

“METHINKS YOU ARE MY GLASS”: REPLICATED SELVES IN SHAKESPEAREAN COMEDY

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For teaching is a comedy of errors with the rare epiphanies of Twelfth Night.

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It is a critical truism that problematic identity is a pivotal, structuring concern in Shakespeare's Elizabethan comedies. Occasionally literalised as inscribed theatricality (as in the pageantry of *Love's Labour's Lost*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or *As You Like It*), cross-dressing and role playing, as well as their unmasking, often trigger the action and/or crown the dramatic denouement (*As You Like It*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Twelfth Night*). In two of the plays, however, the destabilisation of identity is brought to its extreme by the protagonists' encounter with physical replicas of themselves. This paper will briefly comment upon the modes in which the presence of twinned selves casts metaphysical doubt on human identity in Shakespeare's early Plautine *Comedy of Errors* and, more peripherally, on his last Romantic comedy *Twelfth Night*.

1. The Comedy of Errors

In his first phase, Shakespeare experimented with native models of farce, as well as imported Italian ones. A third strain of comic experiment was offered by a popular practice of rewriting the classics.¹⁾

Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* (1594) appropriated and amplified the central situation of Plautus's *Menaechmi*. Born in Syracuse, Menaechmus and Sosicles are separated between Syracuse and Epidamnus, a city of many offences. Renamed, in a gesture of mourning, to Menaechmus,²⁾ Sosicles³⁾ sets out on a quest for his lost twin brother. Arriving in Epidamnus, Menaechmus-Sosicles is mistaken for him, his renaming further aggravating the confusion. So do the stage props – a mantle and a bracelet increase rather than clarify the effects of reduplication, experienced as madness and dreaming by twins and others alike. Only the slave Messenio operates as a landmark in the Epidamnesque labyrinth of multiplying selves. In II, 3, chaos and delusion loom large, as Menaechmus-Sosicles willingly steps into the identity imposed on him in order to indulge in the benefits of *being another*. Visitor to a city of destabilised identities, the vagrant twin enjoys not only a free meal, but also the extras of love-making and precious possessions:

Oh ye immortal gods! to what man that hoped for less have you ever in one day given more blessings? I have eaten, I have drunk, I have banqueted with a woman. I have stolen this mantle, which she will never get again. ... I never was so well off at less expense. (II.5)

To further avoid the buffets of an unfathomable reality, Menaechmus-Sosicles pragmatically suppresses his actual self at the expense of self-exclusion – feigning madness, he turns aggressive to himself, and to others.

What the domesticated „lawful“ self of Menaechmus of Epidamnus gets, on the other hand, is the *damnum* (damage, pun on Epidamnus intended), of reduplication – deprivation, lack and a lock-out from both his own and his mistress's houses. Beyond this radical opposition of privileged double versus deprived, local self approximates its vagrant counterpart in the space provided by seeming madness. Falling into a fit of rage, provoked by the testimonies of his fellow-citizens, the local Menaechmus is treated for the „symptoms“ of his feigning twin by a doctor who, most appropriately, has been healing the *statues* of the gods (V.4), ultimate emblems of stability in a world dominated by flux.

When, at the point of comic anagnorisis, vagrant self is confronted with its domesticated counterpart, the confrontation results in a simultaneous self-transcendence and plenitude of self (V.7). Menaechmus-Sosicles sees his incarnated mirror (*speculum*) and image (*imago*). The marks (*signa*) of name, father, and birthplace „agree“ (*conueniunt*) so perfectly as to imply the ontological sameness of one self and another. The ultimate proof of the shared genealogy of reduplicated selves is the name of the mother, Teuximarcha. Given by Menaechmus-Sosicles, it „settles it“ (*conuenit*) and, eventually, inspires the return to Syracuse, where identical selves⁴⁾ first began as „so alike in appearance that their own mother, who nursed them, could not distinguish between them“ (Prologue).

Shakespeare's first amplification of the available Plautine structure involves adding a second pair of twins, the Dromios. Borrowed from another Plautus play, *Amphitryon*, the double doubling implies *Errors*' serious engagement with the paradoxes of specular desire and the replicated self.

In *Amphitryon*, as a result of divine metamorphoses – Jupiter's, for love, into Amphitryon, and Mercury's, in filial obedience, into Sosia – protagonist and slave are doubled in ways that not only create fissures in reality but totally block its interpretation onstage. As in the *Menaechmi*, the „horizontal“ coexistence of replicas in identical space-time is experienced as madness and sleepwalking by the dramatic characters. Offstage, audiences are spared the destabilising effect. Mercury the Prologue builds up their awareness of divine metamorphosis within the doubling, and gives them clues to the identity of the clones – the plume and the gold tassel worn by the divine counterparts. Tipping the balance between „horizontally“ replicated selves, the marks establish a hierarchy of genealogies: god engendering mortal. Mercury's obedience to the „heart's delight“ (*voluptas*) of his father and his acceptance of metamorphic „defacement“ for Jove's sake emblematises such paternal-filial structures of multiplication.

Amphitryon's divine histrionics result in confrontations this side of schizophrenia. Told he is not himself and facing his exact replica,⁵⁾ Sosia experiences liminal self-cancellation („For heaven's sake, where did I lose myself? Where was I transformed? Where did I drop my shape? I didn't leave myself behind at the harbour, did I, if I did happen to forget it? For, my word, this fellow has got hold of my complete

image, mine that was! Here I am alive and folks carry my image – more than anyone will ever do when I’m dead, I.i⁶), omnipresence („I am here and I am there, et hic et illic.; I beat myself—the I that is at home now“, II.i.594) and, eventually, the paradoxes of *ego ille* (*that me*), or the self-engendering self:

Sosia. I didn’t believe my own self, Sosia, at first, not till *that other Sosia*, myself, made me believe him. [H]e had stolen my looks along with my name. One drop of milk is no more like another than that I is like me.

I warrant you you will come upon a *second servant Sosia* of yours *besides me* when you reach home, yes sir, *one whose father was Davus the same as mine, and who is just like me and just my age, too*. Enough said, sir. *Sosia has twinned here for you*.

Amph. Who is that *Sosia*?

Sosia. I am, I say. How many times do you need to be told? (emphasis added)

Read as dreaming, delusions, sorcery, Bacchic frenzy (II.ii.703), or possession by the other’s gaze, reduplication is experienced as self-division, self-engendering and, most strikingly, as symbolic feminisation. Moreover, it appears to „spawn“ not only selves, but also objects in a replicated, parallel reality: „You have spawned another Amphitryon; I have spawned another Sosia; now if the bowl has spawned another bowl, we’ve all doubled“ (ibid.).

Meaningfully, the play reaches its point of anagnorisis with a genuine, yet problematic twin birth. „Twin“ fathers – Jupiter as Amphitryon and Amphitryon himself -- have engendered „twin“ sons, Hercules and Iphicles, and the latent asymmetry within the paternal „twins“ becomes manifest in the sons. As in the Biblical narrative of the twin brothers Jacob and Esau, temporal hierarchies within the pair are reversed by hierarchies of power, „one being a ten months’ boy, the other a seven“ countermanded by „one is Amphitryon’s child, the other Jove’s: the younger boy, however, has the greater father“.⁷)

Expounded by Jupiter, and heightened to an epiphany, the ending of *Amphitryon* therefore actually subverts the entire ethos of the double self and opens up spaces for the non-specular mystery of the self’s non-self-identical multiplication.

Contaminating the two Plautine plays, Shakespeare amplifies his sources by adding a frame of Heliodorean romance. Based on Book VIII of John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* (1330-1408), just like the later romance of *Pericles*, the story of Aegeon and Aemilia motivates further peripeteia with sameness of origin and a Platonic-Pauline desire for a reunion with a lost half. Born as „the pleasing punishment that women bear“, of the same mother in the same hour and in the same city of Epidamnum, Antipholus of Syracuse and Antipholus of Ephesus are „the one so like the other / As could not be distinguish’d but by names“ (I.i.).

Distinguishing names, however, are never given. Problematic identity is further generated by a natural tempest whose consequence is the un-natural un-twinning of replicated selves, vaguely recalling the splitting of the hermaphrodite in Plato’s

Symposium. Symmetrical as it is, the „divorce“ results in an identical sense of lack and a specular desire for reunion in the „halves“:

Our helpful ship was splitted in the midst;
So that, in this unjust divorce of us
Fortune had left to both of us alike
What to delight in, what to sorrow for. (I.ii.103-6)⁸⁾

To find its other, the severed „half“ feels it has now to go through a loss of self:

Ant.S. Farewell till then: I'll go lose myself
And wander up and down to view the city.(...)
He that commends me to my own content,
Commends me to the thing I cannot get.
I to the world an like a drop of water
That in the ocean seeks another drop;
Who, falling there to find his fellow forth,
Unseen, inquisitive, confounds himself:
So I, to find a mother and a brother
In quest of them, unhappy, lose myself.(I.ii.30–40)

Pun on „content“ – pleasure but also essence, possibly intended, as in Shakespeare's Sonnet I⁹⁾, the migrant half's quest for its counterpart is defined as basically ec-static. Mystical loss of self is experienced quite effectively in a reality fractured by the literal doubling of persons. Antipholus of Syracuse literally confounds himself, losing himself but also finding himself where his copy dwells.

In parentheses, self-replication is a dominant theme of Shakespeare's contemporaneous *Sonnets*. The *Sonnets*, however, construct the „cloning“ of self as vertical – governed by temporal hierarchies, or sequences, from father to son to eternity, where the rise of the copy is the fall of the prototype, as in Sonnet XII:

hen of thy beauty do I question make,
That thou among the wastes of time must go,
Since sweets and beauties do themselves forsake
And die as fast as they see others grow ... (9–12)

It is only the sun-son pun of Sonnet VIII that vaguely articulates a fear of reduplication. This pun, however, could be activated only in a mythological or Aesopian context; breeding a son/sun becoming as destructive as in the narrative of Phaeton or in Aesop's fable of the Sun's children, both implicating the danger of setting the earth on fire.

With this problematic exception, Shakespeare's *Sonnets* seem to preclude replication-induced fissures of self. On the contrary, a natural way of procuring its eternity, replication there mostly serves the purposes of *consolidating* the self.

With „horizontal“ twinning, however, when replica and prototype dwell in identical space-time, the production of mirror selves overcharges reality. Reducing the level of difference, without the benefits of deferral, it ironically renders all interpretations merely tautological. Furthermore, in an intentional Shakespearean error, his *Errors* aggravate the double Plautine doubling of bodies with a doubling of names – the presence of two Antipholi,¹⁰ as well as two Dromios, powerfully weakens the reality of self. As a side effect, master cannot be differentiated through mention of his servant and vice versa. Theoretically, both can be distinguished via an extended name, including the city where they belong: Antipholus of Ephesus and Antipholus of Syracuse. Such a possibility, however, is bracketed by Shakespeare's *Errors* – due to „enmity and discord“, literal – and symbolic – „traffic“ between Syracuse and Ephesus has been banned by „rigorous statutes“(I.i.):

If any Syracusian born
Come to the bay of Ephesus, he dies,
His goods confiscate to the duke's dispose,
Unless a thousand marks be levied,
To quit the penalty and to ransom him.

Antipholus of Syracuse, therefore, is advised to cancel the toponym and give out he is of Epidamnum instead. The substitution turns the Plautine locale into a virtual site, an interchange station between Syracuse, city of origins, and Ephesus, city of transformation. Or between Epidamnum, city of origins, and Ephesus. For the double irony is that the declared city of origins is itself rendered virtual: in Shakespeare's own *Errors*, the two pairs of twins first began in Epidamnum, final destination of the Plautine play.

The choice of Ephesus, site of Hellenic magic and Pauline rebirth, is a meaningful gesture of reimagining the source. Acts 19 pictures Ephesus as city of „curious craftes“ (19). Even more suggestively, Ephesians 2 addresses its citizens to expound Christ as „our peace, who *hath made both one*, and *hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us*“ (14). Encompassing humanity, the body of Christ obliterates distinctions between individual mortal bodies in a new symbolic unity: „for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace. And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross“ (15–16, emphasis added).

Partitions between bodies/selves obliterated in Christ, former „strangers and foreigners“ become „fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God“ (Eph. 2:19), for „There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling ... *for we are members one of another... of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones*“ (Ephes. 4, 25, 30, emphasis added). In such contexts, *Errors* reads like a Shakespearean *parodia sacra*: finding one's twin in Ephesus acquires audible Pauline connotations.

In Shakespeare's Ephesus, however, replicated selves induce fractures in reality. Unable to distinguish between Antipholus of Ephesus and unwitting guest-spouse

Antipholus of Syracuse, Adriana experiences the *mis-en-abyme* of her husband's multiplication and registers it as alienation of the replicated self from the loving other, and thus, Platonically, from itself:

O! how comes it
That thou art thus *estranged from thyself*?
Thyself I call it, being strange to me,
That, undividable, incorporate,
Am better than thy dear self's better part. (II.ii)

The drop of water trope is now remembered to suggest a non-Platonic failure to sever what has been glued together in Pauline matrimony:

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. (ibid.)

At this point, the comedy's poetry anticipates the sublimity of Donne's ecstatic visions of oneness:

For if we two be one and thou play false,
I do digest the poison of thy flesh... (I.ii.124–146, emphasis added,)

Simulated by mirroring bodies, the second severing of the Platonic hermaphrodite is implicitly feared as a Pauline collapse of male identity:

So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh ... For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. (Ephes. 5:28–29, 31) ¹¹⁾

Strikingly similar to Antipholus of Syracuse's language of identity loss, the „drop of water" image construes the other as essential to the maintenance of self. A Platonic replica, or a Platonic complement, a twin or a lover, the other is conceived as a mirror re-asserting its problematic identity. The loss of the other is a drowning of the self into a sea of anonymity, and among infinite replicas of itself. Finding the other, „through a glass, darkly; but then face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12), amounts to a rebirth into a new Pauline self.

In search of the mirroring half, master and servant of Syracuse go through ecstatic experiences. While „losing“ himself to find it – and himself –, Antipholus of Syracuse is repeatedly claimed by Adriana, his twin brother’s wife, as *her own* half:

Thou art an elm, my husband, I a vine,
Whose weakness, married to thy stronger state
Makes me with thy strength to communicate:
If aught possess thee from me, it is dross... (II.ii.177–181)

In his parodic turn, Dromio of Syracuse acknowledges a similar weakening of identity, induced by a woman’s claims:

Do you know me, sir ? am I Dromio ? am I your man ? am I myself ?... I am an ass, I am a woman’s man *and besides myself* ... I am due to a woman; one that claims me, one that haunts me, one that will have me. (III.ii.2.73–83, emphasis added)

Thus, he is ecstatically – and asininely – dragged out of himself, a parodic effect of the gravity of his lover’s physical corpulence. For she who claims him is already spherical, hardly in need of any Aristophanic supplement:

... the kitchen-wench, and all grease; ... if she lives till doomsday, she’ll burn a week longer than the whole world... She is spherical, like a globe; I could find out countries in her. (III.ii.97I118)

While Dromio of Syracuse is comically *transported* beside himself, his master, „traitor to himself“ (III.ii.8), is *transformed* by love. His acknowledgement of the transformation audibly questions the Old Testament „I am that I am“ (Ex. 3:14), the ultimate statement of self-identity, and does so in tropes that recall Donne again:

Are you a god? would you *create me new*?
Transform me then, and to your power I’ll yield.
But *if that I am I*, then well I know
Your weeping sister is no wife of mine ...
O! train me not, sweet mermaid, with thy note,
To drown me in thy sister flood of tears ... (III.ii.39–46)

Thus, variously, to the Syracusan replicas, Ephesus is as a site of seduction, where the other is constantly reaching out for the destabilised self. The experience is rendered in a Pauline language of rebirth, which punningly switches the clock to another temporal sequence: „In Ephesus I am but two hoiurs old“ (II.ii). It’s also a Plautine world of unsought-for gratification, where gifts are offered in the form of golden chains, purses, free meals, friendship and love:

Ant.S. There’s not a man I meet but doth salute me,
As if I were their well-acquainted friend;

And everyone doth call me by my name.
Some tender money to me: some invite me;
Some other give me thanks for kindnesses;
Some offer me commodities to buy...
Sure these are but imaginary wiles,
And Lapland sorcerers inhabit here. (IV.iii.1–11)

Replicas are marked as paternal and maternal, as in Genesis 25, where „Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob“. With Shakespeare, the vagrant Syracusans, who symbolically „belong“ to the Father, obtain satisfaction even without the desire. On the other hand, the ecstasy of reduplication brings the mother's „local“ copies only trouble and pain. With the arrival of the Syracusans, Antipholus of Ephesus and his Dromio are doomed to lack – hunger, absence, madness and confusion.

Names failing, the Other marks doubles by physical violence – beating leaves a trace upon Dromio of Ephesus. Marking off the replica, however, effects its parodic metamorphosis – Dromio acknowledges yet another asinine shift of shape:

Ant.E. Thou art sensible in nothing but blows, and so is an ass.

Dro.E. I am an ass indeed; you may prove it by my long ears. (IV.iv.26–8)

Eventually, the way out of parallel reality is mapped by the binding and confinement of the local replica. The suppression of doubled identities leaves vacant spaces for „new-born“ identical selves to perform the most assertive of all gestures. Putting out their swords, the Syracusan clones establish their material presence in the world of Ephesus – they are no longer the mere copies, shadows, imagoes of other selves. Strategies are reversed when the Syracusans go into the abbey, „opening“ up a space for their Ephesian doubles to leave their own marks upon reality – beating, binding, threatening to *disfigure* others.

Importantly, the act of comic anagnorisis is performed by the Father, who re-names the twins and re-constitutes their identities. The act is ushered in by an initial confusion – Aegeon himself takes the mother's Ephesians for his Syracusans. Encountering the second pair, however, he gives a full account of the genealogy of mirrored identities and the lost oneness of Platonic halves is regained: man and woman are reunited and twins come together, each losing themselves in the other to find themselves again. The Christian paradox is further emphasized by a purely evangelical span – vagrancy and division have lasted for thirty-three years. Notably, the reunion is imagined as a male delivery:

Thirty-three years have I but *gone in travail*
Of you, my sons; and till this present hour
My heavy burdens ne'er delivered. (V.i.403–5)

Thus, Platonic male genealogy seems to be reestablished by the end of a play that keeps striving to question and undermine its implications about selfhood and otherness. It, however, is hard to decide which Antipholus should go first. The Antipholuses, therefore, exit together, hand in hand, as they have come into this world. Thus, recession in depth, the hierarchy of original and copy, of prototype and reflection, which constitutes, as in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, the very core of Platonic genealogy, as well as of Old Testament birthright, is debunked, made shallow by its horizontal projection - the mirror mirrors its mirror. All replicas become equally real, or unreal, with the reestablishment of lost oneness, initially „through a glass, darkly; but then face to face“. (1 Cor. 13:12)

2. *Twelfth Night*

Gender in *Twelfth Night* is what „place“ is in *The Comedy of Errors* – the deferred identifying reference. Though its silencing is not demanded in Illyria, the way that of birthplace is in Ephesus, it is regarded as beneficial to the heroine's survival:

Conceal me what I am, and be my aid
For such disguise as haply shall become
The form of my intent, I'll serve this duke. (I.ii.51–53)

Unlike that of the Syracusan twins, Viola's erasure of identifying difference is a matter of conscious choice. As well becomes a play revolving around the theme of „a brother's dead love“ (I.i.31), *Twelfth Night*'s heroine has a strong sense of identity with her lost twin Sebastian, as well as a detached paronomastic awareness of her own thrownness into a reality where she does not belong: „And what should I do in Illyria ? / My brother he is in Elysium“ (I.ii.2–3).

In Plautine terms, however, Viola is most appropriately situated – like Menaechmus, lost to find herself, for, founded by the descendants of Hercules, Plautus' Epidamnus actually *was* in Illirya. ¹²⁾ Assuming „the form“ of her brother, she still retains a symbolic part of her own, „unmarked“, gender: she chooses to be presented as „a eunuch“ (I.ii.54). ¹³⁾ This duality of self-imposed identification is a displacement from the „Sebastian“ Viola actually performs, but also an attempted return to the actor within the role. Thus Viola seems to dramatize the paradox of the mirror: to reflect objects, it should have its opaque tain, a role allotted here to gender. For, when, cross-dressing like other Shakespearean heroines, Viola, in a *mis-en-abyme* of gender travesty, impersonates Sebastian, this actually is a relapse into the conformity of the Shakespearean boy actor impersonating himself. Thus, in a fictional world of identities dizzily oscillating from one Chinese box to another, the double cross-dressing of women pretending to be men on a stage where women were performed by boy actors is the ultimate literalist gesture of self-identity for the trained young professional of the Lord Chamberlain's Men. Moreover, it's a comment on the entire

setup of Shakespeare's theatre, potentially dramatising the ultimate New Testament paradox of the maintenance of identity, forgetting oneself: „If your first concern is to look after yourself, you'll never find yourself. But if you forget about yourself and look to me, you'll find both yourself and me" (Matt.10:39).

In Platonic terms, Viola's partial „opaqueness" is a Shakespearean comment on Platonic genealogy. Here, to construct the self as a mirror up to the other, obliterate differences between selves and thus perpetuate the self, one has to go beyond the geometry of Platonic copies, shadows, images. Though the very opposite to the inclusiveness of the hermaphrodite, Viola's cross-dressing also leads to the inclusiveness of gender hybridity, the hybridity of the Sonnets' „master-mistress of my passion"(XX). All in all, however, reduplicating the self in *Twelfth Night* seems to lose its ontological glory: it emerges as the mere side-effect of a gender travesty:

I am the man: if this be so, as 'tis,
Poor lady, she were better love a dream.
Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness,
Wherein the pregnant enemy does much.
How easy it is for the proper-false
In women's waxen hearts to set their forms!
...
What will become of this ? As I am a man,
My state is desperate for my master's love;
As I am a woman, - now alas the day! -
What thriftless sighs shall poor Olivia breathe! (II.ii.26-40)

Easily prompted by the condemnation of disguise, a moralizing reading might view gender travesty as triggering a dangerous metamorphosis of „waxen" women rather than evoking a Platonic male genealogy of mirroring doubles. Such a reading would be in perfect conformity with current Puritan blasts on the stage, condemning cross-dressing as morally corrupt. The attitude of *Deuteronomy* – „The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the LORD thy God. (Deuteronomy 22:5) – reemerges in Stephen Gosson's *School of Abuse*:

In Stage Playes for a boy to put one the attyre, the gesture, the passions of a woman; for a meane person to take vpon him the title of a Prince with counterfeit porte, and traine, is by outward signs to shewe them selues otherwise then they are, and so with in the corn-passe of a lye. (Gosson 217.9) ¹⁴⁾

Overall, the play poses the problem of feminine inscription into a Platonic genealogy. To be admitted into the hall-of-mirrors of Platonic doubling, Viola has

to suffer a sea change and travesty as the son. But, as her further fortunes suggest, the mode creates fissures in interpretation. On the upside, in a reality sufficiently problematised by the depth recession of cross-gendered identification, as well as by horizontal doubling, the play avoids overburdening the signifier – unlike *Sosicles*, or the *Antipholi*, Viola neither adopts nor bears Sebastian's name. In comparison with the claustrophobic overdeterminedness of *Errors*, therefore, *Twelfth Night* leaves more space for individual identity and, with woman sneaking into Platonic genealogy, the festive relativity and topsyturvydom of Epiphany are unleashed:

The king lies by a beggar if a beggar dwell near him; or the church stands by the tabor, if the tabor stand by the church... A sentence is but a cheveril glove to a good wit: how quickly the wrong side may be turned outward ! (III.1.8–15)

Inversions within interpretability collapse the ultimate identifying Old Testament archetype of tautology:

Vio. You do think you are not what you are.

Oli. If I think so, I think the same of you.

Vio. Then think you right: *I am not what I am.* (III.i.153–55, emphasis added)

The homoerotic exchange of Cesario/Viola courting Olivia, and Olivia courting „him”/her, becomes possible only through opaque surfaces, with Olivia's dark veil, and stasis imposed by grief, and with „Cesario”'s hardening into monumental reluctance, while still letting the sonnet lady's „heart of stone” show through. Characteristically, this para-Platonic structure of mutual distancing is parodied in Viola's encounter with Sir Andrew, whose gender status is slightly ambiguous. In it, both characters shall acquire the darker aspect of the sonnet mistress – that of the Medusa forbidding the look: „This will so fright them both that they will kill one another, like cockatrices“ (3.4.217–9).

In actual terms, to court Orsino, Viola-Cesario has to re-imagine him as a woman:

Duke. ... Young though thou art, thine eye
Hath stay'd upon some favour that it loves;
Hath it not, boy ?

Vio. A little, by your favour.

Duke. What kind of woman is't ?

Vio. Of your complexion.

Duke. She is not worth thee, then. What years, i' fath?

Vio. About your years, my lord. (II.iv.23–8)

Having so subverted gender identities, the heroine problematises them anew. She lets the daughter show through her disguise as the son:

My father had a daughter lov'd a man,
As it might be, perhaps, were I a woman,
I should your lordship. (II.iv.109–11)

Such dizzying oscillations between traditional gender polarities evoke an early modern Body-without-Organs¹⁵, at once identifiable and non-identifiable with a predicate. Ironically, this schizoid world of fluctuating gender – of man-and-woman rather than man -or-woman – is activated for the purposes of perpetuating the Protean self, as well as the body onto which it is inscribed:

She never told her love,
But let concealment, like a worm i' the bud,
Feed on her damask cheek: she pin'd in thought,
And with a green and yellow melancholy,
She sat like Patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief. (II.iv.112–17)

Thus, to communicate a stable self, Viola finds it necessary to pass through mutually exclusive gender states, metamorphosing from woman to man back to woman. In the next breath, however, even the metamorphosis, which seems to communicate the final truth is further stretched to its opposite: „We men may say more“ (118).

Alternating her identity with that of Orsino, Viola seems to find a final cathartic space of shared gender identification. In Shakespeare's Platonic context, to love the other seems to mean to be like him – Viola mimes her twin brother Sebastian in order to love – and mime – Orsino.

Being the other is experienced as an act of inclusion („I am all the daughters of my father's house, / And all the brothers, too“, 122–3), though, to „external“ interpreters, praxis can incidentally shatter such inclusiveness into the distances of the icon: „To this image [...] did I devotion (3.4.399); or, „How vile an idol proves this god“ (401).

As in *Errors*, the final catharsis of self slipping back into itself occurs when self faces its double, already known from a past life and glimpsed in a mirror reflection: „I my brother know / Yet living in my glass“ (3.4.417).

With self mirrored by another, reflections confirm selfhood: they fix the body into the stasis of the image. Reflection seems to acquire an ontological status: it confers being. On the other hand, the ontologization of reflection problematizes reality – prototype and image can change places and identities. Space seems to

swallow time – reversing it, self-engendering Zeus eats Kronos the eater and conferrer of deferral:

One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons;
A natural perspective that is, and is not! (V.i.226–7)

How have you made division of yourself?
An apple cleft in two is not more twin
Than these two creatures. (V.i.232–4)

Throughout *Twelfth Night*, the encounter with the other is internalized in a gender travesty. At its end, as Viola faces Sebastian, the mirror of reduplication is despecularised and rendered ontological, for its tain is exposed – the self mirrors the other while re-tain-ing its gender. Space spews back deferral – mirroring the other, the self is no longer lost in it. At the same time, however, by activating a major Gnostic topos, that of the body as attire¹⁶), the play acknowledges the fundamental sameness within its gender-marked replicas. Sebastian’s flesh is a „dimension“ is no less „usurp’d“ by the spirit within than Viola’s masculine attire is:

Seb. A spirit I am indeed;
But am in that dimension grossly clad
Which from the womb I did participate.
Were you a woman, as the rest goes even,
I should my tears let fall upon your cheek
And say, ‘Thrice welcome, drowned Viola!’[...]

Vio. If nothing lets to make us happy both
But this my masculine usurp’d attire,
Do not embrace me till each circumstance
Of place, time, fortune do cohere and jump
That I am Viola. (V.i.246–263)

To round off a play about fluctuating identities, *Twelfth Night*’s concluding song celebrates the rule of time but also the patterns of repetition within its movement: being in the world has its changing seasons, but „the rain it raineth every day.“

Indulging in the repetition of self, Shakespeare’s *Comedy of Errors* and *Twelfth Night* question the Platonic hierarchy of prototype and copy by means of exposing the paradoxes and dangers of completely identical replication. Light entertainment as they seemingly provide, they also function as metaphysical warnings – against the fissures of replication, unmarked by either spatial difference or temporal

deferral. Otherwise, the perpetuation of the mirror stage would trap the self in an imaginary of replication and the circular narcissism of self-transcendence denied. When marked or tainted, however, self-replication could also be an educational experience of self-discovery, Lacanian, in the mirror of otherness, but also Pauline, „through a glass, darkly; but then face to face“ (1Cor.13:12).

NOTES

1. As suggested by the mid-century academic domestication of Plautus's *Miles Gloriosus* in Nicholas Udall's *Ralph Roister Doister*.
2. „Remaining on the cusp“. The name could be derived from meno (remain) and aichme (point or cusp). Menaechmus „is reportedly that which would persist on the cusp of good fortune because of meno or maneo and aichme or cuspis“. See Plautus, *Plautini Viginti Comediae*, ed. I. P. Valla and Bernardo Saraceno (Venice, 1499) sig. f[5.sup.v]: Menaechmus „quia meno maneo & aechmi cuspis dicitur quod in cuspidine faelicitatis permanserit“. Richard F. Hardin (2003) Web. 13.04.2013.
3. „The saviour“ (Gr.)
4. Compare „Water was never more like water, nor milk like milk“. Ibid.
5. „He's as like me as I am myself! Same leg— foot— height— haircut— eyes— nose— lips, even— jaw— chin— beard— neck— everything.“
6. All further quotes from *Amphitryo* are from *The Project Gutenberg EBook of Amphitryo, Asinaria, Aulularia, Bacchides, Captivi*, by Plautus Titus Maccius. Web. 13.04.2013.
7. The asymmetries of *Amphitryon* resemble the story of Jacob and Esau in *Genesis* 25. Cf. verse 23: And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger. Esau is the twin loved by the Father, and Jacob is the mother's favourite.
8. Citations of the two Shakespeare plays are from William Shakespeare. *Complete Works*. Ed. W.J.Craig. Oxford Univ. Press: Oxford, 1965.
9. „Thou that art now the world's fresh ornament / And only herald to the gaudy spring, / Within thine own bud buriest thy content“ (9–11). See William Shakespeare. *Complete Works*.
10. The name means „mutual love“ (Gr.).
11. All further quotes are from the King James Bible, Cambridge Ed.
12. 'Epidamnus is a city situated on the right hand to such as enter into the Ionian Gulf. Bordering upon it are the Taulantii, barbarians, a people of Illyris. This was planted by the Corcyraeans; but the captain of the colony was one Phalius, the son of Heratoclidus, a Corinthian of the lineage of Hercules, and, according to an ancient custom, called to this charge out of the metropolitan city.' (Thucydides, *Histories*, I, 24.1–3)

13. On the comic side, the adopted role is shadowed in Sir Toby's reference to her as a „virago“, a female warrior but also a scold, III.iv.
14. See Chambers, E.K. *The Elizabethan Stage*.
15. The term was suggested by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari to describe the undifferentiated body of the schizophrenic. See *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.
16. See Edmund Spenser, *Amoretti*, XXVII, 5-6: „That goodly Idol now so gay beseen, / Shall doff her Fleashes borrow'd fair Attire“. See Edmund Spenser. *Poetical Works*.

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