story in these terms, helping audiences feel, simultaneously, horror at the possibility of an innocent's murder, and grace at their unlikely reprieve. He may have wanted to draw viewers' attention to the personal origins of conflict, disrupting their temptation to seek explanations in others' behaviour or supernatural fantasy. Beyond Christianity's metaphysical implications, which are not discounted by this analysis, he may also have understood its grim truth. He might have seen how the sacrificial violence at theatre's core could be recreated, but also transmuted to effect the sacrifice of hostile illusion, his artistry taking him

beyond Girard. And, as attested by critics through time, Shakespeare grasped how language and staging could engineer all this.

Whether this means the play delivers something equivalent to sacramental processes conducted in a consecrated setting is a theological question beyond the scope of this paper. However, critics who see *Errors*' ending as simply creating an illusion of religion miss a key point. In its purely material revelation, *Errors* does not create illusions, it deflates them. It deflates player's illusions of malevolence, and audience's illusions of their own infallibility and farce's superficiality. Lanier approaches the tangibility of this effect when he says Shakespeare, "leaves the characters and the audience in 'ecstasy', a state of standing outside oneself looking at one's own social reality".³⁸¹

It is anachronistic to deny Shakespeare's Christian intention in *Errors*. Kinney details the play's, "consistent (and overt) Christian references", identifying, "a huge number of liturgical connections", and finding Paul's Ephesian letter inspires "*all* parts" of the play.³⁸² He argues for Elizabethans' immediate recognition of and participation in these references.³⁸³ Yet modern sensibilities can shy from this, associating Christianity with the many abuses its history, like all of human history, presents. Atheists can be embarrassed by its metaphysics;

³⁸¹ Lanier, "Stigmatical in Making," 319 quoting Peter L. Berger.

³⁸² Kinney, "Nature of Kinds," 157, 61, 77-78, and throughout.

³⁸³ Kinney, "Nature of Kinds," 164.

Christians worried about Shakespeare's evasion of metaphysics. Everyone is wary of being tricked. Palfrey, says of the moving ending to *The Winter's Tale*, which, like *Errors*, turns mundane fact into profound emotion –

There are hints of Marion iconography, of death redeemed through tears and repentance – but equally of Pygmalion style transgression, or a trick of art, or a mouldy old tale.³⁸⁴

However, as this thesis shows, a Girardian lens has the power to remove some of this discomfort, so both sources of knowledge – Shakespeare and Christianity – can be appreciated from a wider perspective. Kinney pinpoints the core Pauline message he sees *Errors* engaging with:

The enforced segregation of Syracusan and Ephesian ... like the separation of Jews from Gentiles and Christians from Pharisees in the Bible – results from human sin and hostility [and is] healed by *reunion*.³⁸⁵

Errors' warring twin motif, which resolves as the Dromios join hands to exit – the divided two becoming one – is perhaps most resonant in the context of such cultural divides, which are still very much in evidence in today's world.

Broader connections

Having described Girardian patterns operating in *Errors*, some of these are now connected to Skura's broader research on Shakespeare. Skura and Girard both see Shakespeare as centrally interested in sacrifice and identify the same recurring dynamics in his drama. Showing how their observations tally

³⁸⁴ Palfrey and Smith, *Shakespeare's Dead*, 18.

³⁸⁵ Kinney, "Nature of Kinds," 162.

reinforces findings on mimetic desire, victimisation, culpability and communal murder in *Errors* and connects them to Shakespeare more broadly.

Regarding mimetic desire, Skura shows a particular interpersonal progression, from flattery to attack, recurs across Shakespeare's plays as a repeating pattern in his imagery.³⁸⁶ It starts with his, "best-known image cluster",³⁸⁷ that of false friends flattering someone overly sweetly, like lap dogs, and evolves as follows:

The fawning spaniel then turns into a cur, or circle of curs, surrounding a helpless victim and attacking or 'pinching' him; it merges with ... imagery of the hunt.³⁸⁸

This pattern then, is a shift from excess intimacy to victimisation: fawning friends become savage dogs. It again recalls the exorcism where Antipholus is surrounded by the women who instigated it, yet who cloyingly bewail his sorry state – his 'flattering' position at the centre of their attentions is double-edged. This flattery dynamic clearly correlates with mimetic desire: both ideas describe reversal in close relationships. Both Girard's mimetic desire and Shakespeare's flattery describe a dynamic whereby desired objects attract alternately positive then negative attention from those who are mimetically competing for their possession. Skura also connects the flattery/attack sequence with sexual jealousy,³⁸⁹ and shows how it rises from close, 'mirroring' relationships:

³⁸⁶ Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 166-202 and throughout.

³⁸⁷ Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 6., quoting Caroline F. E. Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935). See also 166.

³⁸⁸ Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 6.

³⁸⁹ Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 168.

Flattery and jealousy derive from flaws in an intense relationship where the Other is an adoring object whose function is to serve and mirror one's desires. Flattery signals ... false devotion, while jealousy ... betrayal of devotion, but both begin in totalizing intimacy.³⁹⁰

describing precisely how Girard sees conflictual envy rising from intimacy.

While Skura valuably identifies this flattery/attack pattern, mimetic theory gives it a logic reaching beyond theatre and psychology. Skura relates it to audience/actor dynamics: Shakespeare's "repeated vision of reversals – of display, entrapment, and attack – is bound up with his view of playing";³⁹¹ his, "baited Christs are associated with the performative aspects of flattery and its reversals".³⁹² In Girardian terms however, it articulates the volatility of desire and mob dynamics more broadly, though it may draw on Shakespeare's experiences "performing for an adoring but fickle mob".³⁹³

Skura also notes Shakespeare is often ambiguous about his villains' culpability, as this thesis observes in *Errors*. She elaborates on this in *King Lear*: "the balance of sympathy shifts almost entirely toward the 'guilty' victim, making the audience's moral positions [insecure]".³⁹⁴ Flaherty also notes Shakespeare provocatively focuses on the humanity of his villains, garnering sympathy for characters that audiences expect to revile, referencing sympathetic treatment

³⁹⁰ Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 293, note 10.

³⁹¹ Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 7.

³⁹² Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 210.

³⁹³ Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 7.

³⁹⁴ Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 207.

of Macbeth when he is besieged.³⁹⁵ In *Errors*, Antipholus' behaviour is far from exemplary, yet as Levin says, Shakespeare makes the exorcism, "so very painful", and goes, "far out of his way to substitute the grim-visaged ... Dr Pinch, for the Plautine Medicus".³⁹⁶ Connecting Antipholus, Falstaff and Malvolio, Skura notes their cruel treatment induces compassion despite their foibles, Shakespeare creating "enough sympathy for the performing 'bear' ... to make spectators feel guilty about the blood".³⁹⁷

Considered in Girardian terms, *Errors*' deliberate avoidance of condemnation, and this more general shift from villain to victim in Shakespeare, can be seen to occur specifically in the context of mob attack, when the villain becomes a scapegoat. Girard says no scapegoat is innocent of wrongdoing, but all are innocent of what the mob accuses them of – causing the mob's problems.³⁹⁸ Similarly, when a protagonist is not only made to suffer for their own transgressions, but to take the brunt of collective anger, or blame for general discontent, they become, in Shakespeare's presentation, a baited, scapegoated victim. This indicates Shakespeare consistently refuses to scapegoat.

³⁹⁵ Kate Flaherty, "Shakespeare Plays and Civic Strife: The Julius Caesar Fiasco is Nothing New," *Guardian*, 16 June 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jun/16/shakespeare-plays-and-civic-strife-the-julius-caesar-fiasco-is-nothing-new>. Skura agrees, linking this to bearbaiting – Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 207.

³⁹⁶ Levin, "Two Comedies of Errors," 127.

³⁹⁷ Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 206-07.

³⁹⁸ Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 47, 61.

This underpins the counter-cathartic effect Shakespeare achieves in *Errors*. By showing the potential villains to be innocent, Shakespeare undercuts the cathartic release unconstrained victimisation usually allows. Or, as Girard says, he, "reproduces the cathartic mechanism ... but he underlines it so forcefully that he lays it bare ... forcing us to ask questions that run counter to [its] effect".³⁹⁹ While Macbeth's death should end Scotland's tribal woes, Shakespeare makes us doubt this by displaying the humanity of the villain. Though Antipholus seems to be a demonically possessed adulterer, he is not. This is radically disruptive, as it turns the pointing finger around to reveal the villainy of the victorious mob. *Errors'* players vigorously accuse each other, but are struck dumb when this outward directed energy has no outward release. This inversion is also why Christianity is radical, at least Girard's reading of it:

All archaic religions ... considered the scapegoat to be *guilty* of the ... crisis. By contrast, Christianity, in the figure of Jesus, denounced the scapegoat mechanism for what it actually is: the murder of an innocent victim, killed in order to pacify a riotous community.⁴⁰⁰

Skura's evidence also supports Girard's view of how the final scapegoat murder functions in real life. While her descriptions of actor/audience dynamics aim to show theatre is the key source of Shakespeare's sacrificial references, they also describe human responses in a fundamentally sacrificial setting, illuminating forces at work in real mob lynchings.

³⁹⁹ Girard, *To Double Business*, 153.

⁴⁰⁰ Girard, Antonello, and de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 61. Flaherty and Lamb, "Shakespeare and Riot." and Flaherty, "Civic Strife."

Skura's analysis of performance shows how contagious imitation impels all crowds to move toward unanimous victimisation, when a single stage actor, "provides a focus which creates a unified response".⁴⁰¹ This suggests victimisation is triggered when a crowd sees one figure as separate, as happened in the miracle of Ephesus and *Errors'* exorcism. Skura references crowd studies which show this effect is intensified when ambivalent emotions are involved: "behaviour is most contagious when people have two opposing impulses both directed at a central figure",⁴⁰² which accords with Girard's idea that victimisation arises from volatile mimetic impulses. Skura shows the circular configuration of theatres like The Globe intensifies this – "the audience becomes something else – a crowd, even a mob or a pack ... its responses magnified and multiplied".⁴⁰³ This architectural configuration in fact re-creates primordial events where mimetic crowds surround a real victim:

Every spectator has a thousand [faces] in front of him ... Whatever excites him, excites them ... There is no break in the crowd which sits like this ... It forms a closed ring from which nothing can escape.⁴⁰⁴

The communal murder itself is described when Skura shows the audience draws on, "passionate identifications and aversions, as the spectators project their own best or worst impulses onto the lightning rod of the actor's body".⁴⁰⁵

This projection takes over, as in a real lynching: "once aroused, the fury of a

⁴⁰¹ Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 27.

⁴⁰² Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 27.

⁴⁰³ Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 27.

⁴⁰⁴ Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, trans. Carol Stewart (New York: Viking Press, 1962). Quoted in Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 227.

⁴⁰⁵ Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 27.

'baiting crowd' ... is fuelled by hatred for all they have made their victim symbolize".⁴⁰⁶ The theatre crowd she describes, is as volatile as a real lynch mob: "this mob soul ... is always an unknown quantity,⁴⁰⁷ and as intensely identified with the actor/victim: "even as they attack they identify with the prey".⁴⁰⁸ This describes why purging a victim is so cathartic – the crowd projects their problems onto, yet also identifies with the victim as they, and the problems, die. It aligns with Girard's view of the unique human capacity for empathetic identification – via mimesis.⁴⁰⁹

Skura also indirectly substantiates Girard's claim that real scapegoating crises are ritualised and victims deified, and that this is the basis of religion and all cultural structures, when she shows how actors experience their role:

An actor practices a calling that sets him apart from the rest of us, formally estranging him in order that, in the fashion of priests and judges, he can serve as our chosen surrogate.⁴¹⁰

When the actor embodies our projected 'ego ideal' ... he becomes more than human and the crowd adores him. He is a kind of god, a totem, or at least a seer or divine spokesman.⁴¹¹

Her quote from theatre theoretician David Cole summarises this Girardian vision: "theatre is a manifestation of the place where the original events are always happening and the original figures are always to be found".⁴¹²

⁴⁰⁶ Canetti, *Crowds and Power*. Quoted in Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 28.

⁴⁰⁷ Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 13.

⁴⁰⁸ Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 28. referencing Canetti, *Crowds and Power*.

⁴⁰⁹ Oughourlian, *Mimetic Brain*.

⁴¹⁰ Edith Oliver, "Up From Stratford," *The New Yorker* (30 January 1984). Quoted by Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 27.

⁴¹¹ Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (n.p.: n.p.). Quoted by Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 27.

⁴¹² Natalie Crohn Schmitt, review of "The Theatrical Event : A Mythos, a Vocabulary, a Perspective" by David Cole, *Comparative Drama* 10, no. 2 (1976): 172, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cdr.1976.0000>., referencing Jackson G. Barry, review of

Conclusion

This chapter examined the final scene of *The Comedy of Errors* to enumerate the Girardian themes operating in it (5.1). It showed *Errors* delivers a Girardian perspective on innocence, carefully controlling accountability across its protagonists to undercut victimisation. This also dramatises Christian views on the innocence of the victim, as scapegoat, and of the perpetrators, as unaware of their misguided victimisation. Adriana and Antipholus were shown to be positioned as mimetic rivals, and accusation highlighted as a key problematic behaviour, aligning the play with Girard's reading of Satan as a behavioural force that generates victimisation. The scene illustrated Girard's view that superstitious intimations are associated with mimetic crisis. His view of Christianity as rejecting misleading mythification of scapegoating showed how Shakespeare's perspective could be both anti-supernatural and pro-Christian.

The play's moving ending was examined and shown to have a cathartic structure, but to replace victimisation with revelation of truth. This confronts players and audiences with their potential for violence, yet effects an unexpected reprieve from it, evoking surprise, relief and compassion, as the humanity of potential victims is grasped. It was proposed the social divisions embodied in the play's twin motif find their antithesis in Pauline exhortations to, "keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3).

"The Theatrical Event : A Mythos, a Vocabulary, a Perspective" by David Cole, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 35, Autumn, no. 1 (1976).

Skura's evidence was then connected to key aspects of Girard's theory discussed in this thesis in respect of *Errors*, to show those patterns operate more broadly in Shakespeare. Shakespeare's flattery was associated with mimetic desire, and his sympathetic treatment of villains with Girard's scapegoating. Skura's reports from, "actors, theatre people, theoreticians, and psychologists",⁴¹³ on the charged exchange between actors and audiences were cross-referenced with Girard's model, delivering tangible insight, not only into the ritual nature of theatre, as Skura intended and Girard claims, but into real mob dynamics.

⁴¹³ Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 9.

Conclusion



Figure 8. The Abbess emerges from the Abbey.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹⁴ Engraving by C. G. Playter after John Francis Rigaud, "A Comedy of Errors, Act V, Scene 1", in John and Josiah Boydell, *Graphic Illustrations of the Dramatic Works of Shakespeare* (London: Boydell & Co., 1802).

The general conclusion emerging from this thesis should by now be clear. Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* tracks René Girard's mimetic cycle, though it diverges from scapegoating to offer a Christian alternative aligned with Girard's reading of the Bible. Girard summarises three recurring elements in myth: "(1) intimations of a social crisis, (2) the attribution of something like the 'evil eye' to some individual, and (3) the collective murder of that individual".⁴¹⁵ *Errors* realises the first two, but deliberately rejects the third phase of this mythic structure, instead revealing the falsity of victimisation, as Christ does. As well as its narrative structure, Girard's model illuminates many other aspects of *Errors* – its interpersonal motivations, contrasting tones and antagonistic arguments, emblematic tableaux, confusing reversals and contradictions. Above all, it links the play's emphatic twin motif to the mimetic violence signalled by twins and warring brothers in myth. This motif, of undifferentiation created by mindless rivalry, manifests in both the play's domestic and civic spheres, again aligning it with Girard's cross-scale model.

The thesis moves beyond critical analysis of *Errors*, and Girard's own analysis of it, producing fresh insights into the play. Not distracted by *Errors*' identity mistakes and frenetic action, the thesis interrogates its social relations, showing that, though mistakes catalyse confusions, behaviours generate conflicts. Arguments don't rise from identity loss, identity is lost when tempers

⁴¹⁵ Girard, *To Double Business*, 187.

are lost. Polarised stances figure the inflammatory potential of mimetic opposition more than moral certitudes. Language does not only express subjectivity and play on motifs, it enacts behaviours that create social upheaval. Intentional reciprocal hostility, expressed in mirrored antagonistic dialogue, escalates conflict and homogenises its participants. At the play's end, people don't find themselves as much as withdraw their hostility.

Validating these insights, the thesis finds *Errors'* Girardian features link it to Shakespeare's more violent plays. Its ubiquitous off-hand beatings are a precursor to extreme violence in darker plays such as *King Lear*. Its mimetic relationships recall other 'twinned lamb' relationships plagued by the jealous imaginings that are the flipside of mimetic bonding – *Othello*, *The Winter's Tale*. Its opening inter-city conflict parallels unresolving rivalrous feuds and wars that cause the death of innocents in tragedies like *Romeo and Juliet*. Solinus' almost humorous reluctance to kill Egeon nevertheless has resonances with Hamlet's famous delay of violent revenge. By focusing on Girardian structures then, the thesis connects Shakespeare's lightest comedy to core aspects of many of his serious plays.

This interconnection positions *Errors* as a potential prototype for later plays, especially with regard to jealous behaviour patterns and miraculous feeling denouements. Underscoring this possibility is *Errors'* concise classical structure, which supports the succinct sketching out of a particular set of social

dynamics. Indeed, this thesis repeatedly finds *Errors* to deliver precise distillations of Girardian social dynamics. Critics remark on the play's purposeful structural compression – it is, “a sort of dramatic diagram, an essay in the pure mathematics of the situation”.⁴¹⁶ Girard says *Errors* makes Shakespeare's dramatic process, “visible in its simplest outline”.⁴¹⁷ Its farcical format also supports didactic clarity by inherently generalising and repeating social patterns: comedy reveals, “patterns of behaviour are predictable”,⁴¹⁸ so “pattern is much more visible in the comic than in the tragic”.⁴¹⁹ With its focus on domestic mundanity, Levin describes the premise this thesis finds operating in *Errors*: “here we are dealing not with extremes but with norms, not with unique individuals but with typical cases”.⁴²⁰ *Errors'* format then, supports the idea the play rehearses certain interpersonal dynamics that in later plays take centre stage, perhaps using female characters and comedy to obscure these.

The thesis draws an alignment between Shakespeare and Girard's capacity for dramatising, or modelling, linked social effects across multiple levels of social organisation. It argued Girard's model, which shows that the single principle of mimesis generates multiple varied effects, furnishes a cohesive but flexible tool for connecting seemingly divergent themes in Shakespeare. The thesis points

⁴¹⁶ Miola, *Critical Essays*, 29. Quoting W. Archer, *The Theatrical World of 1895* (London, 1896). Also Levin, “Two Comedies of Errors,” 113. Also Brooks, “Themes and Structure,” 71, 77. Also Miola, *Critical Essays*, 30.

⁴¹⁷ Girard, “Comedies of Errors,” 75.

⁴¹⁸ Levin, “Two Comedies of Errors,” 114.

⁴¹⁹ Girard, “Perilous Balance,” 819.

⁴²⁰ Levin, “Two Comedies of Errors,” 114.

particularly to a central structure of rivalry Shakespeare elucidates in both intimate domestic, and larger political contexts in *Errors*, and shows he dramatises a continuum and cross-contamination between these arenas. The thesis explains the variability of both character and morality in the play by following Girard's suggestion that personalities are not fixed. Rather, behaviours are inter-reactive, with both positive and negative aspects of relational mimesis driving people's actions. Moral allegiances, are similarly relationally reactive. Individuals are not inherently good or evil, but a wavering combination of varied mimetic impulses. Where such motile phenomena in Shakespeare has been seen as reflecting ironic ambivalence, or as part of a theatrical language game that experiments with ambiguities, dualities and paradox, this thesis suggests Girard's theory could give them a relational logic.

Reinforcing the value of Girard's frame in reading *Errors'* ambiguities, the thesis found that, rather than promoting moral stances, Shakespeare suggests replacing the escalation of moral outrage with de-escalation. In Girardian terms, if Shakespeare cautions against anything, he cautions against social contagion, advocating non-participation in the driving force of mimetic violence. He is therefore an enigma to anyone trying to determine his politics –

Political questions are all of the same differential type: which party does Shakespeare favour in the civil war, the republicans or the monarchists? Which leader does he like best, Caesar or Brutus? Which social class does he esteem and which despise, the aristocrats or the commoners? There is no answer to all these questions. Shakespeare, I believe, feels

human sympathy for all his characters and antipathy for the mimetic process that turns them all into equivalent doubles.⁴²¹

This thesis then, contributes to both Shakespearean and Girardian scholarship, by delivering a range of new insights into *The Comedy of Errors*. It departs from the broad thrust of critical analysis to demonstrate the play has significance beyond its skilful dramaturgy, and depth beyond showing that chaos reigns when social meaning is disrupted. As the thesis deliberately pursues pattern in social relations, it shows the relational dynamics and volatile moods associated with Adriana's jealousy parallel those exhibited by Shakespeare's tragically jealous heroes. This potentially opens both *Errors* and Shakespeare's treatment of jealousy to new enquiry, allowing those protagonists to be evaluated in light of mimetic desire. It also suggests Shakespeare conceived human relations as configuring around such universal behavioural principles more than gender, class or culture. In keeping with Girard's exhortation that, "we should try to recover some major intuitions of [Shakespeare's] that obviously escape us",⁴²² the thesis extends Girard's analysis of *Errors*, identifying and elaborating a richer awareness of mimetic rivalry and Christian truths in the play. Finally, the thesis proposes a possible new source for the play in Philostratus' account of the miracle of Ephesus.

⁴²¹ Girard, *Theatre of Envy*, 197.

⁴²² Girard, *To Double Business*, 153.

Looking beyond *The Comedy of Errors*, the thesis paves the way for more Girardian analyses of Shakespeare, providing a model or a basis for divergence. It reinforces Shakespeare's immense insight into human relations and his Christian sensibility. Links made between his plays helps validate those views that see a foundational sociological conception operating across the plays. The thesis extensively cross-references Girardian analyses with established Shakespearean scholarship on *Errors*, helping to build a bridge between Girardian and Shakespearean fields of research.

Two Shakespearean scholars in particular are used in the thesis to benchmark its Girardian analyses of *Errors*. R. A. Foakes' review of violence in Shakespeare allows ready cross-classification with his most violent plays. While Foakes elucidates various motifs Shakespeare associates with violence, this thesis consolidates those as patterns. Though he repeatedly discusses vengeful envy between close associates⁴²³ as linked to Cain and Abel⁴²⁴ and to severe or state violence,⁴²⁵ the thesis makes the connection between these clearer via Girard's model.⁴²⁶ Foakes' less global approach finds minor violence as discontinuous with extreme violence, leaving the latter as unintelligible, unmotivated,

⁴²³ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 16, 25-27, 52, 74, 109, 11, 13, 14-15, 19-20, 23-25, 28-30, 37, 41, 48, 76.

⁴²⁴ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 9, 15-16, 18, 25-27, 39, 40, 43, 52-53, 71, 74, 109, 11, 13-15, 19-20, 23-25, 28-31, 37, 41, 47-48, 55, 76, 95.

⁴²⁵ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 147-48, 65. Further examples of mythic 'twins' or warring brothers Girard, *Theatre of Envy*, 274.

⁴²⁶ Foakes briefly references Girard's *Violence & the Sacred*, but not *A Theatre of Envy* - his book on Shakespeare.

springing from undefined primitive instinct.⁴²⁷ Revenge is seen as inadequate to explain Shakespeare's extremes – it is: "always reactive, secondary, a response to some previous deed, and the most powerful tragedies develop from ... some originating or primal act of violence".⁴²⁸ This thesis suggests accumulated minor vengeful exchange does in fact lead to the horrific acts Foakes examines. Where Foakes relegates severe violence to a reptilian unconscious, this thesis shows it extending from trivial, envious jostlings among associates in tight communities. By only probing plays with radical violence, Foakes misses these preliminaries, articulated so well in comedies like *Errors*. He nevertheless validates Girard in summarising Shakespeare's views of violence: "civilisation, it might seem, begins in violence, and its conflicts continually have to be resolved by further violence".⁴²⁹

The thesis places Meredith Skura's in-depth descriptions of Shakespeare's theatre within Girard's anthropological model, validating both analysts' research by revealing their alignment. Combining Skura's observations with Girard's theoretical model delivers new insights, particularly into how particular social situations progress in *Errors* from one state to another: how flattery/desire turns into victimisation; how villains become victims; how crowds might come to violently kill a scapegoat.

⁴²⁷ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 8, 9, 57, 61, 73, 74, 77, 79, 113, 26, 30, 46, 92.

⁴²⁸ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 130. Also 113.

⁴²⁹ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 22-27.

While Skura and Girard reach similar conclusions, their framing differs. Skura positions actors as – “made to serve symbolic functions in the discourse of the majority”.⁴³⁰ Though she applies a postmodern frame, this supports Girard’s proposition that theatre is an outgrowth of ritually re-enacted scapegoating, which required an ‘actor’ to represent the victim – to serve a symbolic function in a more primal sense. In a Girardian context, Skura’s “majority”, rather than a problematic privileged group, becomes any group of humans using scapegoating to confirm their unity. The situation becomes far more universal.

In pursuing *Errors’* sacrificial undertones, this thesis proposes that, with a Girardian perspective, it is possible to see an insightful mind like Shakespeare’s connected theatre and religion, particularly in terms of the cathartic effect of sacrifice. It makes this more feasible by pointing out he was not only steeped in dramatic mechanism, mythic form and the drama of the Passion, but regularly encountered violent scapegoating in his milieu. Palfrey, surveying Elizabethan debates such as whether the Eucharist was symbolic or material, thinks Shakespeare probably made this connection:

Whatever Shakespeare’s beliefs, he must have felt the pertinence of these questions to his own art. Was the Mass a highly charged piece of drama? Or was it real?⁴³¹

Skura says seeing sacrifice from an actor’s viewpoint heightened Shakespeare’s awareness of it, and highlights his many Christ figures.⁴³²

⁴³⁰ Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 2.

⁴³¹ Palfrey and Smith, *Shakespeare’s Dead*, 15.

Skura's broadly Freudian frame however, makes the actor's personal experience and pathology the hero of this insight: Christ provides, "an analogy for what actors feel about their ordeal before an audience".⁴³³ That is, she sees Shakespeare using a religious motif to express something seen in modern terms as more explanatory and real than religion: his own psychology. His interest in sacrifice is understood as a preoccupation with actor/audience dynamics. Where his sacrificial figures are *not* easily related to that, Skura still takes them to express it.⁴³⁴ This conception of how Elizabethans related acting and Christ seems anachronistic. It is surely more likely Shakespeare saw acting as a microcosmic echo of the Passion, than Christ's torture as like acting. It certainly inverts the relationship Girard suggests. He sees the Passion pointing to the scapegoating truth underlying human culture – "it must be read first of all as a revelation of human violence".⁴³⁵ He argues Shakespeare grasped this idea – that scapegoating, as represented by the Passion, is a universal social pattern – which is why his work is redolent with it. This thesis therefore concludes Girard's wider anthropological viewpoint provides a stronger rationale for Shakespeare's focus on sacrificial motifs than Skura's more psychological and theatrically focused one.

⁴³² Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 7-8, 27-28, 133.

⁴³³ Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 212.

⁴³⁴ Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 6.

⁴³⁵ Girard, *Theatre of Envy*, 282.

Girard's view that Shakespeare dramatised the social mechanics of scapegoating is supported by the playwright's access to the Christian Bible, which addresses those mechanics. Foakes again unknowingly supports Girard when he says the New Testament establishes Christ as, "a willing scapegoat who ... confirms a human addiction to the violence shown in the crucifixion".⁴³⁶ By further elaborating the purposes of *Errors'* extensive Christian referencing, this thesis extends the connection between Shakespeare and the Bible. It shows, while *Errors* dramatises the run-up to scapegoating it presents an alternative to it, modelled, I suggest, on the biblical revelation of victimisation. In its final scene, Shakespeare does not merely borrow Christian tropes for theatrical effect, as analysts presume (see p.137). He re-presents the experience the Passion evokes, in relatable, material terms, like Girard. This concrete exposition of the fundamentally human and continuing problem of communal violence underpins the play's highly moving ending. There is great value in connecting Shakespeare to Girard and his reading of Christianity. It assists investigation into Shakespeare's Christianity, and makes his Christian references more accessible to those who would discount them. This thesis furthers such possibilities by, for example, connecting Shakespeare's concern with revenge to retaliatory behaviour and the contrasting of justice with mercy in *Errors*, and to Girard's reading of Satan as embodied in mimetic feuding and scapegoating behaviours.

⁴³⁶ Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 29.

The thesis argues for the value of a Girardian analysis of *Errors*. Its opening chapters outline Girard's theory and show mimetic violence and desire operating in *Errors'* domestic settings, uncovering a focus on rivalry as a centrally problematic dynamic. Chapter 3 shows the same dynamic operates in *Errors'* civic arena, Chapter 4 shows how it treats scapegoating dynamics. In doing this, the thesis finds great synergy between Shakespeare and Girard – two multidimensional thinkers focused on elucidating the complex matter of human relating. And it finds strong support for Girard's view that Shakespeare, "reveal[s] in the most concrete and dramatic fashion that all drama is a mimetic re-enactment of a scapegoat process".⁴³⁷

When Shakespeare addresses the themes of Holy Innocent's Day in the comic, familiar mundanity of domesticity that *The Comedy of Errors* represents, he puts his audience in the position of, "having to deal with the ordinary and the realistic".⁴³⁸ Far from being superficial, this makes its lessons relatable, and so highly potent. *Errors'* closing revelation is, similarly, all the more powerful for being purely physical. The audience does not need to believe in an intangible God, or a theatrical illusion. They are only confronted with real social dynamics. They cannot, then, imagine that the potential for violence, or for reprieve, is only held in the hands of the supra-human. They must see that it exists in themselves. In dealing with the corporeal, Shakespeare leaves no room for

⁴³⁷ Girard, *To Double Business*, 153.

⁴³⁸ Levin, "Two Comedies of Errors," 114.

evading a personal sense of responsibility, no room for error. Instead, by appealing to the conscious, animate heart of each individual, he delivers an abiding sense of the holiness of mercy.



Figure 9. Reunited twins – *The Comedy of Errors* at the RSC, Stratford-upon-Avon in 2018.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁹ Photograph by Sam Allard (RSC), *First Encounters with Shakespeare - The-Comedy of Errors – Production Photographs 2018*, <https://stratfordblog.com/review-the-comedy-of-errors-at-the-rsc/>.

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Appendix A – *The Comedy of Errors*, Locked door scene (3.1)⁴⁴⁰

Enter Antipholus of Ephesus, his man Dromio, Angelo the goldsmith, and Balthazar the merchant.

- ANTIPHOLUS: Good Signor Angelo, you must excuse us all.
My wife is shrewish when I keep not hours.
Say that I lingered with you at your shop
To see the making of her carcanet,
And that tomorrow you will bring it home.—
[Indicating Dromio] But here's a villain that would face me down
He met me on the mart, and that I beat him,
And charged him with a thousand marks in gold,
And that I did deny my wife and house.
Thou drunkard, thou, what didst thou mean by this?
- DROMIO: Say what you will, sir, but I know what I know—
That you beat me at the mart I have your hand to show.
If the skin were parchment, and the blows you gave were ink,
Your own handwriting would tell you what I think.
- ANTIPHOLUS: I think thou art an ass.
- DROMIO: Marry, so it doth appear
By the wrongs I suffer and the blows I bear.
I should kick being kicked, and, being at that pass,
You would keep from my heels, and beware of an ass.
- ANTIPHOLUS: You're sad, Signor Balthazar. Pray God our cheer
May answer my good will, and your good welcome here.
- BALTHAZAR: I hold your dainties cheap, sir, and your welcome dear.
- ANTIPHOLUS: O, Signor Balthazar, either at flesh or fish
A table full of welcome makes scarce one dainty dish.
- BALTHAZAR: Good meat, sir, is common; that every churl affords.
- ANTIPHOLUS: And welcome more common, for that's nothing but words.
- BALTHAZAR: Small cheer and great welcome makes a merry feast.
- ANTIPHOLUS: Ay, to a niggardly host and more sparing guest.
But though my cates be mean, take them in good part.
Better cheer may you have, but not with better heart. *[He tries the door]*
But soft, my door is locked. *[To Dromio]* Go bid them let us in.
- DROMIO: *[calling]* Maud, Bridget, Marian, Cec'ly, Gillian, Ginn!
[Enter Dromio of Syracuse, within]

⁴⁴⁰ Reproduced from Shakespeare, *New Oxford Shakespeare*.

DROMIO(S): *[within]* Mome, malt-horse, capon, coxcomb, idiot, patch!
 Either get thee from the door, or sit down at the hatch!
 Dost thou conjure for wenches, that you call'st for such store
 When one is one too many? Go, get thee from the door!

DROMIO: What patch is made our porter? My master stays in the street!

DROMIO(S): *[within]* Let him walk from whence he came, lest he catch cold on's feet.

ANTIPHOLUS: Who talks within, there? Ho, open the door!

DROMIO(S): *[within]* Right, sir, I'll tell you when, an you'll tell me wherefore.

ANTIPHOLUS: Wherefore? For my dinner; I have not dined today.

DROMIO(S): *[within]* Nor today here you must not. Come again when you may.

ANTIPHOLUS: What art thou that keep'st me out from the house I own?

DROMIO(S): *[within]* The porter for this time, sir, and my name is Dromio.

DROMIO: O, villain, thou hast stol'n both mine office and my name!
 The one ne'er got me credit, the other mickle blame.
 If thou hadst been Dromio today in my place,
 Thou wouldst have changed thy face for an aim,
 Or thy name for an ass.

Enter Luce *[within]*

LUCE: *[within]* What a coil is there, Dromio! Who are those at the gate?

DROMIO: Let my master in, Luce!

LUCE: *[within]* Faith no, he comes too late;
 And so tell your master.

DROMIO: O Lord, I must laugh!
 Have at you with a proverb: shall I 'set in my staff'?

LUCE: *[within]* Have at you with another: that's 'When? Can you tell?'

DROMIO(S): *[within]* If thy name be called 'Luce', Luce, thou hast answered him well.

ANTIPHOLUS: Do you hear, you minion? You'll let us in, I hope?

LUCE: *[within]* I thought to have asked you.

DROMIO(S): *[within]* And you said no.

DROMIO: So, come help! *[He and Antipholus beat the door]*
 Well struck! There was blow for blow!

ANTIPHOLUS: Thou baggage! Let me in!

LUCE: *[within]* Can you tell for whose sake?

DROMIO: Master, knock the door hard!

LUCE: *[within]* Let him knock till it ache.

ANTIPHOLUS: You'll cry for this, minion, if I beat the door down!

LUCE: *[within]* What needs all that, and a pair of stocks in the town?

Enter Adriana *[within]*

ADRIANA: *[within]* Who is that at the door that keeps all this noise?

DROMIO(S): *[within]* By my troth, your town is troubled with unruly boys.

ANTIPHOLUS: Are you there, wife? You might have come before.

ADRIANA: *[within]* Your wife, sir knave? Go get you from the door.
[Exeunt Adriana and Luce]

DROMIO: If you went in pain, master, this knave would go sore.

ANGELO: Here is neither cheer, sir, nor welcome; we would fain have either.

BALTHAZAR: In debating which was best, we shall part with neither.

DROMIO: They stand at the door, master—bid them welcome hither.

ANTIPHOLUS: There is something in the wind, that we cannot get in.

DROMIO: You would say so, master, if your garments were thin.
Your cake here is warm within: you stand here in the cold.
It would make a man mad as a buck to be so bought and sold.

ANTIPHOLUS: Go fetch me something—I'll break ope the gate.

DROMIO(S): *[within]* Break any breaking here, and I'll break your knave's pate!

DROMIO: *[to Dromio(S)]* A man may break a word with you, sir, and words are but
wind;
Ay, and break it in your face, so he break it not behind.

DROMIO(S): *[within]* It seems thou want'st breaking. Out upon *thee*, hind!

DROMIO: Here's too much 'Out upon thee!' I pray thee, let me in!

DROMIO(S): *[within]* Ay, when fowls have no feathers, and fish have no fin.

ANTIPHOLUS: Well, I'll break in.—*[to Dromio]* Go borrow me a crow.

DROMIO: A crow without feather? Master, mean you so?
For a fish without a fin, there's a fowl without a feather.
[To Dromio (S)] If a crow help us in, sirrah, we'll pluck a crow together.

ANTIPHOLUS: *[to Dromio]* Go, get thee gone. Fetch me an iron crow.
[Exit Dromio]

BALTHAZAR: Have patience, sir. O, let it not be so!
Herein you war against your reputation,
And draw within the compass of suspect
Th'unviolated honour of your wife.
Once this: your long experience of her wisdom,
Her sober virtue, years, and modesty,
Plead on her part some cause to you unknown;
And doubt not, sir, but she will well excuse
Why at this time the doors are made against you.
Be ruled by me. Depart in patience,
And let us to the Tiger all to dinner;

And about evening come yourself alone
To know the reason of this strange restraint.
If by strong hand you offer to break in
Now in the stirring passage of the day,
A vulgar comment will be made of it,
And that supposed by the common rout
Against your yet ungalld estimation,
That may with foul intrusion enter in
And dwell upon your grave when you are dead.
For slander lives upon succession,
Forever housed where'er it gets possession.

ANTIPHOLUS: You have prevailed. I will depart in quiet,
And in despite of mirth mean to be merry.
I know a wench of excellent discourse,
Pretty and witty; wild, and yet too gentle.
There will we dine. This woman that I mean,
My wife—but, I protest, without desert—
Hath oftentimes upbraided me withal.
To her will we to dinner. *[To Angelo]* Get you home
And fetch the chain. By this, I know, 'tis made.
Bring it, I pray you, to the Porcupine,
For there's the house. That chain will I bestow—
Be it for nothing but to spite my wife—
Upon mine hostess there. Good sir, make haste:
Since mine own doors refuse to entertain me,
I'll knock elsewhere, to see if they'll disdain me.

ANGELO: I'll meet you at that place some hour hence.

ANTIPHOLUS: Do so. This jest shall cost me some expense.

Exeunt

Appendix B – Philostratus’ account of the “miracle of Ephesus”⁴⁴¹

Philostratus begins with Apollonius speaking –

“Take courage, for I will today put a stop to the course of the disease”. And with these words, he led the population entire to the theatre, where the image of the Averting god has [since] been set up. And there he saw what seemed an old mendicant artfully blinking his eyes as if blind, and he carried a wallet and a crust of bread in it; and he was clad in rags and was very squalid of countenance. Apollonius therefore ranged the Ephesians around him and said: “Pick up as many stones as you can and hurl them at this enemy of the gods”. Now the Ephesians wondered what he meant, and were shocked at the idea of murdering a stranger so manifestly miserable; for he was begging and praying for them to take mercy upon him. Nevertheless Apollonius insisted and egged on the Ephesians to launch themselves on him and not let him go. And as soon as some of them began to take shots and hit him with their stones, the beggar who had seemed to blink and be blind, gave them all a sudden glance and showed that his eyes were full of fire. Then the Ephesians recognised that he was a demon, and they stoned him so thoroughly that their stones were heaped into a great cairn around him. After a little pause, Apollonius bade them remove the stones and acquaint themselves with the wild animal which they had slain. When they had therefore exposed the object which they thought they had thrown their missiles at, they found that he had disappeared and instead of him there was a hound who resembled in form and look a Molosian dog, but was in size the equal of the largest lion; there he lay before their eyes, pounded to a pulp by their stones and vomiting foam as mad dogs do. Accordingly the statue of the Averting god, namely Hercules, has been set up over the spot where the ghost was slain.

⁴⁴¹ Flavius Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*. Quoted in Girard, *I See Satan*, 49-50. Girard’s reading of the ‘miracle’ of Ephesus, and explanation of its repetition throughout mythology, is given in *I See Satan*, Chapters 4 and 5.

DO NOT PRINT

Additional reading included in bibliography but not referenced directly⁴⁴²

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- ⁴⁴² Gabriel Andrade, "René Girard (1923—2015)," *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy : A Peer Reviewed Academic Source*. <https://iep.utm.edu/>.
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