

# Shakespeare and the Economic Imperative

“What’s aught but as ’tis valued?”

Peter F. Grav



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LITERARY AUTHORS

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## Introduction

# “The wind that bloweth all the world besides—desire for gold”

Near the beginning of Erasmus' *The Praise of Folly*, Stultitia, the follies of the world personified, proudly lays claim to being the daughter of “Plutus himself, god of riches, who, . . . in spite of Jove himself, was ‘father of gods and men.’”<sup>1</sup> The subsequent tribute to her father leaves little doubt as to what makes the world go round:

At the mere nod of his head, all institutions both sacred and profane are turned upside down—so it always was and is nowadays. His decision controls wars, truces, conquests, projects, programs, legal decisions, marriage contracts, political alliances, international treaties, edicts, the arts, matters serious and silly . . . in short, all the public and private business of mortal men is under his control.<sup>2</sup>

Almost a century later, the title character of Shakespeare's nihilistic tragedy *Timon of Athens* ascribed similar sweeping powers to gold:

This yellow slave  
Will knit and break religions, bless th'accursed,  
Make the hoar leprosy adored, place thieves,  
And give them title, knee, and approbation  
With senators on the bench.<sup>3</sup>

Although Erasmus was certainly not an unknown quantity in early modern England, there is unfortunately no way to ascertain whether the above words of the “great humanist” were ever read by the man who has been referred to as “the inventor of the human.” These two passages, however, from widely disparate comic and tragic sources, do articulate a common belief that money had become *the* controlling influence over Renaissance societal values.

Indeed, the conflation of material concerns with the spiritual, political and romantic spheres (among others) was practically a mainstay of Shakespearean drama that manifested itself through trope, metaphor and, on occasion, through plots that dealt directly with the economic relationships between men and between men and women. Shakespeare was not alone in addressing such thematic concerns; bookending his career, we find Marlowe and *The Jew of Malta* on one end and, on the other, Jonson's satires savaging the principles of acquisition. Moreover, the number of city comedies written in the early 1600s suggests that, over the years in which Shakespeare was a working playwright, portrayals of societies run on monetary principles only grew in popularity. Yet, in light of the volume of work Shakespeare produced, it is perhaps surprising that so few of his plays directly confront what might be termed "the monetary mindset." The five plays that did do so are the focus of this exploration of his work. Over the course of these four comedies and single tragedy, Shakespeare's view of how economic determinants influence and shape humanity seems to progressively darken as if to suggest a growing discomfort with the way of the world—in short, what is a benign condition in *The Comedy of Errors* becomes, fifteen years later, a malignant disease in *Timon of Athens*. Between the early farce and late tragedy lie *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Measure for Measure*, plays in which comic conventions are undermined to varying extents by their increasingly negative depictions of monetized societies.

Although the idea that money can play a significant thematic role in literature hardly seems novel, only recently has a stream of literary criticism emerged that deals specifically with viewing works through a fiscal lens, namely, what has come to be known as "new economic criticism." One of the early seminal works in this area is Marc Shell's *The Economy of Literature*, in which literary texts are described as being "composed of small tropic exchanges or metaphors, some of which can be analyzed in terms of signified economic content and all of which can be analyzed in terms of economic form." Shell continues by arguing that "one goal of literary criticism is to understand the connection between the smallest verbal metaphor and the largest trope. The economy of literature seeks also to understand the relation between such literary exchanges and the exchanges that constitute the political economy."<sup>4</sup> In that statement of principles, Shell's final emphasis locates the correlation of the fiscal and the fictional in the realms of deconstructionism and cultural materialism with their attendant concern for the paradigms of power. Over the course of the 1990s, this stream of criticism grew immensely, primarily in the areas of eighteenth and nineteenth-century literature, and, at the same time, it moved beyond the constricts of politically-driven

criticism to embrace broader cultural and historical concerns. Mark Osteen and Martha Woodmansee opine that one reason for what they term “a tidal wave of scholarship investigating the relations among literature, culture and economics” is that “the critical pendulum has decidedly swung back toward historicist methods and away from deconstruction [and] semiotics. . . .”<sup>5</sup> While historical contextualization remains one of the mainstays of new economic criticism, the field has evolved into what Ivo Kamps terms a “big tent” approach. He notes that among its “practitioners we find those who reveal new historicist, Marxist, feminist and cultural materialist tendencies, but we also encounter an attention to language and genre that evokes the updated reincarnation of Formalism, the so-called New Formalism.”<sup>6</sup> Douglas Bruster, in turn, views new economic criticism as “an open unity, an emergent mode of criticism defined by its willingness to treat the economic basis of social interaction both in and out of literary texts,” adding, “Far from a disabling condition, in fact, the diversity of approaches under its tent remains one of this mode’s greatest potential resources.”<sup>7</sup>

The exploration of Shakespeare’s representations of economically-based societies which follows is built upon two foundations, the first of which is the methodology of the “New Formalism” referred to by Kamps above. While the tendency of much literary criticism in the last few decades has been to extract and concentrate on select portions of text in order to divine overall meaning, the intention here is to put the plays under discussion, in their entirety, under a microscope with a focus on close readings. This is not to suggest, however, that the analysis will be confined to arbitrary glosses of metaphors, imagery and discrete words and phrases, even though the language of commerce which permeates these plays allows for ample interpretive possibilities. Rather, I will explore how the relationship between words, patterns of discourse and the dramatic context within which discourse occurs all coalesce in order to suggest probable meaning. While there is no denying an inherent instability to words in and of themselves, the consideration of a text in its entirety, coupled with intuitive common sense, facilitates interpretation and the assignation of specific significance to lexical items. Thus, when Shylock states, “I crave the law, / The penalty and forfeit of my bond,”<sup>8</sup> it is possible to discern that his use of a financial term fundamentally differs from Timon’s explanation for his largesse: “. . . ’tis a bond in men.”<sup>9</sup> The semantic multiplicity of words evident in these two quotations, rather than rendering interpretation impossible, can enable the reading of both speaker and dramatic text. In this case, Timon’s abstract, almost-feudal spin on the word “bond” in the midst of a society that lives and breathes the monetary ethos informs our understanding of his character. What is central to this

work is how words are *used*, how fiscal language recurs to form metaphoric patterns, how words associated with the quantifiable dealings of commerce transform into signifiers of qualitative values and how the endemic employment of discursive tropes based on mercantile principles debases interpersonal relationships.

The emphasis on close reading, however, should not be construed as a nostalgia for the narrow tenets of New Criticism and its treatment of literary works as closed, autonomous systems. The plays explored herein, perhaps due to their relative singularity in the Shakespearean *oeuvre*, do not only exist as five separate pieces of literature; instead, as will become evident, they have an almost dialogic relationship with one another. Moreover, such intertextual considerations, especially in the area of genre, extend to Shakespeare's other plays. How works like *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *The Merchant of Venice* differ fundamentally from other Shakespearean comedies through their interconnecting of love and money makes their depictions of romantic relationships all the more significant. Against a Shakespearean backdrop of Arden and Illyria, the cash values of Windsor and Venice (and Belmont as well) become subjects of interrogation, and, by extension, the role of money in the formation of societal norms is called into question. The ultimate objective of analyzing the design of the plays in question and their function within a larger literary context is hermeneutic. Rather than subscribing to a belief that the meaning of texts is endlessly indeterminate, the aim of this work is to locate the "operative intention," defined by Steven Mailloux as "the actions that the author, as he writes the text, understands himself to be performing in that text and the immediate effects he understands these actions will achieve in his projected reader."<sup>10</sup> Close reading is the means towards that end. At the lowest level, words in isolation carry both literal and metaphoric meaning; considering the word in discursive context winnows the often vexing multiplicity of meanings encountered. In turn, through the scrutiny of the discursive patterns of an entire text and its relationship to a larger literary context, the recovery of probable meaning is an achievable goal. While this is far from an exact science (as the word "probable" attests), the burden of proof is not any less onerous; that proof must originate in the text itself.

Complementing this formalism-of-sorts, or "New Formalism" as some would have it, is a recognition of the major role historical contextualization can play in the search for meaning. Underpinning the diachronic approach taken herein is a belief that the relationship between history and literature is dialogic. Accordingly, given the premise of this work, it would seem that Mailloux's "operative intent" would be all but unattainable without an effort

to understand the economic circumstances that prevailed in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. As argued by David Scott Kastan,

. . . literary scholars have increasingly (or, more properly, once again) insisted that literary texts are not autonomous and self-contained, and have sought their meanings not only in terms of the formal relations of the work itself but also in its necessary connections to a cultural context that the literary work seemingly both requires and alters. Turning to history to recover these contexts, literary scholars have often brilliantly connected the internal structures of the literary work to the wider cultural environment that motivates and sustains it.<sup>11</sup>

The consideration of the socio-economic environment Shakespeare worked within that follows unavoidably depends largely on the work of historians; however, in common with new historicist practices, non-literary primary texts also have a role to play. For example, John Wheeler's *A Treatise of Commerce* and its depiction of how mercantile principles were endemic in the early seventeenth century provide a cultural and historic context for the examination of exchange values in *Measure for Measure*. However, the intent has been to use such material judiciously and to eschew the bread and butter of new historicism, namely, ". . . the single voice, the isolated scandal, the idiosyncratic vision [and] the transient sketch."<sup>12</sup> Writers such as Wheeler and Raleigh are introduced to the discussion in the belief that the works cited are representative of major currents of thought at the time of writing (while being fully cognizant of the pitfalls inherent in such subjective judgment and generalization). The intent has been to provide a broad picture of economic trends and practices that have a more or less direct bearing on the thematic concerns of each play. While the emphasis in the discussion which follows is unapologetically on Shakespeare's texts themselves, the historical is integral to the argument; as Osteen and Woodmansee note, ". . . without an explanatory context, economic terms seem to have been randomly chosen rather than dictated by intratextual, intertextual and extratextual dynamics."<sup>13</sup> The way in which socio-historic actualities such as the economic imperatives of marriage practices and the "morality versus commerce" battle over usury manifest themselves in his work demonstrates that, although Shakespeare may be "for all times," he was undeniably also a product of his own economic times.

Of particular interest in the following work is Shakespeare's portrayal of the impact of the monetary ethos at the level of the personal. While discussing the intersection of economics, history and literature may be viewed

in some quarters as an opportunity to explore class antagonism and power structures, that work is best left to those engaged in cultural materialist and Marxist criticism. Gabriel Egan argues, “In a Marxist view economics is the underlying force that gives shape to everything else, even consciousness.”<sup>14</sup> The limited truth of this claim is apparent in the five plays to be examined—“limited” because it represents only one Shakespearean point of view. These plays are peculiar in the manner in which they run against the philosophic grain of other Shakespearean works, especially in the context of the comedies. Cash values and transactional economies are at their heart, and, in this respect, Marx’s views on the subject of money are relevant as they uncannily express what Shakespeare dramatically suggested centuries earlier. To paraphrase Kenneth Muir, Shakespeare may or may not have been a proleptic Marxist, but Marx was certainly a Shakespearean.<sup>15</sup> Tom McAlindon points to one of the shortcomings of Marxist criticism being its propensity to “function deductively in accordance with a universal law of causation which renders the intentions of both author and character irrelevant.”<sup>16</sup> While Shakespeare was elsewhere demonstrably interested by political and power dynamics, the supplanting of humanistic<sup>17</sup> values by marketplace ones is what underpins these four comedies and one very singular tragedy. In short, the approach taken herein is “Marx if necessary, but not necessarily Marxist.”<sup>18</sup> To varying extents, Ephesus, Windsor, Venice, Vienna and Athens all embody early modern English economic values and practices played out small, and the human fallout is the central concern here.

At the risk of treading well-worn ground, it bears repeating that the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were a time of profound change in English socio-economic thinking. As Theodore Leinwand observes,

What *has* been written about, and for some time now, is the way the early modern English period complexly elaborates an historical transition, at once epistemological, ideological, and material, from what has been variously rendered as status to contract, from sacred to secular, ascription to achievement, finite to open, fixed to contingent, use to exchange, bounty to profit, feudal to (nascent) capitalist.<sup>19</sup>

While recognizing that trying to delineate what constituted and caused those changes in a few short pages is a foolhardy enterprise at best, the need to contextualize the arguments which follow dictates that at least an attempt be made. Much of this broad overview of trends within the Elizabethan and Jacobean socio-economic scene has been written about much more extensively by historians and those engaged in historically-bent literary criticism, some of whose

work will be cited below as occasion arises. Certain specific issues will also be addressed in chapters where they are germane to the argument, such as the status of the early modern merchant class and how that plays out in *The Comedy of Errors*. In all of the works to be discussed in detail, Shakespeare blurs the line between social and economic relationships and depicts the ascendance of cash and exchange values. What seems evident is that Shakespeare's thematic concerns in this area reflect what was happening around him.

In his discussion of the early modern English market economy, Leslie Clarkson argues that “. . . the doctrine of self interest was firmly entrenched as a guide to economic behavior even though it was sometimes questioned,” adding that “by the end of the sixteenth century, the victory of the gospel of profit maximization was virtually complete.”<sup>20</sup> The “victory” Clarkson refers to occurred in a philosophic as well as an economic arena; Jonathan Hall typifies the battle thus: “The contemporary debate involved two opposing concepts of wealth, the traditional agrarian one whose measure was production from the land for consumption and fulfillment of bodily needs (in Marxist terms, ‘use values’), and the mercantile one whose measure is money power for further expansion (‘exchange values’).”<sup>21</sup> Given Hall's framing of the opposing sides, changes in agriculture seem fittingly exemplary of how the world had shifted.<sup>22</sup> At the end of the Middle Ages, farming was for the most part carried out at the subsistence level—from the peasant whose holdings fed his family to larger gentry-owned estates that provided for an often-large staff and retinue that resided thereupon. Over the course of the sixteenth century, population growth and urbanization combined to increase the demand for agricultural products, which resulted in rising farm commodity prices. The opportunity to profit from this led to larger farming operations with lower costs and higher outputs, the end result being the displacement of peasant farmers through the twin practices of enclosure and engrossing. Furthermore, as Richard Halpern writes, “. . . a good fourth to a third of the rural population was composed of cottagers, squatters, and wage laborers whose land tenure and economic status were so insecure that they could easily be dispossessed by a variety of other means, such as entry fines and legal challenges, if landlords chose to do so.”<sup>23</sup> Because enclosed land could be let out at much higher rents, landowners, who themselves were suffering from inflationary trends, “put aside,” as Christopher Clay notes, “old fashioned notions about relationships with their tenantry.”<sup>24</sup> Faced with a resistance to enclosure that bordered on rebellion, the government enacted laws in the second half of the 1500s to slow the inexorable movement toward larger-scale commercial farming. That the ethos of money ultimately won out over humanitarian concerns is evident in Clay's summation:



By the seventeenth century . . . articulate public opinion was increasingly inclined to favour agrarian change, as the concern about its social consequences, which had preoccupied the writers of the early and mid sixteenth century, gave way to an appreciation of the economic advantage to the nation of a more efficient and productive agriculture.<sup>25</sup>

One of the “social consequences” engendered by agrarian change and England’s burgeoning population<sup>26</sup> was a growing number of landless, impoverished people. Many who had formerly survived off the land turned to wage laboring, but an expanding labor pool and inflation combined to create a class of working poor: “. . . by the 1610s, [wage rates] of agriculture labourers were down to 44 per cent of what they had been in the later fifteenth century.”<sup>27</sup> One outcome of rural poverty was a large-scale migration to urban centers, especially London, of people in search of work. Between 1576 and 1603, the capital’s population expanded from 180,000 to 250,000<sup>28</sup> and, as noted by Peter Ramsey, “Studies of urban communities in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century suggest that perhaps half their population lived in direst poverty and squalor, on the edge of total destitution and starvation.”<sup>29</sup> Clay describes the result of this migration as “. . . the development of a highly visible substratum to urban society . . . surviving by begging, prostitution and crime.”<sup>30</sup> Those who took to the road looking for work and those who arrived in London and other cities were increasingly viewed as a threat to social order, which resulted in a succession of acts to deal with the problem in ways both punitive and charitable. For example, poor laws enacted in the 1590s on one hand promised whippings and jurisdictional expulsions for beggars as well as prohibitions on new housing in London’s suburbs, while, on the other, strengthened compulsory poor rates. Such levies were necessitated by both a decline in sources of charity and the growing magnitude of the problem. “The expansive ‘hospitality’ of the very rich gradually went out of fashion after the mid sixteenth century . . . [and] traditional sources of funds for poor relief had ceased, on their own, to provide sufficient money in many of the larger towns even in normal times by the later sixteenth century.”<sup>31</sup>

Downward mobility was not only a phenomenon at the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum. During the 1500s and early 1600s, the plight of more than a few members of the nobility and gentry manifested the changing economic times as well. Different factors affecting the upper classes were in play; for example, rising taxation levels in the 1590s and a succession of bad harvests caused financial difficulty for the landed gentry

“ . . . by undermining the ability of their tenants to pay rents and fines.”<sup>32</sup> Quite often, however, massive overspending caused a decline which Lawrence Stone connects to the shift from feudal values to sixteenth century economic reality:

. . . the most important factors working for an abnormally high level of expenditures were the moral obligations imposed upon a nobleman by society to live in a style commensurate with his dignity; and confusion between the feudal ideal of generous hospitality and stately living in the country and the Renaissance ideal of sophisticated patronage and display in the town.<sup>33</sup>

The need to maintain appearances in inflationary times led to heavy borrowing, which, in turn, led in many cases to the sale of land and a descent in social status. The profligacy of some nobles and the attendant economic fallout was also reflected at court after James' accession. The lavishness of the Stuart court undoubtedly contributed to an increase in the crown debt, which grew tenfold in the first five years that James was on the throne.<sup>34</sup> In order to raise funds, unpopular economic stratagems were implemented such as increased taxation and an expansion of the sale of monopolies. That feudal ideals were giving way to economic imperatives is exemplified in James' putting knightships on the auction block to generate income.

While there were many who suffered economically in the late Tudor and early Stuart period, others thrived. For example, as the times grew more litigious, especially in the area of land ownership, lawyers prospered, with some amassing fortunes to rival those of the greater gentry. As well, the engrossers who converted arable land to grazing pasture profited handsomely as wool exports grew. Meanwhile, the merchant class reaped huge financial rewards via the expansion of overseas trade.<sup>35</sup> As described by L. C. Knights, there arose “ . . . a class of 'new men'—clothiers, financiers, merchants, entrepreneurs [who] . . . owed their power not to the possession of land, like the old feudal nobility, nor to political-administrative talents, like the newer members of the Tudor aristocracy, but solely to their business ability.”<sup>36</sup> With England's swelling population keeping labor costs low, the opportunity for enrichment through trade and manufacturing was ideal; as John Maynard Keynes points out, “the greater part of the fruits of the economic progress and capital accumulation of the Elizabethan and Jacobean age accrued to the profiteer rather than to the wage-earner.”<sup>37</sup> One group widely perceived to be villains in the new economic reality were middlemen. The evolution of England's economy from the scale of the local medieval markets to a vast

network of internal and external trade necessitated someone to connect producer and consumer. However, the needs of capitalist enterprise were met with a mistrust founded in feudal morality; middlemen, producing nothing and profiting from the work of others, were denounced from the pulpit and widely blamed for rising prices, particularly in agricultural goods. “The hostility shown towards middlemen,” Clarkson notes, “was itself an index of their increasing importance.”<sup>38</sup>

The increasingly commercial nature of governance provided opportunities for economic advancement both in the civil service and at court. Luminaries such as Raleigh and Leicester benefited from Elizabeth’s practice of “allow[ing] . . . ministers and courtiers . . . to enrich themselves by securing long leases of Episcopal lands.”<sup>39</sup> Clarkson identifies Robert Cecil as the epitome of fortune-amassing servants of the crown: “Successively as Secretary of State, Master of the Court of Wards and Lord Treasurer he had unrivalled opportunities for making money by fees, bribes, speculation and the acquisition of land; at his death his income was probably at least 25,000 [pounds] a year.”<sup>40</sup> The extensive granting of monopolies by the crown was a source of societal friction and a further example of changing times. Medieval-style localized guilds, which still existed into the early modern period, not only controlled industries and trades, but also served social and charitable functions for their members and communities. Fuelled by self-interest, monopolies under Elizabeth and James expanded and became an exchange commodity by which debts could be paid and courtiers rewarded; national in scope, they offered great return for those that secured them. Unsurprisingly, most new monopoly holders cared little for the guilds’ tradition of social responsibility.<sup>41</sup>

While all of the circumstances outlined above paint a picture of a society increasingly dedicated to agendas of acquisition, perhaps nothing more embodies how the demands of nascent capitalism trumped old-world moral values than the sixteenth-century debate over usury.<sup>42</sup> The hostility toward lending money at interest and laws prohibiting it dated back to the Middle Ages, largely founded in Biblical injunctions against the practice. Like the middleman, the usurer was viewed as an exploiter who profited without risk off the backs of others. However, ethical qualms were confronted by a mercantile and industrial expansion which required ready supplies of fluid capital. “Credit was the bedrock upon which prosperity was built, and so long as it was available commerce would expand.”<sup>43</sup> Despite various laws enacted against it, usury was a widespread practice, and, despite continued moral objections, it was legalized in 1571 with interest rates capped at ten per cent. As Clarkson notes, “. . . by the beginning of the seventeenth century most

discussions of interest assumed that it was the price of capital and not the mark of man's fall from grace; and the focus of debate became the economic consequences of high or low rates of interest."<sup>44</sup> Once legalized, usury was not only a source of capital for those that needed ready funds, but also a generator of wealth for those who practiced it. In fact, many merchants abandoned the risks of overseas trade to take up the relatively worry-free business of moneylending once it became legal. In the end, what is startling is how, within a few generations, the pragmatic needs of capitalism transformed a practice that was morally anathema into an accepted, if not respectable, part of England's economic life.

Along with living and working in times of profound change in English socio-economic thinking, morality and practices, Shakespeare was also part of a simultaneously-evolving literary culture. The events of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries outlined above provide a context in which literature that reflected economic concerns and attitudes becomes more readily understandable.

Texts of a non-literary nature, such as anti-usury tracts, reveal aspects of contemporary thinking, and a great deal of criticism, especially new historicist, has, over the past few decades, convincingly formed connections between them and the poetry, drama and fiction of the early modern era. However, the broad historical contextualization of thematic concerns *within* literary texts and how economics constitute a recurring motif are more the objectives here, as the dialogue between history and literature offers considerable interpretive opportunities. Looking at this premise from the other disciplinary side, Laura Stevenson argues that ". . . the historian who is alert to the social potential of literary expression can gain insight into the assumptions of the society he studies by examining the artistic paradigms men created in order to make sense of the changes around them."<sup>45</sup> What emerges from the historical overview offered above is that England's social and economic transitions engendered societal uncertainty as change produced both winners and losers. Accordingly, the ascendance of cash and exchange values was both celebrated and vilified in early modern literature. In works that dealt with economic matters, two distinct streams evolved. In the eyes of some authors, money and the pursuit of it was indeed the root of all evil; for others, the new economic age was romanticized as a golden time of untrammelled opportunity. While the former portrayed the monetary ethos as a dehumanizing force, the latter often adopted an almost missionary zeal as if to assuage the fears and suspicions spawned by mercantilism. Stevenson's survey of 296 popular Elizabethan works found ". . . eighty that were concerned with merchants, clothiers, craftsmen

and the economic and moral context of their lives,"<sup>46</sup> a figure which indicates that audiences as well as playwrights were interested in the intersection of financial and human experience. Jean-Christophe Agnew argues that the literature of the time suggests that "Britons . . . [were] feeling their way round a *problematic* of exchange; that is to say, they were putting forward a coherent and repeated pattern of problems or questions about the nature of social identity, intentionality, accountability, transparency, and reciprocity in commodity transactions—the who, what, when, where, and why of exchange."<sup>47</sup> How these issues and money itself were manifested by Shakespeare's literary forebears and contemporaries is of interest in that, as we assume that Shakespeare did not exist in a cultural vacuum, the differences and evolution of *his* approach inform the effort to understand his intent.

The fascination with man as an economic being was certainly well-established by the time Shakespeare took up his pen. Morality interludes, for example, had invariably depicted material values as being antithetical to spiritual ones. One of the prominent aspects of Thomas More's *Utopia* was the utter rejection of wealth as a measure of personal worth, with its underlying message being that gold, with its non-existent use-value, was in the end a divisive societal force. Among Shakespeare's early contemporaries, perhaps Spenser's Cave of Mammon in Book II of *The Faerie Queene* constitutes the era's most overt indictment of cash values. What Guyon encounters there are the ideals of acquisition rendered grotesque, as Mammon, a filthy and taloned incarnation of the lure of worldly wealth, attempts to seduce the knight of temperance by offering power enabled by gold. The world he extols is revealed to be a fearful, frenzied one of eternal pain and strife, one in which the extinction of humane values is manifested by men kicking each other down in their effort to climb a golden chain. Yet while Guyon has a clarity of moral vision at the beginning of the episode, deeming riches to be the "roote of all disquietnesse; / First got with guile, and then preserv'd with dread,"<sup>48</sup> his near-death at the end of the canto conveys the Herculean effort needed to resist the lure of material riches.

In the 1592 anonymous tragedy *Arden of Feversham*, the abandonment of moral principles for monetary gain is tied to contemporary English economic trends as public and private agendas coalesce to portray greed as a source of societal breakdown. Mosby, the adulterous lover of Arden's wife, is willing to kill in order to achieve wealth and social position. The internal conflict engendered by shifting economic mores is evident in one of his soliloquies, which contrasts a traditional work ethic with the monetary values that now consume him:

My golden time was when I had no gold.  
 Though then I wanted, yet I slept secure;  
 My daily toil begat me night's repose,  
 My night's repose made daylight fresh to me.<sup>49</sup>

The play's title character, in contrast, betrays no such misgivings. However, our response to Arden is complicated by the play's portrayal of him, on one hand, as an innocent cuckold and, on the other, as a rapacious landowner, the latter ultimately precluding any sympathy for him. Architect of his own downfall, his acts of enclosure have wrought an economic despair that drives two dispossessed men to attempt his murder. The world we encounter in *Arden* is one in which all interpersonal relationships are grounded in financial exigencies, a world that has lost its moral compass. The other great Elizabethan drama that places *homo economicus* at its centre is Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, one of the most popular plays of the 1590s. While Barabas himself patently embodies a materialist ethos, Marlowe also portrays the society which condemns him as operating under the same principles. As the Turkish bashaw claims in the play, "The wind that bloweth all the world / [is] desire for gold."<sup>50</sup> The commodification of humanity is rampant in Malta, as evidenced by Lodovick's negotiating a price for the affections of Abigail and the Christian slave auction. Stephen Greenblatt, while noting that greed is at the heart of the play, observes,

To be sure, other values are expressed—love, faith, and honor—but as private values these are revealed to be hopelessly fragile, while as public values they are revealed to be mere screens for powerful economic forces. . . . Barabas' avarice, egotism, duplicity and murderous cunning do not signal his exclusion from the world of Malta but his central place within it.<sup>51</sup>

Dramatic condemnations of monetized societies and their values also came with regularity via the stock character of the grasping usurer. Evidently, the antipathy toward lending money for profit did not end with its legalization in 1571. For example, in Lodge and Green's cautionary tale *A Looking Glass for London and England*, a monstrous character named, in the tradition of moralities, simply "Usurer" is the ruination of a young man who falls into his clutches. Merchants who had taken up usury are satirized in Chapman, Jonson and Marston's *Eastward Ho!* through the figure of Security, who feeds upon the sexual and economic needs of the prodigal apprentice Quicksilver. A walking confirmation of the age's suspicions about the trade, Security extols

the easy money of usury by pointing out that its profits are not subject to the weather and wind like farming and mercantile trade. Somewhat conventional in its moral message (some would say to the point of parody), *Eastward Ho!* depicts both the triumph of feudal values such as knowing your place and the newer value of making one's fortune by hard commercial work. As well, through Security, the issue of undeserved social mobility via wealth meshes with qualms about usury, creating a theme which emerges in several plays of the period; as Stevenson points out, "The Jacobean usurer . . . acquire[s] a new vice; he has lost his morality-play role as a figure of greed only to gain a new stereotype of the social climber."<sup>52</sup>

Jacobean Citizen Comedy was, of course, rife with inverted values and men and women motivated solely by the prospect of getting rich. Through playwrights such as Middleton and Jonson, early seventeenth-century London had an unflattering mirror held up to it that showed the endemic corrosion of a humane society. The growing cynicism evident in this genre was likely spurred in part by the transition from the Elizabethan to the Jacobean age and the avarice and court corruption which marked the latter. Yet, despite the widespread portrayals of money's deleterious effects on society ranging from Spenser's Mammon to Jonson's Volpone, there were writers who viewed England's evolving values as fodder for works that affirmed the capitalist ethos. As a case in point, although *Eastward Ho!* shows the vacuity of material values, it also, through the apprentice Golding, argues that these were indeed golden times. Representative of a newly economically-mobile generation reared on the tenets of industry, he rises in station and outstrips the charity and wisdom of his master, Touchstone, demonstrating the forward and positive evolution of mercantile ethics.

One of Golding's literary forerunners is John Winchcomb, Thomas Deloney's titular exemplar of entrepreneurial capitalism in *Jack of Newbury*. A relentless piece of propaganda for the new economic order, Deloney's prose work relates the rags-to-riches story of a weaver who prudently uses his wealth for the betterment of his community and the commonwealth. There are no malcontents in his economic empire as all are well taken care of, and his personal relationship with an admiring royalty sanctions the emergent capitalist class by granting it an equal place among the nobility. In Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, the conflation of mercantile and state interests surfaces once again in the play-ending banquet attended by an anachronistic Henry V. This early example of Citizen Comedy betrays none of the animosity towards the monetary ethos one associates with the genre. Instead, the career of Simon Eyre, a bluff incarnation of Elizabethan probity, demonstrates that trade and industry not only produce riches, but also offer an

entrée into the higher echelons of civic and political life. That Eyre replaces an old world snob, Oatley, as Lord Mayor confirms the desirability of the rise of the “new man.” Such positive representations of the nascent capitalist “aristocracy” reach an apotheosis of sorts in Thomas Heywood’s 1605 *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody* Part II, a play Brian Gibbons succinctly typifies as “mercantile hagiography.”<sup>53</sup> The story of the merchant Hobson and Thomas Gresham, the founder of the Royal Exchange, celebrates their trade practices, patriotism and benevolence, with their elevated status legitimized by what seems to be a requisite of this genre—a mutually complimentary encounter with royalty. During the course of the play, the fortunes of the peddler Tawnycoat, a victim of the economic times, take a turn for the better as if to suggest that no one is precluded from partaking in England’s prosperity if they are thrifty and hard-working. Additionally, as Theodora Jankowski points out, “. . . the charitable dealings of Gresham and Hobson manage to naturalize the more rapacious aspects of mercantile capitalism and make it socially as well as economically desirable.”<sup>54</sup> In his *Apology for Actors*, Heywood argues the didactic power of theatre thus: “. . . so bewitching a thing is lively and well spirited action, that it hath power to new mold the harts of the spectators and fashion them to the shape of any noble and notable attempt.”<sup>55</sup> The lesson Heywood patently wished to impart through his “chronicle” play is that wealth and power in the hands of the merchant class was of desirable benefit to all; even the lowly bricklayers cry out “God bless Mr. Gresham.”<sup>56</sup>

Given the historical and literary milieu, what seems remarkable over the course of Shakespeare’s prolific career is how little of his work directly or indirectly confronts the economic realities of his time through plot. Shakespeare not only lived in a period of rising capitalism, he was also an active participant. While mindful of resisting the lure of biographic criticism, certain aspects of his life bear at least brief mention, such as his father’s involvement with usury, his accumulation of wealth and land and his professional life in the theatres of London, locales which Bruster argues “can best be understood in terms of commerce, as centers for the production and consumption of an aesthetic product.”<sup>57</sup> Yet, as Sandra Fischer points out, “Seldom in Shakespeare is an economic plot the sole or major focus . . .”<sup>58</sup> as it is in so many works by his contemporaries, especially in the Jacobean era. However, when they do address the monetary ethos, his plays eschew the well-trodden paths taken by others. For example, the transformation of the stock cartoonish usurer into the moral dilemma that is Shylock belies the simple black-and-white reductionism such an easy target invites. Unlike a large number of Jacobean playwrights, Shakespeare never wrote a pure city



comedy that directly ridiculed the money-driven ethics of London's middle class; instead he offers *Measure for Measure*, a highly problematic comedy that seems unconcerned with generating laughter, a play in which a world implicitly predicated on exchange values is held up for our consideration. When love and money do cross paths in his work, he resists the obvious fortune-hunting lesser character in favor of a romantic lead like Bassanio, who may or may not be motivated by greed, and matches him with the economically-minded Portia. Moreover, instead of having obvious social-climbing mercenaries like the Yellowhammers in Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* arrange profitable matches for their offspring, we are asked to evaluate an established pillar of Windsor's middle-class society, Mistress Page, in the same role. When Shakespeare does finally and unambiguously meet economic issues head-on, it is through *Timon of Athens*' world-turned-nightmare of rampant exchange and cash values. The four plays alluded to above, along with *The Comedy of Errors*, are those in which Shakespeare concerns himself directly with the monetary ethos. Notably, it is only in the earliest play, *Errors*, that a society is able to withstand its corrosive effects. In light of the literary polarities that existed, i.e. the satiric and the celebratory, it appears that, while Shakespeare may have started in the middle, he ultimately reacted strongly against the Deloney-Heywood vision of the world. In the twenty-odd years between *Errors* and *Timon*, it seems almost as if the onward march of nascent capitalism in England had a cumulative effect on the playwright for whom exploring the human condition is always at the centre of his work. Perhaps the words of Touchstone can best provide a framework for the following examination of Shakespeare's "economic plays": "' . . . And so from hour to hour we ripe and ripe, / And then from hour to hour we rot and rot; / And thereby hangs a tale.'"<sup>59</sup>

To concentrate on five plays is by no means to suggest that they were the only venues through which Shakespeare explored the economic, as financial language and imagery permeates his oeuvre regardless of genre. For example, Fischer, in her excellent examination of the Lancastrian tetralogy, detects therein "a cluster of tropes [which constitute] a pattern that equates human relations with economic transactions, and at its base is an experimentation with new ways of finding identity and defining human value in the context of a quickly developing social-exchange mentality."<sup>60</sup> In the tragedies, the world is at times reductively interpreted through fiscal precepts; Lear's question of his daughters, "Which of you shall we say doth love us most?"<sup>61</sup> attempts to place quantifiable value on that which cannot be quantified, with the answer determining the gain or loss of the Renaissance's quintessential material prize—land. In *Macbeth*,

the feudal ideals of obligation are couched in a lexicon of debt and repayment; as Laurie Maguire notes, “. . . the play uses fiscal conceits to express social bonds . . . [with] money function[ing] symbiotically and symbolically . . . as an emblem of society, kinship, of human ties.”<sup>62</sup> The financial mindset even infects the romances, perhaps the most humanistic of Shakespeare’s works, as evidenced by Constance Jordan’s observation of *Cymbeline*: “Iachimo is all calculation: to him, Posthumus appears to be ‘of crescent note,’ like a bill of exchange that increases in value as its term nears expiration.”<sup>63</sup> At other times in the romances, however, commercial language is used to belie the mercantile ethos; such is the case of Hermoine’s refusal to reduce her humanity to an exchange value when condemned by Leontes in *The Winter’s Tale*: “To me can life be no commodity.”<sup>64</sup>

Beyond Shakespeare’s metaphoric use of fiscal language, issues which come to play-length fruition in works such as *Measure*, *Timon* and *Merchant* occasionally surface as isolated set pieces in other plays, two instances of which merit consideration in the current discussion. The first is Philip Faulconbridge’s second-act soliloquy in *King John*; a just-concluded political deal prompts a tirade against

That smooth-faced gentleman, tickling Commodity,  
Commodity, the bias of the world;  
The world who of itself is peised well,  
Made to run even upon even ground  
Till this advantage, this vile-drawing bias,  
This sway of motion, this Commodity,  
Makes it take head from all indifferency,  
From all direction, purpose, course, intent.  
And this same bias, this Commodity,  
This bawd, this broker, this all-changing word . . . <sup>65</sup>

In this diatribe, the Bastard configures all the energies of the world as being consumed by self-interest and locates this ethos in a word borrowed from finance. The idea of “policy” and all its Machiavellian implications are linguistically conflated with the morality of the capitalist world-view, ultimately tarring political and financial gain with the same contemptuous brush. While a world deviating from its axis imparts a lack of principled fixity, the triple equation of “bawd,” “broker” and “word” effectively levels the ethics of the whorehouse, marketplace and political arena. His speech culminates in a manifesto that equates political ambition with monetary acquisition:

. . . But for my hand, as unattempted yet,  
 Like a poor beggar railleth on the rich.  
 Well, whiles I am a beggar, I will rail  
 And say there is no sin but to be rich;  
 And being rich, my virtue then shall be  
 To say there is no vice but beggary.  
 Since kings break faith upon commodity,  
 Gain, be my lord, for I will worship thee!<sup>66</sup>

Here, individual morality, when translated into fiscal parlance, is shown to be purely subjective, an idea furthered by “sin” and “virtue” being defined only by where one happens to be standing relative to their shifting coordinates, wealth and poverty. In the final couplet, the victory of mercenary secularism is proclaimed, as antiquated church-based ethics no longer apply. In effect, the Old Testament worshipping of the golden calf has become the way of the world. Yet a certain self-knowledge is evident in the above speeches; rather than embracing the philosophic stance he gives voice to, Faulconbridge seems to be adopting a persona, one that acknowledges that this is what you have to do to make your way in the world. While the Bastard’s subsequent actions in part contradict the ethical position taken in this scene, his reliance on commercial language to describe a world of moral vacuity speaks volumes. It also presages the societies Shakespeare would later create in Vienna and Athens.

A second notable instance of Shakespeare injecting the economic into a work otherwise largely unconcerned with monetary issues occurs late in *Romeo and Juliet* when Romeo attempts to procure the poison that is forbidden by law to sell. Confronted with the Apothecary’s demurrals, Romeo appeals to his need:

Romeo: Art thou so bare and full of wretchedness,  
 And fearest to die? Famine is in thy cheeks,  
 Need and oppression starveth in thy eyes,  
 Contempt and beggary hangs upon thy back.  
 The world is not thy friend, nor the world’s law;  
 The world affords no law to make thee rich.  
 Then not be poor, but break it and take this.  
 Apothecary: My poverty, but not my will, consents.  
 Romeo: I pray thy poverty and not thy will.<sup>67</sup>

Given Romeo’s frenzied impatience in the scene before, this pause to delineate the plight of the urban underclass draws attention to itself. As the apothecary

himself seems to function as an embodiment of Romeo's despair at this point in the play, Shakespeare's choosing to put an economic face on that despair is significant. Despite the brusqueness of Romeo's words, a sympathetic recognition of the plight of the impoverished is perceptible in his evocation of the Apothecary's "need and oppression." What we perhaps glimpse in this brief scene are the hordes of destitute working poor that inhabited London in the late 1500s; the "contempt" they faced is acknowledged, and empathy, rather than condemnation, underlies Romeo's speech. In a world wherein financial inequity results in starvation, a breakdown in social order is all but inevitable; thus, violating Mantuan law becomes a pragmatic rather than a moral consideration. Romeo concludes the scene with a tirade against money that cannot help but seem somewhat arbitrary, as only tenuous connections can be made between it and the overall thematic concerns of the play. It almost appears as if Shakespeare was determined to inject a condemnation of the monetary ethos into his tragedy of over-hasty love:

There is thy gold, worse poison to men's souls,  
Doing more murder in this loathsome world,  
Than these poor compounds that thou mayst not sell.  
I sell thee poison; thou has sold me none.<sup>68</sup>

The ultimate culprit for the world's misery is not man, but what motivates human action—money. As Maguire observes, "This sequence of poverty/money/gold-as-poison could have come from the pen of a Marxist philosopher rather than that of a lyric poet."<sup>69</sup> The overt and bitter antipathy for gold that emerges in this scene is a motif that would lie largely dormant in Shakespearean drama for over a decade until it burst violently to the surface once again in *Timon of Athens*.

That the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries saw feudal values and economic practices give way to those of nascent capitalism has become a virtual commonplace among historians and literary critics alike.<sup>70</sup> The struggle between these two worldviews is an underlying thematic concern of two vastly different plays: *As You Like It* and *Troilus and Cressida*.<sup>71</sup> Although their lack of an overall narrative emphasis on economic concerns precluded their being accorded chapter-length investigations, their indirect representations of the transitional nature of the early modern English economic scene warrant more than a cursory glance. In his introduction to *Shakespearean Pragmatism*, Lars Engle relates his work to a milieu in which the dichotomy between two value systems seems almost tangible, saying that his book

. . . presupposes that a general and partly visible transition from medieval to early modern ways of thinking about things, and from feudal to early capitalist modes of economic organization, was taking place all around Shakespeare. Thus what we might call an actual economy was visible to Shakespeare as a social and political force for the deconsecration and, often, destabilization of hierarchies.<sup>72</sup>

Engle's reference to "hierarchies" points to the revolution in social structure that was a hallmark of the early modern period. The status-based society of the Middle Ages was no longer holding by the late sixteenth century, as military service, hereditary title and land ownership had ceased to be the central determinants of social position; wealth, in and of itself, became increasingly the mark of the man. D. M. Palliser notes that "A middle class or bourgeoisie developed with its own corporate sense of identity distinct from those above and below. It was acquisitive, commercially minded and economically progressive."<sup>73</sup> The emergence of this class without ties to "feudal values" heralded a decline in the medieval concept of fundamental bonds existing between men. Clarkson's observation that "self interest was firmly entrenched as a guide to economic behaviour"<sup>74</sup> underlines the erosion of the doctrine of mutual societal obligations in the early modern era. The fissure between two ways of life is evident in the split between Arden and court and between the Greek and Trojan camps in *Troilus and Cressida*.

Before Shakespeare's kaleidoscopic exploration of love, *As You Like It*, yields entirely to comedic concerns, economic undercurrents periodically surface, offering a contrast between old and new world values. The play opens with Orlando bristling under the constraints of primogeniture, making him not uncommon in the ranks of younger sons. By the end of the sixteenth century, their plight often resulted in a removal from the ranks of the land-based gentry and assimilation into the new economic order. Clarkson writes, "If their older brothers would not provide for them they had to seek their livings by serving at court or in the professions, or even by becoming apprenticed to tradesmen," noting also that "Among the lower orders younger sons of owner-occupiers sometimes descended to the ranks of landless labourers or industrial wage earners. . . ."<sup>75</sup> While Orlando's insistence on the value of his birth and blood indicates an adherence to status-based hierarchies, his rebellion against the strictures of a system dating back to the Middle Ages, coupled with his belief that the

future can be bought, also marks him as a “new man.” The entrepreneurial spirit is evident in the demand he makes of his oppressive brother, Oliver: “. . . give me the poor allottery my father left me by testament. With that I will go buy my fortunes.”<sup>76</sup> Oliver reaps the rewards of feudal privilege, and the court society he is part of is autocratic and morally corrupt, its hatred of the good and banishment of the innocent carried out without reason. In contrast stands old Adam, who incarnates romanticized feudal values—in particular, fealty and selflessness. When he shares his life savings with Orlando, it bespeaks a disregard for cash values, his gold having worth not as a marker of status or the means to material acquisition, but rather as a vehicle for effecting humanistic good. However, Adam’s advanced age implicitly marks him as anachronistic, reflecting Paul Delaney’s argument that “Where the feudal ethic had exalted service to a superior as the most honourable of human bonds, the bourgeois era regarded it as an intrinsic violation of individual dignity.”<sup>77</sup> Orlando’s subsequent nurturing of his faithful servant who grows weaker as the play progresses seems a metaphorical attempt to maintain a set of feudal values that are inexorably waning. The fact that Adam disappears midway through the play and is never spoken of again cannot help but be seen as a resigned acceptance of the death of those values.

Despite the disappearance of old Adam and what that implies, the Arden into which Orlando ventures nostalgically evokes a value system that was well past by the time *As You Like It* was written. The first words we hear from Duke Senior explicitly derogate the materialism of the outside world and elevate the feudal ethic of his alternate court: “Now, my co-mates and brothers in exile, / Hath not old custom made this life more sweet / Than that of painted pomp?” (II.i.1–3) The bonds between these men who “live like the old Robin Hood of England” (I.i.110–11) are patently non-economic. Far removed from mercantile principles of exchange and the acquisitive instinct, Arden is a golden world that embodies a natural economy; the labor of men is subsistence-oriented, and the garnered “riches” produce communal feasts to which all are welcome.

Beyond the life of the exiled lords, however, the pastoral enclave of Arden is subject to both internal and external economic trends. For a brief moment when Rosalind and Celia first encounter Corin, Shakespeare seems to be reminding us of the world outside. The cousins’ offer to exchange gold for food and their subsequent purchase of the cot and farm are indicative of the power money wields in the world at large. However, juxtaposed to Rosalind and Celia’s casual reliance on wealth to smooth their road is Corin’s depiction of the lot of an agricultural laborer:

. . . I am shepherd to another man,  
 And do not shear the fleeces that I graze,  
 My master is of churlish disposition,  
 And little recks to find the way to heaven  
 By doing deeds of hospitality.  
 Besides, his cot, his flocks, and bounds of feed  
 Are now on sale, and at our sheepcote now  
 By reason of his absence there is nothing  
 That you will feed on. (II.iv.77–85)

Corin's master's rejection of the feudal ideal of "hospitality," as well as his disregard for the bond between servant and master, are the signs of the callous breed of "new men," while the imminent sale of the farm evokes the transitional economic realities of agriculture outlined earlier. Marx's argument that "the circulation of land as a commodity . . . is practically the result of the development of the capitalist mode of production"<sup>78</sup> carries a certain resonance in *As You Like It*. Corin's belief in the value of hospitality differentiates him from his master on levels other than the obvious, and, during a spirited bit of repartee with Touchstone, he espouses a veritable credo for use values and an idealized peasant life:

Sir, I am a true labourer. I earn that I eat, get that I wear; owe no man hate, envy no man's happiness; glad of other men's good, content with my harm; and the greatest of my pride is to see my ewes graze and my lambs suck. (III.ii.69–73)

That he bests Touchstone, who espouses modern court values, in their undeclared battle of wits attests to the validity of Corin's worldview.

*As You Like It* does, however, eventually move beyond such concerns to concentrate on the real matter at hand—the consideration of love. By its end, the egalitarian non-monetized world of Arden is shown to be ephemeral despite its transformative effects, as all (except Jacques) must return to the reality which lies beyond its confines. With fortunes and position returned, these Dukes and Lords, wiser for their experience, will presumably better their society; by implicit comparison, old world values have been proven to be worth pursuing. No such reassurance, however, is offered amidst the rampant cynicism one encounters in *Troilus and Cressida*. While it is difficult to imagine two plays farther apart in ideology and tenor, the way in which feudal values are held up against capitalist/mercantile ones provides

an interesting point of comparison. The movement towards a marketplace ethos appears inexorable in *Troilus*, and Shakespeare's outlook on the world is decidedly less optimistic.

The primary objective of *Troilus and Cressida* seems to be nothing less than a complete dismantling of ideals. This is most apparent in its taking a tale of Homeric grandeur and reducing it to, as Thersites puts it, an "argument . . . [about a] whore and a cuckold."<sup>79</sup> The old world value of chivalry is rendered laughable in the play, and Achilles effectively writes *finis* to notions of fair play and honor at its end. The principles of the new world fare little better; the mercantile ethos is portrayed as a deceptive sham (I.iii.353–7) and the prevailing exchange economy proves dehumanizing as Cressida is reduced to a commodified bargaining chip passed literally from hand to hand. Bruster argues that "It was no accident that Shakespeare chose the Troy myth for his satirical 'comedy' [as] . . . London looked on Troy as its progenitor and its double . . .,"<sup>80</sup> a claim which adds weight to Vivian Thomas' view that "there can be no doubt that Shakespeare was very conscious of the social and economic changes taking place in his society and that these developments find expression in the play."<sup>81</sup> Despite its affinity with *Measure for Measure* via its representation a society predicated on exchange values, the concerns of *Troilus and Cressida* are so myriad that it is difficult to locate the economic at its heart.<sup>82</sup> Yet its representation of feudal and mercantile values in two scenes that run in parallel, the meetings of the Greek and Trojan councils, is important to the present discussion as the play seems to reject both worldviews and offers nothing in their place, as if to suggest that there is no longer anything to turn to or believe in.

The centerpiece of the Greek council scene is Ulysses' remarkable "degree" speech, in which he identifies what he perceives to be a fundamental threat to ordered society:

. . . everything includes itself in power,  
 Power into will, will into appetite;  
 And appetite, an universal wolf,  
 So doubly seconded with will and power,  
 Must make performe an universal prey,  
 And last eat up himself. (I.iii.118–23)

While "appetite" is often glossed as "envy," this vision of greedy consumption was perhaps equally intended to evoke the rapacity of a world wherein the usurer, the middleman and the corrupt courtier act only out of self-interest and for material gain. The social mobility engendered by the elevation of



wealth as a barometer of status is, by extension, metaphorically condemned in Ulysses' picture of the disregard of rank in the Greek camp:

The general's disdain'd  
 By him one step below, he by the next,  
 That next by him beneath; so every step,  
 Exempl'd by the first pace that is sick  
 Of his superior, grows to an envious fever  
 Of pale and bloodless emulation. (I.iii.128–33)

The fear Ulysses provokes is not only of military insubordination, but also of a chaos resulting from a restructuring of a rank-based society. The premise that extratextual contemporary concerns are at play is furthered by his claim “Degree being vizarded, / Th’unworthiest shows as fairly in the mask” (82–3) being redolent of the anxiety that prompted the array of sumptuary laws that were enacted throughout the 1500s in England.<sup>83</sup> However, the alternative proposed to counter the social and moral anarchy he envisages, while evoking the social structure of feudalism, fails to even pay lip service to positive medieval values such as mutual obligation and inherent bonds existing between men; instead he reduces all to a hardnosed reliance on hierarchy and “degree.” If all that can be offered by an ostensible spokesman for the feudal ethos is a return to aristocratic and autocratic rule, then the monetized status quo of the early seventeenth century that has been evoked cannot help but seem, by implication, no better or no worse. What Ulysses purports to stand for is, in the end, undermined by his being a singularly specious proponent of old world values. As Richard Hillman argues, “Ulysses’ conservative rhetoric thinly overlies a commitment to power broking premised on the assumption that social structures, even individual identities, are not fixed, but subject to manipulation and construction.”<sup>84</sup> Moreover, his thinly-veiled contempt for Agamemnon and Nestor<sup>85</sup> belies his belief in the observation of hierarchy, and his manipulation of the lottery that chooses the unfit Ajax as Greek champion confirms him to be a Machiavellian hypocrite.

A few scenes later, Troilus comes off little better for different reasons. The Trojans, whose literary heritage stems from a Chaucerian tradition devoted to the ethics and mythos of a chivalric code, by the end of their council accept an ethos founded in the subjective valuations of the marketplace rather than fixed principles. In their world, commodification and the language of the marketplace seem all but unavoidable. The first to speak in the debate over Helen's fate is Hector, who denies her personal identity and intrinsic worth by objectifying her as “a *thing* not ours, nor worth to us . . .” (II.ii.21). Helen's extrinsic

worth is measured by him in two ways: first through her value relative to Trojan casualties (“Every tithed soul ’mongst many thousand dismes / Hath been as dear as Helen—I mean of ours” [18–9].) and second, through a metaphor of cold economic calculation: “. . . she is not worth what she doth cost / The keeping”(50–1). Ironically, Troilus, the supposed scion of romantic idealism, similarly reduces her to a *thing* using language suggestive of economic calculation; she is both “. . . a pearl / Whose price hath launched a thousand ships” (80–1) and “a worthy prize”(85).<sup>86</sup> While they may differ on the subject of Helen’s fate, both men subscribe, albeit Troilus more than Hector, to a non-essentialist view of human value. As Terry Eagleton points out, “Troilus means formally that Helen has launched a thousand ships because she is a pearl, but there is an implication that she is a pearl *because* she has done so; it is the activity she has given rise to which confers value upon her, not her inherent value which justifies that activity.”<sup>87</sup> The belief that value is context-driven is the belief of the marketplace, where the laws of supply and demand are but one of many factors which determine worth and its corollary, price. While Troilus may extol Helen as “a theme of honour and renown” (198), his reliance on mercantile imagery undermines his lofty rhetoric, imbuing his argument with the values of an exchange economy. The examples are numerous: Hector is accused of weighing the “worth and honour of a king” in a vendor’s “scale / Of common ounces” (25–27), and the Trojans have “bought a Grecian queen” (77) who cannot be returned like soiled linens to a merchant (68–9), a queen who is perversely praised for turning “crowned kings to merchants” (82).

Beneath the discussion of Helen’s fate lies a debate over the existence of intrinsic worth, an argument Georg Simmel frames as follows:

Just as we represent certain statements as true while recognizing that their truth is independent of our representation, so we sense that objects, people and events are not only appreciated as valuable by us, but would still be valuable if no one appreciated them. The most striking example is the value that we assign to people’s dispositions or characters, as being moral, dignified, strong or beautiful.<sup>88</sup>

In a pivotal exchange in this scene, Shakespeare manages to distil the entire question of intrinsic value to just a few lines:

Hector: Brother, she is not worth what she doth cost  
 The keeping.  
 Troilus: What’s aught but as ’tis valued?  
 Hector: But value dwells not in particular will:

It holds his estimate and dignity  
 As well wherein 'tis precious of itself  
 As in the prizer. (II.ii.50–55)

In six all-encompassing words, Troilus' question encapsulates a world lacking fixed principles, one in which material and humanistic values have become one in their subjection to pragmatic and personal valuation. This is the kind of mindset that enables the moral stigma of usury to be washed away by the needs of the marketplace and the bonds of mutual obligation to be superseded by economies of scale. Hector's response, while fusing objective and subjective valuation in the determination of worth, at least recognizes the essentialist view of intrinsic values that Simmel argues above. The Trojan champion, described by James Bulman as "the emblem of constancy to an ideal that Troilus longs to be,"<sup>89</sup> represents a stability of ethics that is not totally dependent on the principles of market evaluation, and, as Eagleton points out, "There seems little doubt that in *Troilus and Cressida* Shakespeare sides with Hector against Troilus in their heated exchange over the question of Helen's value."<sup>90</sup> As if to underline their respective stances, the actions of Troilus and Hector over the course of the play personify their positions. Troilus' evaluations are subject to time and mood. For example, the man who vigorously asserts Helen's worth in this scene had earlier dismissed her value as a creation of public opinion: "Fools on both sides: Helen must needs be fair, / When with your blood you daily paint her thus" (I.i.88–9). Certainly, the mutability of his perception of Cressida at various points of the play also attests to the instability of subjective evaluation.

Hector's eventual and distressingly swift capitulation in the Trojan council scene and his treacherous murder by Achilles at the play's end cannot help but suggest that his ideal of fixed ethics is no longer sustainable. At the same time, the play's ultimately pathetic rendering of Troilus in no way endorses the alternative worldview he represents. Similarly, while the disappearance of old Adam in *As You Like It* imparts a waning of feudal values, the reinterpretation of those values by Ulysses in order to fend off a world in transition is shown to be an utter sham. What we seem to be left with is a changing universe that offers nothing to believe in.

The chapters which follow offer readings of Shakespeare's most overt explorations of the impact of the monetary ethos on societal values in general and on interpersonal relationships in particular. These plays arguably constitute a distinct subgroup within his oeuvre, and their outcomes bear testimony to an evolution in Shakespeare's approach to such issues. Happy endings, such as *The Comedy of Errors*' with its familial and romantic reconciliations

overcoming the values of the marketplace, prove to be unsustainable. It would be left to the comedies wherein money plays no readily discernable role to carry on that tradition. In the bourgeois and mercantile milieus of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *The Merchant of Venice*, respectively, economic victories seem to take precedence over affective ones. And, while *Measure for Measure* and its world of exchange values offers no reconciliation whatsoever at play's end, all that had gone before seems almost preferable to the nihilism that is *Timon of Athens*' depiction of a completely monetized society. As the world Shakespeare lived in evolved, so too did the worlds he created, and the England Francis Bacon perceived when he spoke of "the idolatry that is generally committed in these degenerate times to money as if it could do all things public and private"<sup>91</sup> increasingly resonates in the societies and characters we encounter over the course of these five works.

## Chapter One

# The Merchants of Ephesus and How Money Never Really Mattered

With errant ducats and the purchase of a gold chain largely driving its plot, *The Comedy of Errors* seems at times to be as concerned with the vagaries of commercial exchange systems as it is with mistaken identities. Fittingly, Shakespeare cast men of commerce as the central protagonists of this early farce, an apt choice given the rising profile of the mercantile class in late sixteenth-century England. By the time he wrote *Errors*, the size and scope of English overseas trade was burgeoning. With ships plying their trade from Russia to North Africa, to America and beyond, London was alive with the mercantile entrepreneurial spirit, and merchants were making their fortunes. Yet, as England moved from being a land and title-based society towards a nascent capitalism, the barometers of status were in a state of flux, and those who made their living via commerce occupied an uncertain position in the early modern social hierarchy. Ephesus, the setting of *Errors*, offers for consideration a society which revolves around merchants and commercial concerns, and Shakespeare's portrayal of one chaotic day in its life suggests that he was not completely at ease with the mercantile ethos. Bruce R. Smith, in reference to the couplings that end *Errors*, views the play as a validation of what the commercial trader stood for at the time, arguing that "since all the men in question . . . are merchants, the ending of *The Comedy of Errors* affirms values, ethical and monetary, that belong quite solidly to urban burghesses in the social hierarchy of early modern England."<sup>1</sup> Such a reading, however, is problematic on a couple of fronts. First, the societal position held by merchants at the time Shakespeare was writing was not quite as fixed as the term 'urban burghesses' might suggest, and, second, upon examination, the play, instead of celebrating the values incarnated by the mercantile class, paints a rather unflattering picture of them.

Long regarded as 'mere farce' or as an exercise in adapting Plautus, *The Comedy of Errors* has more recently accumulated critical capital by virtue of

its exploration of what constitutes personal identity. Indeed, Antipholus of Syracuse's "drop of water" speech<sup>2</sup> and his bewildered bondsman's questions of "Am I Dromio? . . . Am I myself?" (III.ii.72–3) add philosophic weight to what on the surface is a knockabout comedy by calling into question how individuals define the self. However, the act of self-discovery in *Errors* seems inextricably linked to considerations of a financial nature. Jonathan Hall's claim that the play's "crisis is not a metaphysical affair but an economic and semiotic one"<sup>3</sup> rings true because, beyond the mixing up of twins, the play is certainly about money. In fact, Shakespeare uses the word "money" more often in *Errors* than in any other play he wrote—twenty-six times. As well, the words "gold," "mart," "ducat," and "merchant" appear at a pace rivaled only by *The Merchant of Venice* and *Timon of Athens*, two plays that wear their economic concerns much more openly on their sleeves.<sup>4</sup> The market atmosphere which permeates *Errors* further contributes to the impression that economics lie at the play's thematic heart. Gabriel Egan notes that "in *The Comedy of Errors*, as later in *The Merchant of Venice*, merchants whose living is the endless exchange of one commodity for another come to experience that process enacted on themselves."<sup>5</sup> Georg Simmel's argument that "the technical form of economic transactions produces a realm of values that is more or less completely detached from the subjective-personal substructure"<sup>6</sup> is manifested on a human level in the play as the subjectivity of the Antipholi comes under continual fire. Moreover, the process by which dissimilar commodities assume an equal value in monetized societies via a third ostensibly objective criterion, cash value, is suggested by much of *Errors*' action. The brothers are interchangeable in the eyes of Ephesus despite anything they might say in protest, and the primary marker which enables this leveling of identity is pointedly material—the ubiquitous gold chain.

While much of *The Comedy of Errors* is adapted from Plautus' *Menaechmi*, Shakespeare's expansion of his source material imparts a desire to focus on the commercial aspects of urban life. Opening his play with Egeon, the pathetic merchant whose tragic circumstances stem from his occupation, was purely Shakespeare's invention and only one of many changes effected from his classical source that point to an underlying thematic concern with economic matters. For example, the locale shifts from Epidamnus to Ephesus, a renowned commercial trading centre. As well, Shakespeare populates his Ephesus with an expanded cast of merchants whose dealings and priorities form the basis of *Errors*' comedic action. Finally, questions of ownership in *Errors* revolve around not an article of clothing as in the *Menaechmi*, but an item wrought of that quintessential symbol of a money-fixated world—gold.

Beyond the obvious comedic potential his source material offered, Shakespeare may well have been intrigued and inspired by the framing story related by the parasite, Peniculus, at the beginning of *Menaechmi*. In it, he explains that the Antipholi twins were separated when one boy accompanied his merchant father on a trading expedition, during which another merchant snatched him up amid the confusion of the marketplace.<sup>7</sup> In effect, this is the story of a child who becomes a virtual commodity that changes hands between men who buy and sell in a commercial setting, a mart that is configured as a site of familial division. Although Plautus does not travel down any thematic alleys presented by his premise, Shakespeare's expansion consistently considers the mercantile underpinnings of human relations. While *Errors* is not overtly about the financial nexus which was becoming increasingly prevalent in the late sixteenth century, the human ramifications of that shift seem to continually percolate beneath its surface.

As evidenced by Plautus' child-swapping merchants and the protagonists of *Errors*, not to mention all of Willy Loman's forebears, the man of commerce has long been a ubiquitous presence in literature. Among the sundry characters who gather at the Tabard in *The Canterbury Tales* is a pilgrim identified simply as "a merchant"; in common with many of his fellow travelers, he is defined not by name, but by what he does. Despite his being deemed by the narrator to be a "worthy man,"<sup>8</sup> Chaucer's Merchant is not on the same social level as the Knight or the Squire. Typical of the portraits drawn in *The General Prologue*, his relatively short description offers contradictory evidence of his nature. As noted by David Williams, "While on the one hand he is described as solemn, worthy, and stately, on the other hand he is also a thoroughgoing materialist, deceitful, and totally dedicated to profit making."<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, despite the Merchant's resplendent attire, he seems to be secretly in debt.<sup>10</sup> In other words, any intrinsic worth in the man is to be viewed as superficial at best, his only real quality of note being his outward display of wealth. Given Shakespeare's familiarity with Chaucer, this ambiguous portrait may well have provided the germ for his creation of Antipholus of Ephesus, a man "of credit infinite" (V.i.6) who is arrested for non-payment of debt. While the Ephesian Antipholus' problems are the result of a single day's mishaps, the precarious position of those dependent on the fruits of commercial exchange is perhaps indicative of underlying problems with the entire system. Antonio's plight in *The Merchant of Venice* a few years later would offer further proof of this proposition. In any event, it would appear that in the two hundred-odd years between *The Canterbury Tales* and *The Comedy of Errors*, the stock of the merchant character had not appreciated considerably.

In the social hierarchy of the medieval estates, the merchant was a relatively minor player; however, by the time Shakespeare wrote *Errors*, the idea of a rigid feudal status-based society had all but passed, as the new measure of a man's position was increasingly that of wealth. If money was indeed the mark of the new man, then the man of trade stood poised to assume a higher position in the English pecking order than he had hitherto taken. As asserted by Sir Walter Raleigh, “. . . whosoever commands the trade of the world commands the riches of the world, and consequently the world itself.”<sup>11</sup> For centuries, wealth had been conceived largely through land ownership, but, by the late 1500s, that marker of class status was less and less the exclusive domain of the landed gentry. Monies generated from mercantile enterprise, particularly overseas trade, were flowing into the purchase of land, and merchants, who formerly had occupied no particular place in the English class structure, were now turning into gentlemen. With the unprecedented expansion of foreign trade, the numbers and resources of merchants were growing at a rapid pace, but not without engendering societal unease. As noted by L. C. Knights, “The desire of those newly enriched by trade to become landed proprietors accounts for a good deal of the contemporary social dislocation.”<sup>12</sup> Laura Stevenson also argues that the practices of those involved in various aspects of trade “aroused mixed feelings in a conservative society, and their wealth raised serious questions about the place of rich businessmen in the social hierarchy.”<sup>13</sup> The marked ascent of the mercantile class grew apace under Elizabeth and James I, but, as far back as 1551, Edward VI's indignation that “. . . the grasier, the fermour, the merchaunt become landed men, and call themself gentlemen, though they be churles”<sup>14</sup> demonstrated an underlying hostility towards these socially mobile “new men.” Despite such misgivings, the power and influence of the merchant class in the public sphere continued to expand. The monies generated by overseas trade through customs duties were a major source of government revenue, and mercantile wealth was a dependable and convenient source of loans for the crown.<sup>15</sup> In addition, as argued by Susan Doran, “[Henry VII and Elizabeth] appreciated that commercial expansion would not only enhance royal revenues but also create the impression of power and glory.”<sup>16</sup>

The blurring of distinctions between the gentry and the new men of commercial trade was by no means a one-way street comprised of social-climbing merchants buying up property. Although the landed classes generally considered commerce to be beneath them, some members of the gentry were only too willing to revive their flagging fortunes by marrying their sons and daughters into mercantile wealth. As well, those in business



had ready money to lend that could provide breathing space for profligate gentlemen who had fallen on hard times. But perhaps the most interesting development of the late 1500s was the entry of the landed classes into the mercantile world via the formation of joint stock companies. Enterprises such as The Merchant Adventurers attracted numerous investors from society's upper echelons, including such luminaries as Lord Burghley and Philip Sidney. Apparently, the profits generated by overseas trade expeditions and privateering served to motivate both merchant and gentleman, and the line between them grew thinner still. Although money may have been to some extent a class-equalizing force, attitudes engrained over centuries did not die easily. Writing about the joint stock company phenomenon, Theodore Rabb observes the following:

It must be remembered, too, that despite their associations with commerce the landed classes still retained some of the contempt for trade which characterized this stratum of society throughout Europe. The Renaissance ideal of the courtier stressed other pursuits, and the merchant's profession was never held in the highest esteem.<sup>17</sup>

The stated motivations of those involved in joint stock companies spoke volumes as well; while the merchant class unabashedly pursued profit, the gentry often cited loftier goals to justify their participation, such as colonization and exploration.<sup>18</sup> The merchant may have been emblematic of the "new man" spawned by a new capitalist economic order, but his singular focus on monetary return and nouveau-riche status made him somewhat suspect and denied him respect. The inability of merchants to fully integrate into the upper echelons of the English class structure is evident in John Wheeler's *A Treatise on Commerce* in which a spirited, albeit a touch overly-defensive, argument is advanced championing the mercantile class:

. . . yet there are of the notablest and pricipallest traffickers which are ashamed and think scorn to be called Merchants; whereas indeed merchandise which is used by way of proper vocation, being rightly considered of, is not to be despised, or accounted base by men of judgment, but to the contrary by many reasons and examples it is to be proved that the estate is honourable, and may be exercised not only by those of the third estate . . . but also by the Nobles and chieftest men of the Realm . . . without any derogation to their Nobilities, high degrees, and conditions.<sup>19</sup>

The ambivalence displayed by English society toward the merchant figure is certainly reflected in early modern literature. As outlined in the Introduction, the man of commerce would see himself alternately portrayed as an immoral profitmonger and as a golden exemplar of a new economic age. However, the adulation came less frequently; as John McVeagh argues, in sixteenth-century literature, “the new note is of growing hostility to commercial men, and of distrust of the natural tendency of commercial enterprise in its own right.”<sup>20</sup> A prime example offered by McVeagh is Udall’s 1553 *Respublica*, in which the business practices of the ‘avarice’ character include bribery, counterfeiting and the embezzlement of the customs. At approximately the same time that Shakespeare was debuting *The Comedy of Errors*, Christopher Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta* was also being staged. From its prologue by Machiavelli which segues to a scene of Barabas greedily conferencing with two merchants about his shipping enterprises to its point-blank question, “. . . who is honoured now but for his wealth?,”<sup>21</sup> Marlowe’s play relentlessly indicts the capitalist ethos. The thirty-six performances between 1591 and 1596 recorded by Henslow suggest that, beyond the obvious dramatic appeal of Barabas’ cartoon villainy, the play’s overall socio-political stance may have struck a chord with its audience as well. What is overt in *The Jew of Malta*, however, is rendered more subtly in *Errors*; whereas Marlowe mocks Malta’s Christian ethics by depicting a slave auction in which every man literally has a price, the arbitrary cash value put on Egeon’s life in Shakespeare’s play implicitly condemns the exchange values which facilitate the objectification of men.

The principal setting of *Errors* is the mart of Ephesus, where seemingly all the relationships between the men who gather there revolve around commercial transactions. However, reading Ephesus as the London that Shakespeare lived in—a city in which mercantile influence was pervasive in the 1590s—does not seem that large a stretch. David Bevington’s observation that “the cast is very English, for all the play’s being set in Ephesus”<sup>22</sup> supports this notion of geographical displacement, as does Dromio of Ephesus’ talk of having spent “a sixpence” (I.ii.55). It seems arguable then that, beneath the broad physical humor that marks *Errors*, Shakespeare also offers a critique of contemporary English commercial trade and the “new men” of the era. The trade war between Ephesus and Syracuse, the extra “merchant” characters that were not in Plautus, and the consistent use of financial language, among other factors, all point to a common thematic thread. Justifiably, the gold chain and bag of ducats as defining marks of men have been viewed by some as being emblematic of a rising materialism in the sixteenth century.<sup>23</sup> However, in common with all of Shakespeare’s works, the key to

discerning the play's underlying ideas lies, in part, in the construction of its characters. While *Errors* has seldom been lauded for the strength of its characterizations, it manages, amidst all of the confusion, to carve out three very different representative incarnations of men caught up in a new economic order. Through an examination of them, the play's stance towards the fiscal mindset becomes easier to discern.

The play opens with Egeon, Merchant of Syracuse, who, instead of being a dynamic "new man" of the "new order," is a spent man whose occupation has brought him to the brink of tragedy. One of his sons, Antipholus of Ephesus, appears to be a successful bourgeois businessman whose life centers on economic transactions—until it unravels due to those same transactions. The system he has bought into fails him utterly. Egeon's other son, Antipholus of Syracuse, whose profession is never explicitly mentioned, is subtly and not-so-subtly linked to the mercantile mindset as well—so much so that one can easily forgive critical assumptions such as Smith's claim that "all the men in question are merchants." However, the Syracusan is made of different mettle than his brother, as evidenced by his constant vacillation between his three obsessions: money, romance and existentialist questioning. Through his musings, priorities, and personal evolution, the philosophic heart of *Errors* can perhaps be detected. As we watch him virtually recreate himself, Antipholus of Syracuse offers hope of rising above a world in which money makes the man.

As many have observed, the opening scene of *Errors* seems pointedly out of synch with the play that follows. The melancholy tone of Egeon's tale, the promise of a tragic outcome and the focus on characters who are absent for the bulk of the play all provoke the question of why it was included. Moreover, the dramatic action of the first scene has no overall plot relevance and is not sourced in *Menaechmi*. Granted, Egeon's reintroduction in the fifth act does add a measure of poignancy to the unraveling of identities, but the Abbess' connection to him seems as contrived as his play-opening trial and sentencing. Although some productions of the play such as the 1984 BBC version work to establish Egeon as a looming presence within *Errors*, this is purely a directorial decision, as nothing in the playscript demands it. Apart from the revelation of how the two Antipholi came to be separated, Egeon's backstory and fate virtually constitute a second play fronting the main one.

In the context of his "extended family," the Antipholi, the Dromios, and the Abbess, Egeon stands apart in one particular aspect—his identity is never a source of misdirection.<sup>24</sup> In the opening lines of the play when addressed by the Duke, Egeon is identified and, by extension, defined by his profession: "Merchant of Syracuse" (I.i.3). In doing so, the Duke reduces

him to a type, and, in a play that hinges on identity issues, Egeon is what Egeon does. This reduction is not of the Duke's doing alone; it appears that Shakespeare might have regarded Egeon in much the same way. In the first Folio version of *Errors*, which has been argued as originating from an authorial manuscript,<sup>25</sup> Egeon's first-act speech headings are designated simply "Mer(chant)." This renders him virtually indistinguishable from the other nameless merchants who share the same designation in the First Folio. In effect, Egeon becomes a quasi-"Every-merchant" who learns the ephemeral worth of material possessions, and the picture that is drawn of him and the world of mercantile trade is hardly an adulatory one.

The dehumanizing and destabilizing effects of mercantilism are immediately apparent in *Errors* as Egeon finds himself under sentence of death not because of any word or deed on his part; instead, he is caught up in a trade war, or as the Duke grandly puts it, "mortal and intestine jars / Twixt [Egeon's] seditious countrymen and us" (I.i.11–12). Having been at sea for five years, Egeon is presumably ignorant of the dispute; nevertheless, he finds himself, as a "merchant of Syracuse," a pawn in it. The new economic order engendered by the growth of international trade has become one of "enmity and discord" (5). Rather than bringing nations together out of reciprocal interests, mercantilism has led to political insularity and hostility. Shakespeare did not have to dig far back into English history for a prototype of the circumstances he establishes in Ephesus. In 1585, Philip of Spain, retaliating against English privateers, placed an embargo on trade with England and ordered English shipping and goods in Iberian ports to be seized. English sailors and merchants ran the risk of imprisonment or even death if found within Spanish waters. Anthony Miller writes, "Though the national enmity was based on religion, Englishmen believed that Spanish persecution was in practice motivated by profit" and links this belief to *Errors* via Ephesus' potential windfall from Egeon's goods or ransom.<sup>26</sup> But, however tempting an England-Spain / Syracuse-Ephesus equation might be, the possibility of *Errors* constituting an exercise in Spain-bashing seems improbable, as neither side comes off particularly well in the play. Both states seem all too willing to extend the principles of commercial exchange to include the purchase of life and liberty. Merchants of Ephesus, "wanting guilders to redeem their lives," (8) have been put to death by the Duke of Syracuse, and Solinus is prepared to execute Egeon "unless a thousand marks be levied / To quit the penalty" (21–2). The Ephesian Duke does go beyond state policy, however, and betrays his monetarist values when he assigns an arbitrary worth to the Syracusan, saying, "Thy substance, valued at the highest rate, / Cannot amount unto a hundred marks" (I.i.23–4). Although Solinus may mean

Egeon's goods by "substance," more likely this is, as put by Alexander Leggatt, a "crude measuring of human life in financial terms."<sup>27</sup> The equation drawn, however, also anticipates a thematic concern that Shakespeare would later explore in greater depth, namely, that for those caught up in the monetary ethos, there is fundamentally little difference between, to use Antonio's words in *The Merchant of Venice*, "purse" and "person."<sup>28</sup>

Egeon's predicament seems doubly arbitrary and unjust, given that he has not arrived in Ephesus in the capacity of merchant. His quest is for familial gain, rather than financial, and the history he relates is that of a commercial trader brought low. In years past, Egeon has apparently been the model of an upwardly mobile merchant, his monetary worth linked to his happiness: "I liv'd in joy; our wealth increas'd / By prosperous voyages I often made . . ." (I.i.39–40). Realizing a return on his investments, however, appears to have taken priority over his domestic responsibilities, as his factor's death in Epidamnum and "the great care of goods at random left" drew him from the "kind embracements of [his] spouse" (I.i.42–3). This separation from his pregnant wife at the behest of his business presages the prolonged familial rupture that has brought Egeon to his present circumstances. The primacy of the marketplace in Egeon's world is further betrayed when he relates how the Dromios came into his family. The second set of twins was neither adopted nor taken under wing; seeing an opportunity in their family's poverty, the Dromios were simply "bought, and brought up to attend [Egeon's] sons" (I.i.57). Effectively, the Syracusian's words render children as a commodity, and the potential of an extended family is reduced to material terms.

Departing from Plautus, who separated the *Menaechmi* family on land, Shakespeare offers up an elaborate tale of storms and strife at sea to explain the division of Egeon's family. This shift is consistent with reading the first scene of *Errors* as a cautionary tale against the mercantile worldview. One of the greatest, if not the worst, economic dangers faced by sixteenth-century merchants was the loss of a fully laden ship at sea. A few years after *Errors*, *The Merchant of Venice* would make such an eventuality the agent of Antonio's undoing. Egeon, however, is ruined by human loss, rather than material; the cargo lost when his ship is split apart proves invaluable, leaving him, in his words, "sever'd from my bliss" (I.i.118). By the time we encounter him, his voyages are no longer purposeful trading expeditions; instead, they consist of "roaming" and "coasting" (133/134) in search of that which he has found irreplaceable. Egeon, in effect, has renounced the ethos of acquisition and embraced more traditional and humanistic principles. He stands before Solinus a penniless, friendless old man, resigned to his fate, and seemingly oblivious to the fact that the financial nexus his life formerly revolved around

has been reduced to an arbitrary valuation of his life. The first merchant character that Shakespeare creates is hardly the brash, newly-gentrified captain of industry that was so visible a figure in the London of his day. Instead we have a man who has learned that the joys engendered by profits are fleeting and that wealth lies in the familial, rather than the material. He comes before us a penitent, yet ultimately insignificant victim of the international marketplace's strife.

The Duke's enforcement of a law that places a price upon a man's life is entirely in keeping with the tenor of the city he presides over. Historically, Ephesus was a commercial and banking centre, and, in *Errors*, Shakespeare peoples it almost exclusively with those involved in trade. As the play moves from the first scene's somber and somewhat improbable tale of financial profit and human loss to the market atmosphere of the second scene, the focus shifts to the more banal reality of living in a world dominated by economics. This thematic concern is underlined by Douglas Lanier, who notes that "Shakespeare . . . obsessively returns to details of trade such as the ubiquitous mart, several merchants added as minor characters, the central place of exchanges of money and goods in nearly all relationships. Taken together, these changes mark the essentially materialist premises of this world."<sup>29</sup> After the first scene's talk of "mortal and intestine jars," the milieu described by Lanier cannot help but seem, in comparison, rather prosaic. However, Ephesus, with all of its day-to-day minor trade transactions, becomes a crucible to test the merits of societies in which honor, reputation and justice can be equated with credit, debt and cash.

The commercial ambiance of Ephesus is evident from the start when Antipholus of Syracuse encounters the generically-named "first merchant," one of several Ephesians in the play whose worldview is filtered through the optics of finance. Given the death sentence meted out to Egeon, the merchant's primary concern for the newly-arrived visitor's property, rather than his life, would seem to speak to his values. As we join the scene in mid-conversation, the first words Shakespeare has him utter are "Therefore give out you are of Epidamnum / Lest that your goods too soon be confiscated" (I.ii.1-2). When the merchant does address Egeon's plight, his phrasing blithely reduces the matter to a failed business transaction and ignores the questionable morality of putting a price on a man's life: ". . . a Syracusian merchant / . . . not being able to buy out his life . . . / Dies ere the weary sun set in the west" (I.ii.3/5/7). Exiting shortly thereafter, he turns down the Syracusian's offer of dinner to attend a potentially lucrative meeting with other merchants. Laurie Maguire succinctly glosses the message imparted by noting that Ephesus is "where a merchant places the fiscal profit of business

before the spiritual profit of friendship.”<sup>30</sup> In a scant thirty lines, this brief encounter communicates much of what we need to know about *Errors*’ setting and the mercantile mindset of its citizenry.

Subsequent scenes involving various merchants further impart the financial underpinnings of Ephesus’ social interactions. Indeed, the only two identified directly in the play, Angelo and Balthasar, bear names that “closely associate them with money.”<sup>31</sup> When they gather with Antipholus of Ephesus for dinner, Balthasar resorts to terms of market valuation to pay tribute to his host’s hospitality, saying “I hold your dainties cheap, sir, and your welcome dear” (III.i.21). Reputation is also measured in fiscal terms; when his word is publicly questioned, Angelo asks, “Consider how it stands upon my credit” (IV.i.68). Later, he uses the same terms to extol the Ephesian Antipholus, proclaiming him to be “of credit infinite, highly belov’d” (V.i.5). The very construction of this line is fraught with meaning; its medial caesura constitutes an implicit “therefore” and establishes an equality between two characteristics that bespeaks the values of this society—namely, being able to meet one’s financial obligations renders one worthy of love. Although Shakespeare is undoubtedly playing with the multiple meanings of “credit,”<sup>32</sup> the context of that line and Angelo’s lexical inclinations work to ensure a financial reading of the term.

The links between men in Ephesus are seemingly all financial in *Errors*: Antipholus of Ephesus owes Angelo for the chain; Angelo owes the Second Merchant the same amount; the Second Merchant needs that money to finance a new business venture. Such dealings were the norm in late sixteenth-century English market towns as well, as much internal trade “was between men known to one another who would allow credit for short periods with little risk of loss.”<sup>33</sup> The events in Ephesus, however, argue that societal bonds based on commercial exchange are not only tenuous, but laughable as well. In fact, almost all of *Errors*’ comedy occurs when transactions go awry and tempers flare, and, as Russ McDonald points out, “The vocabulary of these disputes is almost invariably the parlance of the marketplace.”<sup>34</sup> When the money fails to follow the path it should, the solidarity of merchants is fractured, and men publicly label each other “villain” (V.i.29/32). Furthermore, the genial unwritten custom of the mart proves incapable of resolving conflict, and the community becomes subject to the laws of the state. But in Ephesus, even due process appears to be a transactional commodity. The administration of justice produces a money trail as binding as the one surrounding the gold chain. Angelo must pay the officer a fee for the arrest of Antipholus of Ephesus (IV.i.77), who, in turn, must hand over a purse of ducats to secure his release (106–8). The officer, meanwhile, is loath to

release Antipholus because he would then be responsible for payment of the debt. In such a judicial environment, it is small wonder that death sentences can be rescinded for the right price.

If Ephesus stands as the model of a commercially-minded city, then its resident Antipholus must surely be counted as a model citizen. Barbara Freedman typifies him as “the settled, respectable citizen . . . a pragmatic businessman . . . the Ephesian homebody,”<sup>35</sup> and, indeed, his position in Ephesus seems solid enough when we first encounter him. Interestingly, Shakespeare delays introducing the Ephesian Antipholus until the third act, subtly undermining his importance within the play itself; the events that unfold thereafter effect a similar diminishment within the community. As a dramatic character, he is two-dimensional in comparison to his father and brother, whose background stories provide both motivation and depth. Antipholus of Ephesus, in contrast, comes before us as the newly-created man of wealth whose social status has no apparent historical roots in either land or title. Clarkson argues that “the proper rank of merchants, lawyers and similar professional men was a puzzle to pre-industrial society,” noting also that “as far as society was concerned, the true test [of gentility] was the ability, in a famous phrase, to ‘bear the port, charge and countenance of a gentleman.’”<sup>36</sup> Over the course of *The Comedy of Errors*, Antipholus of Ephesus’ growing inability to fulfill any of those requirements is what effectively robs him of any claims to status or dignity.

Seemingly, all of Antipholus of Ephesus’ social connections are in one way or another of a commercial bent. He enters the play in the company of a goldsmith and a merchant. “Of credit infinite,” the respect he engenders amongst his peers, as discussed earlier, is invariably expressed through the language of finance, a language he uses extensively himself. In his first scene, when barred at his door, he demands of Dromio (of Syracuse, unbeknownst to him), “What art thou that keep’st me out from the house I owe?” (III.i.42) Antipholus’ phrasing here is telling. His residence is not defined as a “home,” a term that Shakespeare uses liberally throughout the canon; rather, its significance lies in its being a material possession, and the source of his anger is twofold—not only is his identity being denied at this point, but also his rights to his chattels. This is the first instance of many in *Errors* of the material marking the man, a trend that Stephen Greenblatt sees as a consistent theme running through Renaissance drama, namely “the intrigue that arises from the willed or accidental mistaking of one person for another centers on property and proper names: purse and person are here inseparably linked.”<sup>37</sup>

In consideration of the relationship between house, home, and identity, it bears noting that Antipholus of Ephesus is only ever seen in the street;



evidently, the mart comprises his particular world. When Adriana asks Luciana why men in general, and her husband in particular, fail to return home, her sister's reply, "Because their business still lies out o' door" (II.i.11), speaks to the conflict in *Errors* between personal and economic priorities. The absence of Antipholus from the domestic space, perhaps due to his dining with "some merchant" (II.i.4), echoes Egeon's neglect of his wife, and the privileging of mercantile concerns appears to be an inherited trait. However, any comparison between father and son ends there, as Egeon's evident affection for his wife is not mirrored in his Ephesian son's spousal relations; apparently, not only the relationships between men are economically-based in Ephesus. Rather than being a love match, Adriana's marriage seems to have been built on financial grounds, as evidenced by Luciana's suggestion that Antipholus may have "wed [her] sister for her wealth" (III.ii.5). This fiscal element is reinforced when Adriana later describes Antipholus as ". . . my husband / Who I made lord of me and *all I had*" (V.i.136–7) (italics mine). Moreover, the Duke appears to have played the role of broker for the nuptials (V.i.138). However, financial foundations are consistently shown to be unstable in *Errors*, and the warring state of Adriana's marriage and her profound dissatisfaction only discredit the idea of marriage as a commercial transaction. This is a theme that Shakespeare would later revisit and expand via the questionable couplings in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *The Merchant of Venice* that are rooted in economic imperatives.

While Gail Paster describes the experiences of the Syracusan Antipholus as "mov[ing] outward from the domestic world to the world of commerce,"<sup>38</sup> the same can be said of the primary signifier of Ephesus' material and value-based society—the gold chain. The majority of personal interactions in *Errors* are touched in one way or another by the question of its possession, an issue which ultimately lays bare the relative worthlessness of relationships forged through economics. In Ephesus, intangibles such as friendship, affection, trust, and respect are, in the end, subordinate to the object, in and of itself. The centrality of the chain speaks to the world that Shakespeare was writing in; as argued by Douglas Bruster, "That the plays of this period should manifest such a heightened, fetishistic interest in commodity only replicates a larger social fascination with the material."<sup>39</sup> The chain, with its forged links, should logically stand as a symbol of societal interdependence, but fails to do so. Its composition of gold, the major monetary metal of the sixteenth century, imbues it with a quantifiable value beyond the metaphorical. The failure of the chain to sustain a consistent meaning as it moves from hand to hand suggests that, by extension, the circulation of wealth is, at best, random and meaningless and, at worst, societally divisive.

All that the chain signifies coalesces in Antipholus of Ephesus, who, having first commissioned it, in the end becomes its chief victim. Initially linked to the domestic sphere, the chain operates on a different symbolic level for Antipholus and his wife. Juxtaposed with her suspicions of infidelity, Adriana's invocation of the chain imbues the material artefact with talismanic value, as if it were capable of either assuring her husband's love or at least guaranteeing his return: "I know his eye doth homage elsewhere, / Or else what lets it but he would be here? / Sister, you know he promis'd me a chain" (II.i.104–6). However, her next line constitutes a virtual dismissal of such signifiers: "Would that alone a toy he would detain, / So he would keep fair quarter with his bed" (107–8). Despite being a native Ephesian, Adriana does not completely embody commercial attitudes in the same way her husband does. He, on the other hand, patently regards the chain as a form of currency, a way to buy marital peace with a "shrewish" (III.i.2) wife. When he is denied entry to his house, that transaction is cancelled, and the chain is then used to buy the favors of the courtesan. Unable to purchase domestic harmony, Antipholus transforms the chain into an economic lever; not only will Adriana be denied marital satisfaction, she stands to lose on a material level as well. With Antipholus' assertion that he will withdraw his present "be it for nothing but to spite [his] wife" (118) adding a particularly nasty edge to the deal, the chain effectively becomes a weapon of conjugal hostility. Having proven ineffective as a vehicle for domestic harmony, the movement of the chain from wife to mistress confirms its natural place in the mart. In a city of profit and gain, the unnamed courtesan signifies the conjugal as a commodity, "turning," as put by Maguire, "Antipholus' sexual and social needs into a business."<sup>40</sup> Unlike Adriana, who is a self-confessed scold, the courtesan offers him "excellent discourse" (109), prompting the suspicion that even language is a marketable good in Ephesus.

From the moment the Ephesian Antipholus takes the stage in *Errors*, the play's primary comedic thrust hinges largely on the relentless humiliation of a smug businessman. As Antipholus appears to be exemplary of his class, it becomes possible to construe his systematic dressing down as an attack on the values he embodies, an attack that shows no deference to bourgeois mercantile burghers. Although we have a strong sense of the position he normally occupies through the words of other Ephesians, *Errors* affords us only the briefest of glimpses of Antipholus at the top of his game. Within moments of his first appearance, his hierarchal position in the home is overturned, as Dromio of Syracuse and a kitchen drudge mock his mounting anger and dismiss his ineffectual orders. The man addressed outside his door as "sir" and "master" (III.i.21/49), by merchant and servant, respectively, is

now uniformly called “knave” (64/74) by his wife and an unknown servant who lie within. The scene ends with his domestic power in tatters; yet his stature in the public sphere seems intact by virtue of the sympathy extended by his commercial confreres. However, the respect he is afforded in the mart is soon proven every bit as ephemeral.

The fourth act of *Errors* begins with the resident Antipholus confident of regaining mastery of his household. Sixty-five lines later, he is publicly arrested for non-payment of debt, as the movements of the gold chain and his brother, unbeknownst to him, seemingly conspire to dismantle all that he has built. Paster alludes to what is really at stake, arguing, “The intensity of the quarrel that erupts between Antipholus and the jeweler is a measure of the sense of personal betrayal on both sides and of the authority of the mercantile code which both believe the other to have violated.”<sup>41</sup> Although Angelo describes Antipholus as being “of very reverend reputation . . . / . . . second to none that lives here in the city” (V.i.5/7), this reputation is evidently based on an ability and/or a willingness to meet his financial obligations, not on any inherent worth. Smith speaks of “two distinct and competing codes of manhood in early modern England,” namely, one based on honor and the other on profit. He posits that, “It is tempting to associate these two ethical codes with the two economic systems that likewise existed side by side in England of the 1590s; the older feudal system based on land and the newer capitalist system based on money.”<sup>42</sup> Tempting indeed, but the point needs to be taken a step further vis-à-vis *Errors*. In this play, Shakespeare seems determined to reveal the new man whose societal standing is built on wealth to be nothing more than a paper tiger. Furthermore, the tenets of societies that raise such men are shown to be entirely suspect.

The scene under discussion above (IV.i) ends with Antipholus of Ephesus’ first face-to-face encounter with the Syracusian Dromio. The relationship between the Ephesian Antipholus and Dromio is predicated on a relentless assertion of power as recounted in the servant’s litany of constant beatings (IV.iv.26–37). Interestingly, in the *Menaechmi*, the Syracusian brother is the more violent, and Shakespeare’s transference of this quality to the resident twin serves to diminish the Ephesian, as audience sympathies undoubtedly lie with the hapless Dromios. The exchange between the master and his “servant” further ruptures Antipholus’ ordered world as the Syracusian Dromio’s talk of a bark for Epidamnum eradicates any predictability in yet another relationship that had previously been a given. At the end of the scene, the Ephesian falls back on a belief in market solutions, sending Dromio for a bag of ducats that will buy his freedom.

The systematic and swift degradation of Antipholus of Ephesus reaches its nadir in a scene which opens with him engaged in the discourse of finance once again; rather than railing against the injustices he has suffered, he is brokering a deal with the arresting officer: "Fear me not, man, I will not break away. / I'll give thee ere I leave thee so much money / To warrant thee as I am 'rested for" (IV.iv.1–3). However, events once again conspire to reveal easy economic equations and solutions as ineffective. Like the chain, the bag of ducats that will secure his freedom takes a path away from the Ephesian. Bereft of material goods that could validate his claims and identity, as well as release him, his final humiliation is being publicly pronounced mad by his wife and subsequently bound and carried off the stage. The parallel between father and son is now complete. Both are at the mercy of Ephesian law due to a lack of friends and funds, and neither has been well-served by the capitalist ethos.

All of the financial situations and humor in *Errors* depend on the premise of the Antipholus brothers being mirror images of each other. But while the mirror provides a surface replication of the original, it also reverses that which it reflects. Such is the case with *Errors*' long-separated twins. While the Ephesian loses the chain, the money, and his identity, those things flow effortlessly to the Syracusan.<sup>43</sup> Robert Miola's observation of the pervasiveness of "locality oppositions . . . in Shakespearean comedy [such as] Syracuse and Ephesus . . . [and] Venice and Belmont"<sup>44</sup> points to the dichotomy that exists between the twins' fundamental character and approach to the world. In each of the geographic binaries mentioned by Miola, and others such as Court and the Forest of Arden, one way of life typically signifies restraint, while the other denotes freedom. Although Syracuse and Ephesus initially appear the same by virtue of their tit-for-tat trade war, their progeny represent two widely divergent visions of how to live in the world. As put by Freedman, Antipholus of Ephesus "inhabits a closed interpretive universe with a limited number of signifiers and signifieds."<sup>45</sup> Those signs and signifiers are invariably monetary and material. In contrast, Antipholus of Syracuse embodies a willingness to move beyond a financial mindset, to transcend a fixed world of ducats and gold chains and explore the possibilities of identity. Through him, Shakespeare both mocks the Ephesians of the world and affirms an alternative world of intangible, rather than material values.

Unlike Plautus, whose play centers on the resident Menaechmi brother, Shakespeare presents Ephesus through the foreigner's eyes and in the process aligns our vision with Antipholus of Syracuse's. Following the somber exit of Egeon, the Syracusan Antipholus' entrance heralds a shift of mood and a markedly different incarnation of a merchant-like figure.<sup>46</sup> Whereas

his father's world is now finite and ostensibly short-lived, the newly-arrived Antipholus's desire to dine with the First Merchant and to "view the manners of the town, / Peruse the traders, gaze upon the buildings" (I.ii.11–13) marks him as a man with expanding horizons and a healthy curiosity about the world. This positive portrayal of the merchant figure evokes what Anna Neill calls "liberal and cosmopolitan arguments about how commerce creates . . . the universal improvement of manners through civilized exchange between different nations."<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, it suggests a more robust and romanticized view of the mercantile trader, one in line with Hall's typification of the Syracusan Antipholus and Dromio as "the mercantile 'venturing' pair."<sup>48</sup> This provides an implicit contrast with the spent force of Egeon and the stay-at-home Ephesian Antipholus who has "ne'er saw Syracuse in [his] life" (V.i.325). The interchangeability of the twins in the eyes of the Ephesian populace is suggestive, by extension, of a blinkered view of all those involved in commercial trade being cut from the same cloth. Effectively, the prevalence of exchange values reduces those within a certain category to a common value much in the same way coins of a specific denomination are deemed to have the same worth. But, in *Errors*, all merchants are not created equal. Shakespeare's rendering of the two brothers, i.e. one who successfully risks all to discover family and another who remains in his finite business world, plays into Elizabethan hierarchal distinctions between types of commercial traders. For example, in Thomas Wilson's 1572 *A Discourse upon Usury*, the Ephesian Antipholi of the world receive short shrift:

And touchynge retaylers at home . . . I place them in a lower degree, as not worthy the name of merchaunts, but of huckesters . . . Whereas the merchaunt adventurer is and maye be taken for a lordes fellow in dignitie, aswell for hys hardye adventuryng upon the seas . . . as for his royall and noble whole sales . . . [he is] to be highly chearyshed, and worthy to beare office in any well governed common weale.<sup>49</sup>

In *Errors*, the professional differentiation Wilson describes is manifested in the twins' characters, and Shakespeare invites us to look beyond what kind of merchant each is to what kind of man each is.

Unlike his brother, who is locked into defining himself "through what he owns, and through the servants and women whom he owns,"<sup>50</sup> Antipholus of Syracuse comes to us as a near-cipher. His first-act soliloquy imparts a yearning to forge human connections and focuses on self-inflicted metaphysical loss, rather than material acquisition: "So I, to find a mother and

a brother / In quest of them, unhappy, lose myself" (I.ii.39–40). His amorphous sense of self, coupled with his arrival by water in a strange land, is suggestive of a man on the verge of rebirth—a motif reinforced by the baptism imagery in the fifth act and his claim "In Ephesus I am but two hours old" (II.ii.148). The Syracusian twin is in a state of becoming that requires a willingness to adapt; at the same time, the externally-manifested boundaries of his brother's life have produced a stasis that renders the Ephesian vulnerable when change is thrust upon him. The identity deprivation undergone by Antipholus of Ephesus when his material possessions are denied him is involuntary and results in impotent anger, his lack of introspection underlined by an absence of soliloquies by him; in contrast, his brother has five. Antipholus of Syracuse's likening of himself to "a drop of water / That in the ocean seeks another drop" (I.ii.35–6) denotes a fluidity of identity that enables him to cope with change. However, it also ironically sets him in opposition to his twin. The brothers may be perceived as interchangeable, but their personalities make them more akin to oil and water than to identical drops of water capable of reunification.

A further irony stemming from the Syracusian's quest for self-identity is that he is continually rewarded not for whom he is, but for what he appears to be. His good fortune throughout the play is the result of his unwitting assumption of his brother's social and economic roles, such as husband, merchant and debtor. The transferability of those roles only underlines their inherent superficiality as identity markers since no one seems to notice the difference in how he executes them. While it is true that the system would be functioning normally were it not thrown off-kilter by the day's events, what *Errors* implies about the economic nature of identity points to inherent flaws within that system. In the world of commerce, to name is to define, as evidenced by contracts invariably beginning with the parties being named; when identity, as the system conceives it, becomes confused, we realize that the system's idea of identity is material and arbitrary, hence its vulnerability.<sup>51</sup>

John P. Cutts posits that "[Antipholus of Syracuse's] coming to Ephesus in one sense reflects his growing concern with the discontent which is himself."<sup>52</sup> A large measure of that discontent can arguably be attributed to the conundrum of being a romantic in a world of hard-edged economic realities. The juxtaposition of the soliloquy discussed above to his first (mistaken) exchange with Dromio of Ephesus illustrates the competing pull of the two imperatives that shape his life at the play's beginning. The yearning for self-definition and connection with others he expresses quickly evaporates, replaced by an obsession with the material. Even his mode of language seems

at odds with itself, as his flowing poetic cadence (“ . . . Who, falling there to find his fellow forth, / (Unseen, inquisitive) confounds himself” [I.ii.37–8]) gives way to an economy of clipped monosyllables that is interrupted only by the disyllabic “money,” as if to underline its importance: “Stop in your wind, sir, tell me this I pray: / Where have you left the money that I gave you?” (53–4). Moreover, his imagination and curiosity, so evident scant moments ago, deteriorates into a single-minded repetitiveness: “Where is the gold I gave in charge to thee?” (70), “Where is the thousand marks thou hadst of me?” (81) This obsessiveness presages the subsequent overreaching concern of Ephesian men in *Errors*, namely, “Where is the chain and the payment for it?”

The detrimental effects of fixating on money are further communicated by the one hundred and eighty degree turn in Antipholus of Syracuse’s relationship with his bondsman. Earlier, his description of Dromio as “A trusty villain . . . that very oft, / When I am dull with care and melancholy, / Lightens my humour with his merry jests” (I.ii.19–21) imparted an affectionate mutuality and camaraderie between the two. The potential loss of gold, however, transforms a “trusty” man into a figure of mistrust, and verbal affection gives way to physical abuse. If the portrayal of the Syracusan seems deliberately schismatic in the play’s early going, it is because an economic imperative has been introduced. What we are given here is a glimpse of how inherently fragile one’s sense of security is in a world that defines the self by the material, a theme that Shakespeare would return to in plays as diverse as *The Merchant of Venice*, *King Lear* and *Timon of Athens*. This, however, is the only instance in *Errors* of Antipholus of Syracuse being linked to the negative ramifications of monetary concerns. For the remainder of the play, his brother becomes increasingly mired in them while he progressively grows beyond them.

The dénouement of Antipholus of Syracuse’s first-act appearance comes in the form of another soliloquy, one that offers a synthesis of the oppositional pulls on his identity. The reversion to poetic language therein signals the return of the former man as he considers the nature of economically-determined societies. His speech, which casts Ephesus as a “town full of cozenage” (I.ii.97) populated by “jugglers” (98), “cheaters [and] prating montebanks” (101), colors the city’s day-to-day mercantile dealings with a menace that belies its seemingly innocuous appearance. As argued by Leggatt, “The sleight of hand that deceives the eye, the cunning of the confidence trick, shades into something deeper and more sinister, deception and shape-shifting that attack not merely the purse but the body and soul.”<sup>53</sup> The arrival of Antipholus of Syracuse in Ephesus

destabilizes the quotidian commercial life of the town; yet, at the same time, the Syracusian's footing seems far from sure as evidenced by his vacillation between philosophic concerns and economic exigencies. One of the underlying issues in *Errors* seems to be "how to live in the Ephesuses of the world." Egeon may choose resignation, and the Ephesian Antipholus may mindlessly buy into the financial nexus; but, Antipholus of Syracuse offers a vehicle for the interrogation of material-based societies. Despite his quest for self-actualization and his aptitude for social analysis, he is drawn, at the scene's end, back to a comparatively banal economic worry: "I greatly fear my money is not safe" (105). At this early juncture, such concerns are still a priority. The next time we see the Syracusian, his first words are the anticlimactic and flat declarative statement, "The gold I gave to Dromio is laid up / Safe at the Centaur," (II.ii.1–2) as if Shakespeare wished to underscore the inconsequentiality of the material. This kind of deflation of what seem to be significant monetary issues will be reprised in the fifth act's resolutions, and from this moment on, for Antipholus of Syracuse, issues of identity take precedence over prosaic money concerns.

Antipholus of Syracuse's need to refashion himself comes to the fore during his courtship of Luciana. Now physically removed from the Ephesian marketplace, his demand of her, "Teach me, dear creature, how to think and speak" (III.ii.33), betrays a desire for nothing less than a total redefinition of the self. The irony in the scene is manifest: while unaware that a new identity has been thrust upon him, he is presenting himself as a blank slate. Although he will later grow anxious over the non-fixed state of his identity and plan his escape from Ephesus, at that moment resistance is far from his mind, and Antipholus offers himself up completely, saying, "Transform me then, and to your power I'll yield" (40). The placement of this interlude in *Errors* is, in itself, significant. Antipholus of Ephesus' speeches which frame the preceding scene both concern the gold chain, the currency that is capable of buying the affections of his wife and mistress. The Syracusian's subsequent wooing scene begins with Luciana's cynical assessment of her sister's marriage being economically based. Her advice to the man she presumes to be Antipholus of Ephesus is to carry on a pretence of love "for [Adriana's] wealth's sake" (6). When he finally speaks, it seems evident that the Syracusian has been transported to a separate reality that transcends the prevailing economic matrix. His newfound emotional "wealth" effectively negates Ephesus's cash-for-love mindset; Luciana, not ducats, now constitutes his "fortune" (63). The idea of "something" being offered for "nothing" lurks beneath this scene, and John Russell Brown points to the following speech as being indicative of "Antipholus of Syracuse who offers himself to Luciana unasked, and for whom giving is its own reward:"<sup>54</sup>



Sing, siren, for thyself, and I will dote;  
 Spread o'er the silver waves thy golden hairs,  
 And as a bed I'll take thee, and there lie,  
 And in that glorious supposition think  
 He gains by death that hath such means to die. (III.ii.47–51)

Although Brown may have purposely sidestepped the rather obvious sexual pun, even that sense further reinforces Antipholus' privileging the intangible over the material. Additionally, while the materiality of gold is ever-present in *Errors*, here its cash value, as well as that of silver, is transformed through metaphor into a romantic one.

The relationship between the Syracusan Antipholus and Dromio provides yet another venue through which *Errors* explores the deleterious effect of money. Unlike Antipholus of Ephesus, whose relations with his servant are strictly vertical, i.e. master and slave, the Syracusians relate on a more horizontal level, their inter-dependence evident throughout the play. Antipholus of Syracuse even speaks of his love for Dromio (II.ii.28). Only twice does their friendship devolve into hierarchal antagonism; on both occasions misdirected financial transactions are the cause, and, on both occasions, Antipholus of Syracuse resorts to violence. In the first, being mistaken for his twin, the Ephesian Dromio is beaten for denying knowledge of the gold his brother had been charged with. The second beating is inflicted upon the Syracusan Dromio over his ignorance of there ever having been an altercation between him and his master over money. After this second beating, with the issue of the missing gold resolved, the relationship between the Syracusians reverts to an equal footing, and henceforth all subsequent violence in the play comes at the hands of Antipholus of Ephesus, predictably enough, over money.

During the exchange which precedes that first beating, the wordplay that permeates many of the Dromios' scenes is employed to make a pointed equation between money and misery:

Ant. S.: Where is the thousand marks thou hadst of me?  
 Dro. E.: I have some marks of yours upon my pate;  
 Some of my mistress' marks upon my shoulders;  
 But not a thousand marks between you both. (I.ii.81–4)

While advancing the comedy of the play's identity confusion, Dromio of Ephesus' unwitting pun signals a larger truth within *Errors*, namely, that just as a gold chain, money and the possession thereof offer no stable proof of identity and position, the very language of finance carries no

fixed signification. As argued earlier, Antipholus of Ephesus' relationships are "marked" (an implicit third level of meaning for the term in the above exchange) and defined through the language of commerce, and the exchange of money and goods forms the boundaries of his "friendships." While the camaraderie between the Syracusian Antipholus and Dromio is also expressed through the principles of exchange, in their case, the medium of exchange is linguistic and the currency they use is words. To them, give and take is not a material proposition. For example, the extended stichomythic dialogue between the pair in Act Two (II.ii.40–109) is filled with wit and warmth, and the good-natured misdirection of language in the form of puns and quibbles stands in stark contrast to the misdirected financial transactions in *Errors* which result in contention. Whereas Ephesians constantly assign value to goods (e.g. the courtesan's ring is worth forty ducats, the chain is worth three ducats more than Angelo's debt), the organic correspondence and equation of utterances between the Syracusians suggests a more natural economic system at work:

Syr. Dro.: . . . Am I Dromio? Am I your man? Am I myself?  
Syr. Ant.: Thou art Dromio, thou art my man, thou art thyself.  
(III.ii.74–5)

One other piece of dialogue between the two Syracusians in this vein is of particular interest. Ostensibly talking about the beating that has just occurred, they speak in terms that violate the most fundamental rules of the marketplace:

Syr. Dro.: Well, sir, I thank you.  
Syr. Ant.: Thank me, sir, for what?  
Syr. Dro.: Marry, sir, for this something that you gave me  
for nothing.  
Syr. Ant.: I'll make you amends next, to give you nothing  
for something. (II.ii.49–54)

In Ephesus, "something" must be given for "something." For the Syracusians, this exchange is indicative of a deeper truth—namely, that for them, the giving of "something," i.e. love and mutual support, is a free and selfless act.

Antipholus of Syracuse's subsequent encounters with Ephesians represent an extension of the quasi-utopian economic order outlined above in that he is continually given "something" for "nothing." Understandably mistaking commercial exchanges for spontaneous generosity, he exclaims "I see a

man here needs not live by shifts / When in the streets he meets such golden gifts" (III.ii.181–2) after being given the gold chain by Angelo. Despite his obvious relish as he expounds on living in such an ideal world, he is enough of a realist to recognize his circumstances as illusory, if not sinister, his words denoting a recognition that nothing in this world comes free:

Some tender money to me, some invite me . . .  
 . . . Even now a tailor call'd me in his shop,  
 And show'd me silks that he had bought for me,  
 . . . Sure these are but imaginary wiles,  
 And Lapland sorcerers inhabit here. (IV.iii.4–11)

While Antipholus of Ephesus' life has been transformed into a nightmare, his Syracusan brother walks about in a veritable dream come true. Running in parallel, the divergent realities of the Antipholi illustrate that living under a social and political system predicated by economics is a two-edged sword. In *Errors*, the positives and negatives coalesce in the figure of the merchant. The world can be one of trust where men offer credit based on reputation, or it can be one where mistrust holds sway and the respected trader becomes a pariah. This binary leads to the question of how stable the position of merchants, the erstwhile figureheads of late sixteenth-century capitalism, was in the English social hierarchy. Hall argues that "in Elizabethan society, the hybrid social identity of the merchant as nobleman permits [a] mobility . . . in which the socially guaranteed identity of the nobleman itself functions as credit."<sup>55</sup> It is precisely that precarious identity that Shakespeare disrupts in *Errors*. Antipholus of Ephesus' fixed position as a respected bourgeois businessman is revealed to be shockingly ephemeral when his "credit" apparently fails. On the flip side of the coin, the dramatic irony inherent in the Syracusan's newfound societal rank renders the status he enjoys (the same one previously enjoyed by his twin) completely meaningless. Neither can make a credible claim to being the 'merchant as nobleman' that Hall alludes to, which suggests that, at heart, the correlation is an illusory one.

Before resolving all of the identity confusion in *Errors*' final act, Shakespeare seems intent on reinforcing the idea of Ephesus as a society that is obsessed by finance. To wit: the Second Merchant and Angelo, representing the mercantile class and, apparently, the rank and file Ephesian populace, open the action. They first discuss, yet again, the gold chain and then confront (the wrong) Antipholus over his failure to honor his debt. They are not alone, however, in their single-mindedness, as the religious and political elites

of the city are similarly preoccupied. Upon hearing that Adriana's husband has gone mad, the Abbess' first reaction, "Hath he not lost much wealth by wrack of sea?" (V.i.49) and its concern for the mercantile wallet rather than the soul suggests that her years in Ephesus have taken their toll.<sup>56</sup> When the Duke arrives, he loses no time reintroducing the financial equation of Egeon's cash-or-death situation (130–2). When it comes Adriana's turn to relate the day's events, she fails to mention how her husband has denied their marriage and made advances towards her sister; instead she describes how Antipholus has violated the principles of private ownership, charging him with "doing displeasure to the citizens / By rushing in their houses; bearing thence / Rings, jewels, any thing his rage did like" (142–4). Her husband's version, naturally enough, is a litany of the financial injustices he has endured that culminates in his demand for "ample satisfaction / For these deep shames and great indignities" (253–4). Given the prevailing atmosphere and the character of Antipholus of Ephesus, the word "satisfaction" is undoubtedly being used in its legalistic, fiscal sense, i.e. his reputation in tatters, his focus is on financial compensation. Rounding out the "extended family" on stage is the Courtesan, who is seeking monetary recompense as well, because, as her earlier exit line put it, "forty ducats is too much to lose" (IV.iii.93).

Notably, while his brother is in the midst of all this financial wrangling, Antipholus of Syracuse is safely ensconced in the priory. His escape from the confusion of the marketplace to take refuge in a place of spiritual concerns reinforces the fundamental difference between Ephesians and Syracusians in *Errors*. Only when the Syracusan Antipholus emerges with the Abbess can the reconciliations and resolutions begin. From that point on, the play virtually belongs to them, with Shakespeare according them significantly more lines than the other characters present. Furthermore, both employ the language of finance in a way that shows a marked transition in the play. For them, commercial parlance becomes a metaphoric vehicle to express humanistic values. Whereas the state sought to enlarge their coffers via Egeon's freedom, Emilia's offer to "loose his bonds, / And gain a husband by his liberty" (V.i.339–40) demonstrates that "gain" can be on a personal level without apparent tangible worth. Similarly, the idea of debt and payment that has permeated *Errors* to this point is reconfigured in Antipholus of Syracuse's hope that he will be able to "make good" (375) on his earlier avowals of love to Luciana. Finally, Emilia's invitation for all to enter the abbey, where, as she puts it, they "shall make full satisfaction" (399) turns Antipholus of Ephesus' earlier demand for the same on its head, as the notion of financial compensation is displaced by the bonhomie of a gossips' feast and the prospect of familial reunification.

What perhaps is most startling about the resolution of conflict in *Errors* is the way in which all of the play's monetary and material bones of contention are rendered utterly meaningless. In a scant fifteen lines, the matters of the chain, Egeon's ransom, the bag of ducats, and the ring are effortlessly resolved. When Angelo identifies the chain that has been the source of so much turmoil as being of his making, Antipholus of Syracuse seemingly shrugs and ends the matter with a flat "I think it be, sir, I deny it not" (378). The path of the missing bail money is then retraced, and the ducats are offered by Antipholus of Ephesus to ransom his father. Despite his out-of-character generosity, the Ephesian Antipholus' phrasing at this moment betrays a continued dedication to the language of financial exchange: "These ducats pawn I for my father here" (389). Remarkably, the Duke then eschews the ducats as if the monetary demands of the state had never existed, saying, "It shall not need, thy father hath his life" (390). While it is conceivable that he has been caught up in the swell of good cheer about him, Haines' speculation that, in the Duke's goodwill gesture, "we see the outlines of a establishment in Ancient Ephesus where to be well-connected is to be secure"<sup>57</sup> seems more probable. The return of the Courtesan's ring, accompanied by the Ephesian twin's best wishes ("There, take it, and much thanks for my good cheer" [392]) rounds out this spate of collective amnesia vis-à-vis the economic imperatives that had governed the action of the play.

*The Comedy of Errors* begins with two merchants who have embarked on separate voyages devoid of profit motivations; they come to Ephesus seeking to overcome a sense of incompleteness that has overshadowed their lives. By forging new interpersonal bonds and renewing old ones, they have effected the play's positive outcome. In between their arrival and the play-ending gossips' feast, the fixation of Antipholus of Ephesus and his mercantile cohort on the material and the monetary subsume what is really at the heart of the play. The summary manner in which all the fiscal disputes are dealt with in the fifth act only confirms them to be a sham without substantive meaning. Beyond the frantic slapstick that has long been the source of its appeal, *Errors* explores the chasm between two distinct ways of viewing the world. Leggatt's summation of this aspect of the play seems particularly apt:

. . . the world of commerce simply goes crazy when an irrational factor is introduced, and the only satisfaction is for chains and ducats to be restored to their original owners, as though the confusion had never taken place. Nothing is gained in the process, for the transactions of business are barren and limited, incapable of the sudden, spontaneous enrichment that we see in the transactions of love.<sup>58</sup>

Undeniably, the happy ending of *Errors* belongs to Antipholus of Syracuse and Egeon, and, by extension, Luciana, Emilia, and the Dromios. The Ephesian twin, who has embodied the play's thematic concern with economics, plays no significant role in the finale and, pointedly, amidst all the familial joy, never exchanges a word with his wife. From beginning to end, *Errors* represents Shakespeare's earliest sustained critique of societies built on economic foundations, and, upon consideration, Bruce R. Smith's claim "For all the exoticism of Ephesus as a setting, *The Comedy of Errors* celebrates the code of commerce"<sup>59</sup> seems as misguided as the path taken by the gold chain in the play. In the end, the money never really mattered, and neither did Antipholus of Ephesus and all that he represents.

## Chapter Two

# Shakespeare's England

## *The Merry Wives of Windsor's* Bourgeois Cash Values

While countless stagings of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* have been set in a bucolic “merrye olde England,” Bill Alexander’s 1985 RSC rendition took Shakespeare’s representation of a 1590s English bourgeoisie, numerically anagrammatized its temporal setting, and placed it in the 1950s Macmillan years of postwar prosperity in Britain. Alexander depicted a suburban middle class enjoying the power of newfound affluence in an era whose watchword was “you never had it so good.” Mistresses Ford and Page plotted their revenge on Falstaff while sitting under hair dryers and sipped gin and tonics in a comfortable living room while Ford ransacked the infamous buckbasket. One of the underlying concerns of this much-lauded production was the materialism of the time; theatre programmes even carried real period advertisements for consumer goods such as televisions, complete with prices. Alexander’s vision was entirely apropos, as the idea that wealth had become both the measure of personal worth and a societal linchpin lies at the heart of *Merry Wives*, a play in which economic imperatives are never far from the surface. Falstaff dissolves his retinue and pursues the titular wives because he is penniless; Ford throws money at Falstaff to test his wife’s fidelity; and Anne Page’s matrimonial fate is governed by the wealth she represents and the capital she attracts. In the only work wherein Shakespeare ostensibly depicts his own contemporary society, it seems evident that cash values, rather than human ones, are firmly in control. Presumably, the play’s portrait of a greed-driven bourgeoisie is what prompted Engels, in an 1873 letter to Marx, to comment that “the first act of the *Merry Wives* alone contains more life and reality than all German literature.”<sup>1</sup>

While often neglected in discussions of Shakespeare’s comedic oeuvre, *Merry Wives* is both an intriguing and important play that warrants inclusion in any examination of the dramatist’s underlying attitudes towards the role played by money in society. The inclination of some to place it in the genre

of Citizen Comedy seems apt, given that genre's preoccupation with economic motivations and the cozenage required to accumulate wealth. In both the main and subplot of *Merry Wives*, subterfuge appears to be a societal norm with monetary reward providing the impetus. Although other Shakespearean works incorporate elements of Citizen Comedy, the play is unique in its depiction of avarice in a sixteenth-century middle-class domestic English milieu. The discussion of *Merry Wives* and the monetary ethos which follows unfolds on three fronts. First, the predominance of economic concerns in its main plot, with Falstaff's pursuit of Ford's purse and Ford's willingness to pay to be cuckolded, is examined with an eye towards the question of how much of a threat Sir John actually poses to Windsor's bourgeois establishment. While this portion of the play is memorable for generating some of Shakespeare's best physical comedy, its resolution is somewhat predictable as lessons are learned and the forces of greed are turned back. Attention then turns to the Anne Page subplot, which is much more opaque and offers none of the comfort the main plot engenders with its comeuppance of a humbled fortune-hunter. Instead, what appears to be a standard New Comedy story of a young woman defying her parents to wed the man she loves is, upon closer examination, a consistently cynical exploration of the pervasiveness of economic imperatives in interpersonal relationships. In this respect, *Merry Wives* anticipates the concerns of *The Merchant of Venice*, as Fenton and Bassanio seem to be romantic figures cut from the same mercenary cloth. Finally, the Anne-Fenton love story is considered in light of the very different way it unfolds in the *Merry Wives* Quarto and Folio texts. What becomes apparent through this comparison is that the Folio version foregrounds economic themes that are largely absent in the 1602 Quarto. While the differences between the Q and F versions have long been widely considered the result of the former being either a memorial reconstruction or an abridgement, the argument advanced here is that the Folio text is more likely a revision of the Quarto and that Shakespeare's motivation was to strengthen the indictment of cash and exchange values that lies at the heart of *Merry Wives*.

As noted above, *Merry Wives* is the only play that Shakespeare set in a recognizable, contemporary England, and its singularity in this respect suggests that the themes developed within it constitute his underlying reactions to the economic world in which he lived. Since the centrality of money in society is not displaced to Ephesus, Venice or Vienna, the comfort zone attendant to that displacement vanishes. With regard to the English mindset in the 1590s, an era of nascent capitalism, *Merry Wives* brings to mind the words of Walt Kelly's Pogo: "We have met the enemy and he is us." The Pages, the Fords, Shallow, Slender, Evans and Doctor Caius are



all representatives of an English bourgeoisie (the latter two in spite of their Welsh and French pedigrees, respectively<sup>2</sup>) that grew in strength and number over the sixteenth century, and, in Shakespeare's only "English" comedy, their value system is shown to be sorely wanting.

Much in the way that Citizen Comedy evokes a "real" London, Shakespeare's references to actual Windsor locales, such as Datchet Mead and the Garter Inn, lend *Merry Wives* a patina of verisimilitude.<sup>3</sup> Given that "Windsor under the Tudors was one of the richer towns of the realm,"<sup>4</sup> it was an apt milieu wherein to explore the social and economic mores of the late sixteenth-century English bourgeoisie. Due to the presence of Windsor Castle, with its attendant economic benefits of entourages coming and going, Windsor apparently thrived in the 1580s and 90s, as evidenced by the major paving projects undertaken and the building of a new market-house. Although there has been speculation that Ford and Page are based on actual prominent Windsorites,<sup>5</sup> it seems enough to view Shakespeare's construction of them as being representative of the middle class at the time. Like Antipholus of Ephesus, they are reasonably prosperous men who do not appear to be engaged in any specific occupation that generates their wealth. Although they are clearly not at the level of nobility, the play takes Page and Ford's wealth for granted in the same way that the origins of aristocratic wealth never need to be delved into for dramatic purposes. The two families are, in effect, local patriarians in their urban world without need of title. While references to "court" acknowledge the existence of the "other" aristocratic world, it seems to be a parallel reality; as Arthur Kinney notes, in *Merry Wives*, "the inn and the merchant's house displace the more customary quarters of royalty and nobility."<sup>6</sup> In fact, aside from the invocation and homage to Elizabeth in the fifth-act masque, the play's representatives of court, Falstaff and Fenton, hardly command respect, their financial straits rendering them suspect. Ironically, Fenton's court background is cited by Page as a reason for *precluding* him as a suitor for Anne: "He is of too high a region."<sup>7</sup> Perhaps, metaphorically, the most salient physical aspect of the town of Windsor is that it encircled the castle which bore its name. Although ostensibly at the centre, the system wherein status was based on rank was increasingly under siege in the late sixteenth century. Accordingly, the nobility is all but marginalized in *Merry Wives* while the bourgeois citizenry takes centre stage.

The clash between the values of court and the existent class structure in Windsor is evident in the opening lines of the play when Justice Shallow pointedly contrasts his and Falstaff's titular achievements. In high indignation, Shallow avows, "If he were twenty *Sir* John Falstaffs, he shall not abuse Robert Shallow *esquire*" (I.i.2-3) (italics mine). Slender's argument in

support of his uncle points to the magistrate's ancestry and coat of arms, using the signs of nobility (and in the process rendering them meaningless) to bolster the claims of a civil servant turned gentleman. However, while Shallow's claims may rest on rank, his real concern is material—Falstaff has violated the Justice's property rights by poaching his deer and breaking open his lodge. Although it may be tempting to paint Shakespeare's Windsor as a quasi-"green world" or pastoral enclave, the deer in *Merry Wives* are not a communal resource worthy of philosophic debate as they are in the Forest of Arden; they are, instead, private property. Shallow's construction of Falstaff as a moral and economic threat to Windsor is furthered by the accusation that he got young Slender drunk and picked his pocket. To settle the matter, a tribunal made up of the pillars of Windsor society is proposed to consider the charges, with the church represented by Parson Evans, the bourgeois elite by Page and the commercial entrepreneurial class by the Host of the Garter. However, the need for this triumvirate is proven moot as the matter is never settled, and Falstaff escapes unpunished. It is not so much that they are unable to deal with Sir John; it appears rather that getting to dinner and enjoying the fruits of wealth is a more attractive prospect.

Over the years, a good deal of *Merry Wives* criticism has focused on how Falstaff's presence poses a threat to Windsor from the outside. For example, Anne Barton argues that the Windsorites view Falstaff as "the intruder from another social and moral sphere . . . a threat to the established order of a community."<sup>8</sup> In much the same vein, Camille Slight offers the following: "For all of Falstaff's natural exuberance, his designs on the deer and the women of Windsor constitute an attack by the civilized vices of greed and pride on bucolic contentment."<sup>9</sup> Yet it is arguable that the "threat" of Falstaff exists more in the minds of critics than it does within *Merry Wives*. The play-opening contretemps is hardly taken seriously, and Shallow's obsession with degree and his need to confront this "assault from the outside" seem little more than comic set pieces. Rather than censuring Falstaff, the play's middle-class avatar, Page, dismisses the whole matter with bonhomie and hospitality extended to all. This society, under his direction, is fundamentally secure and self-assured. Here and in the campaign to bed Ford's wife and acquire his wealth, the threat of Falstaff appears to be all smoke with precious little fire.

Although the Falstaff of *Merry Wives* at times reaches rhetorical heights reminiscent of the Henriad's Falstaff, the England of the 1590s seems to have reduced him to a bundle of economic exigencies. After brazenly refuting Shallow's charges in the first scene, his next appearance is comparatively pathetic; pleading poverty to the Host, the most he can muster are uninspired monosyllables: "I sit at ten pounds a week" (I.iii.8). Whereas his inability

to pay at Mistress Quickly's Eastcheap establishment led to verbal flights of indignation (HIV Pt. 2 II.i), Falstaff's admission of "Well, sirs, I am almost out at heels" (I.iii.28) carries an air of resignation that seems out of character. One might also expect that the anachronistic thrusting of him into this bourgeois society would result in a puncturing of its pretensions and values similar to the way that the notions of honor and duty came under attack in the Henry plays. Instead, it is Falstaff's pretensions that are deflated by economic reality, and he embarks upon his ultimately humiliating seduction of Mistress Ford simply because he is broke. Furthermore, rather than viewing the titular wives as gullible, unworldly marks as might be expected, his plan is predicated, in part, upon an apparent belief that they actually fancy him (I.iii.62–4). While Sir John's ultimate misreading of Hal in the Henry plays is understandable, his misreading of small town wives suggests that the machinations of *Merry Wives'* main plot are somewhat perfunctory and that Shakespeare's real interest lay elsewhere.

Needless to say, money is front and centre in *Merry Wives'* central plot. Falstaff means to romance Mistress Page because "she has all the rule of her husband's purse [and] he hath a legion of angels" (I.iii.49–50). With imagery drawn from England's burgeoning New World traffic, he configures the wives as economic colonies ripe for the plunder: "They shall be my East and West Indies, and I will trade to them both" (I.iii.67–69). Dispatching his love letters, he shifts from a merchant role to that of an erstwhile Sir Francis Drake, commanding his boy, Robin, to "sail like my pinnace to these golden shores" (I.iii.77). Thus, the main plot's stage is set, with the expectation that Falstaff will play the court card successfully, as he does with the rural inhabitants in *Henry IV Part 2*, a play in which he walked away with the upper hand, having fleeced Shallow and the military recruitment system.<sup>10</sup>

In *Merry Wives*, however, expectations are thwarted, and Falstaff's deception is grounded without ever having taken flight. Mistress Ford and Page are not taken in for a moment, and the plot reverses upon itself, as their schemes henceforth predominate. Those who wish to read Falstaff as a threat to the economic well-being of Windsor's citizenry must disregard how immediately that threat is neutralized. Upon reading her letter, Mistress Ford dismisses Falstaff as a "Flemish drunkard" (II.i.18), and almost instantaneously, the stalker becomes the stalked as the two wives speak of being revenged upon Sir John no less than three times in their opening scene. In no other Shakespearean play is a plot centered on deception so immediately seen through, the resulting impression being that, far from being under attack from without, Windsor and its inhabitants are anything but vulnerable. Court origins and titles are inconsequential as their "gentry" status more

than suffices; to them, Falstaff is little more than a degenerate bankrupt with a title, most likely reminiscent of contemporary spendthrift nobles.<sup>11</sup> Arguably, the underlying message is that while Falstaff may have been able to at least occasionally triumph in the time of Hal, in this new economic order, with its self-assured, savvy, and ascendant bourgeoisie, he is decidedly out of his element. *Merry Wives* takes place in an ostensibly model community of common sense, and, unlike what transpires in *The Comedy of Errors*, the introduction of an outside element does little to rattle its complacency.

While the revenge Mistresses Ford and Page take upon Falstaff produces unquestionably some of Shakespeare's funniest onstage moments, the ultimate defeat of avarice in *Merry Wives* somehow seems far too easy and far too pat. If, as argued throughout this work, Shakespeare was interested in the way that economics exert an undue influence on human behavior, then the central plot in his only play depicting his contemporary society seems to have little to say. What it does seem to say is that the turn-of-the-century gentry were immune to the moral and economic rot represented by Falstaff—in short, his values are as anachronistic as his presence in the play. But perhaps the Falstaff plot in *Merry Wives* is nothing more than a highly entertaining red herring designed to reinforce a contemporary audience's complacency vis-à-vis their own moral and economic conduct. On a surface level, the main plot may indicate that wit, common sense and an amiable sociability trump man's mercenary tendencies, but everything beyond the surface in *Merry Wives* suggests the opposite. Windsorites may be easily able to ward off the threat of Falstaff, but, in their egocentricity, they seem unaware of the extent to which they emulate his values.

While it could be argued that Ford, one of Windsor's two male middle-class scions, is punished along with Falstaff in the main plot, he suffers for his jealousy, not for his avarice. Notably, however, he is not a Malvolio-type figure left isolated at the play's end; instead, the solidarity of Windsor's bourgeoisie is evident as he is quickly reintegrated back into the societal mainstream. Yet money patently plays as central a role in his thinking as it does in Sir John's. Ford believes that wealth is a means of finding truth, and his first meeting with Falstaff amply demonstrates that these two men speak essentially the same language and are cut from the same philosophic cloth. As pointed out by R. S. White, "[Ford's] assumption is exactly Falstaff's—women's sexuality is a commodity that can be bought with flattery and, in Falstaff's estimation, can be turned into money."<sup>12</sup> It might be added that his willingness to finance Falstaff's campaign puts the two men on the same moral plane. Ford obviously appreciates the power money wields, as his opening gambit is to establish the economic upper hand with Falstaff:

Falstaff: Good Master Brook, I desire more acquaintance  
of you.

Ford: Good Sir John, I sue for yours; not to charge you,  
for I must let you understand I think myself in a better  
plight for a lender than you are, the which hath some-  
thing emboldened me to this unseasoned intrusion . . . (II.ii.154–9)

Ford is well aware that the prospect of cash is enough to enlist Falstaff's help, but he goes further and provides a supremely jaded philosophic slant on the way of the world, stating baldly that "if money goes before, all ways do lie open" (160). While Sir John's reply, "Money is a good soldier, and will on" (161), bestows a spurious dignity upon cash values with its invocation of military valor, this trade-off of mercenary aphorisms effectively renders the two men equal. The correlation between Windsor "insider" and "outsider" is further strengthened by Ford's wooing of Falstaff with the same sort of unctuous praise the old knight wrote in his letters of seduction: ". . . you are a gentleman of excellent breeding, admirable discourse, of great admittance . . ." (214–16). When Falstaff offers mock-protest in the face of such hyperbole, Ford reverts to his greatest strength, economic leverage, in an almost maniacal exhortation: "There is money: spend it, spend it, spend more, spend all I have; only give me so much of your time in exchange of it . . ." (221–3).

As if to dispel any possibility that Ford is merely adopting a money-centered persona in his disguise as Brook, Shakespeare gives him a soliloquy to end the above scene in which he exclaims, "See the hell of having a false woman: my bed shall be abused, my coffers ransacked, my reputation gnawn at" (II. ii.276–7). The prospect of being cuckolded prompts not emotional pain, but, rather a litany of self-centered concerns marked by possessive pronouns and anchored by a central fear of economic loss redolent of Shylock's conflation of his daughter and ducats.<sup>13</sup> When Falstaff says of Ford, "Hang him, poor cuckoldly knave, I know him not. Yet I wrong him to call him poor: they say the jealous wittolly knave hath masses of money" (II.ii.256–8), he is echoing not only Ford's priorities, but also Ford's construction of himself as a man; that is, his riches lie not in the intangible (having a faithful wife), but rather in the material (whether his coffers are full).

Even near the play's end, instead of partaking in the happy resolution and joying at the confirmation of his wife's virtue, Ford insists on bringing economics to the fore. Wishing to add financial injury to Falstaff's humiliation, he twice demands repayment of the money "Brook" advanced, with the second request imparting genuine vindictiveness: "Over and above that you have suffered, I think to repay that money will be a biting affliction"

(V.v.165–7). Having been humiliated himself, Ford's assertion of his economic superiority is a way of regaining his dignity. While he may have strayed from the mean, he is no Falstaff—he has money. For his part, Page, whose cool-headedness contrasts with Ford's cholera throughout the play, contributes to the impression that it is Falstaff's financial status that marks him as an outsider. When the collected Windsorites take turns heaping abuse on Sir John, Page alone maligns him on an economic basis, calling Falstaff “as poor as Job” (154). It would appear that penury, as well as moral transgressions, runs contrary to Windsor's communal values.

The resolution of *Merry Wives'* main plot harks back to the play's opening scene as an apparent spirit of good will and hospitality overcomes all adversity. Ford is no longer a communal aberration: in fact, he is accorded the play's closing lines in which he delivers one last jab at Falstaff. However, he first offers a maxim to summarize all that has transpired; commenting on his own marriage and Anne Page's recent nuptials, he betrays his dedication to the financial nexus one last time by commodifying the women present: “In love the heavens themselves do guide the state: / Money buys lands, and wives are sold by fate” (V.v.226–7). As pointed out by Kinney, “. . . it is the verb *sold*, not the agent *fate*, that discloses his (and the play's) basic sense of values.”<sup>14</sup> However, despite Ford, the Falstaff-wives storyline, with all its comedic and masque-like flourishes, seems to undermine any questioning of Windsor's values. Falstaff's agenda of acquisition is decisively thwarted, and Ford's campaign to maintain his wife and fortune ends in triumph. As happy endings go, this one certainly suggests that all is right in this bourgeois world. Yet Ford's behavior throughout plants seeds of doubt about Windsor's societal priorities; in the subplot of *Merry Wives*, those seeds come to fruition.

At first glance, the Anne Page-Fenton intrigue appears to be merely a conventional New Comedy plot. It certainly contains the essential elements as outlined by Northrop Frye, namely, “the successful effort of a young man to outwit an opponent and possess the girl of his choice.”<sup>15</sup> Alexander Leggatt argues a connection between New Comedy and Citizen Comedy by focusing on the financial element of both, typifying New Comedy as being concerned with a young man plotting against an old one not only for the girl, but also for the money.<sup>16</sup> The subplot of *Merry Wives* is, indeed, a hybrid of these two streams of comedy in that Fenton does overcome his *senex* in a plot wherein the objectives of everyone involved are economic in nature. However, while *Merry Wives'* main plot may fit within the realm of Citizen Comedy,<sup>17</sup> its subplot is somewhat deceptive. Although cloaked in the garments of New Comedy, the conventions of that genre are not stable. For example, the reconciliations of social values that in New Comedy allow marriage to take

place are nowhere to be found in *Merry Wives*. While the marriage between Fenton and Anne transpires because of the kind of deceit common in both New and Citizen Comedy, Page shows no signs of changing his views—he merely concedes defeat. There is, in fact, no need for any shift in social mores because everyone has been singing from the same economic songbook throughout.

While its multiple plots echo the construction of other Shakespearean comedies, *Merry Wives* differs from its generic confreres in how its romantic storyline is subordinated; in short, the young lovers play second fiddle to the Falstaff plot. Unlike *As You Like It* or *Twelfth Night*, for example, this play denies us the opportunity to see the principals falling in love; as a consequence, any emotional investment in a happy ending is considerably diminished. Oddly, Fenton and Anne, the ostensible romantic heroes of *Merry Wives*, do not even appear together until after the midpoint of the play. The overall neglect of the play's "love story" suggests that, like the "economic threat" posed by Falstaff, this erstwhile New Comedy marriage plot is yet another diversion laid before the audience, its primary function being to illuminate other thematic concerns. This suspicion is further reinforced by Anne Page's singularity amongst women in Shakespearean comedy. Although a few of her lines suggest intelligence and wit, Anne, unlike a Viola or a Portia, never seems to be in control of her own script. Given her "unusual passivity for a comic heroine in Shakespeare,"<sup>18</sup> it falls to Fenton to devise their elopement. After the lovers' third-act meeting, Anne is so marginalized she is accorded only one more line in the entire play—an obsequious "Pardon, good father—good my mother, pardon" (V.v.210) when the newly-married couple present themselves as such. This is no epilogue-delivering Rosalind; instead it is Fenton who makes the lovers' case in the denouement. In *Merry Wives*, Anne Page's ultimate importance lies in *what* she is, rather than *who* she is. What she may or may not have to say is of little consequence; as put by White, she is "a possession to be bought and sold . . . a prize to be won."<sup>19</sup> The focus of practically all of the other characters' economic attentions, Anne is nonetheless a singular presence in the play in that she is not motivated by the prospect of wealth or possession. In Windsor's tightly-knit community with its construction of people as insiders or outsiders, perhaps Anne, rather than Falstaff, is the real outsider.

*Merry Wives* is barely fifty lines old when the idea of Anne being an economic objective is introduced. In a way, the play's opening scene encapsulates how wealth was supplanting rank as a social barometer in early modern England as the conversation shifts from Shallow's coat of

arms to the proposition of tapping into middle-class wealth. Interestingly, the play's religious figure, Parson Evans, introduces the topic as if to demonstrate the extent to which monetary interests are a societal norm. Evans' mercenary notions put one in mind of the beginning of *Henry V*, in which the machinations of senior churchmen demonstrate that political chicanery is not confined to the secular world. The conversation which ensues in *Merry Wives* amongst Evans, Shallow and Slender configures Anne as a lucrative commodity on the marriage market. The Windsor wives may represent overseas treasure to Falstaff, but Anne Page's wealth makes her a highly desirable domestic product. In addition, as Evans' reference to Anne as "pretty virginity" (I.i.42) indicates, she is undamaged goods. Although Slender attempts to define Anne by her appearance and voice, her quantifiable value is the Parson's primary interest—namely the "seven hundred pounds of moneys, and gold, and silver" (46–7) she will inherit upon turning seventeen. Slender's terms of reference subsequently shift to coincide with Evans' as he repeats the amount Anne can expect (53–4). Any attempt to construct Anne in a non-monetary way seems pointless; when Shallow offers what is apparently a tribute to her intangible worth, his words are immediately reconfigured by the Parson in an unabashedly cynical and mercenary way:

Shallow: I know the young gentlewoman, she has good gifts.

Evans: Seven hundred pounds, and possibilities, is goot gifts. (I.ii.56–9)

The plan to marry Slender to Anne reduces marriage to a monetary proposition that renders Falstaff's objectification of Windsor's wives morally no better or worse.<sup>20</sup> After lip service is paid to the idea of love, Shallow lays bare the economic parameters of the proposed match, asking his nephew, ". . . will you, upon good dowry, marry her?" (222–3). Slender's malaprop-filled answer admits that, although there is no great love on his part, he is willing to marry Anne—as he revealingly and comically puts it—"dissolutely" (235).

Although the idea needs little reinforcement, Slender's inane chit-chat with Anne that ends *Merry Wives*' first scene proves him to be an entirely unsuitable husband for her. Anne's other presumptive suitor, Dr. Caius, hardly fares better; presumably a fair bit older than Anne, he is little more than a choleric humors character. In his first appearance, he launches into an extended tirade because Evans' boy has come to plead Slender's suit to his



servant, Mistress Quickly. His rage is not focused on the issue of marriage, let alone love; rather, he is consumed with the issue of possession, as evidenced by his verb choice each time he mentions Anne's name: "Do not you tell-a-me dat I shall have Anne Page for myself?" (I.iv.107–8); "By gar, I will myself have Anne Page" (110–11); "By gar, if I have not Anne Page, I shall turn your head out of my door"(115–6). Since the play offers nothing in the way of background for his fixation, the only conclusion to be drawn is that Caius' motivation is the same as everyone else's—greed. It is hardly surprising that Shakespeare does not even bother to construct a scene between Anne and Caius as the Doctor appears to be merely a prop to reinforce the objectification of Anne and the scope of Windsor's monetary mindset.

Yet beyond the comedic value of his fractured English, Caius does play one very important role in *Merry Wives* in that he is the vehicle through which Mistress Page's values become evident. Though it is established earlier that Anne's mother favors the Doctor's suit, her rationale is not made manifest until the Herne's Wood plotting is underway:

I'll to the Doctor: he hath my good will,  
 And none but he, to marry with Nan Page.  
 . . . The Doctor is well moneyed, and his friends  
 Potent at court: he, none but he, shall have her,  
 Though twenty thousand worthier come to crave her. (IV.iv.83–9)

The combination of monetary gain and court influence is a heady one for Mistress Page, and she, like Caius, uses the verb of possession to tie doctor and daughter together. Anne is hers to dispose of in a manner that will bring the greatest return, regardless of Caius's suitability. Although this may be just another economic equation in a play rife with them, what is interesting is that Mistress Page is *Merry Wives'* sole character to play an active role in both the main plot and the subplot. On one hand, she is part of a bulwark against the acquisitiveness embodied by Falstaff; on the other, she is shown to embrace principles that differ little from Sir John's. It seems as if Shakespeare artfully constructed Mistress Page as a highly likable character only to expose her true colors at this juncture, her presence in both storylines conveying how pervasive the moral malaise engendered by money is amongst Windsor's middle class. In the end, the machinations surrounding her daughter's marital future anticipate and exemplify Marx's view that "The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation."<sup>21</sup>

Mistress Page's financial thinking is complemented perfectly by her husband. He too is cast for most of the play in a largely positive light, being the voice of reason in the matter of the wives' fidelity as well as the amiable host of communal feasts. Yet Page is eager to tie his daughter to Slender, a man his wife calls a "well-landed . . . idiot" (IV.iv.85). Once again, we can only assume the operating motive is greed, as Slender seems to have no personal advantages, only fiscal ones. Beyond the immediate cash that Page evidently believes that this match would generate, Simon Reynolds speculates, "If Page knew that Slender was to inherit the deer park and all Shallow's other property, this would provide a return upon his money. His family would become gentry by association, his 'substance' would be enhanced."<sup>22</sup> Notably, one of Page's chief accusations against Fenton is that he loves Anne "but as a property" (III. iv.10)—an ironic charge, given that Page himself reduces her to an asset by asserting, ". . . my daughter is disposed of" (III.iv.68). For her part, Anne has obviously been briefed by her father on the expected remuneration, and her disgust for Page's economic maneuvering is evident: "This is my father's choice. / O, what a world of vile ill-favoured faults / Looks handsome in three hundred pounds a year!" (III.iv.31–3)

Hardly a stock fortune-hunting *roué*, Slender spouts laughable romantic patter, and his hovering in the background of scenes muttering "Ah, sweet Anne Page!" (III.i.38) contributes to the impression that he is a fool. Obviously though, Shallow has briefed his nephew on the economic ramifications of his potential marriage to the point where Slender thinks that all discussions center on it. When Anne asks, "What is your will?" (III.iv.55), meaning his intentions, the lad clumsily focuses on the word's legalistic, monetary sense, replying, "I ne'er made my will yet, I thank God: I am not such a sickly creature" (57–8). Given Slender's ineptitude, it subsequently falls to the avaricious Shallow to play Cyrano, albeit a Cyrano with an economic bent:

Shallow: Mistress Anne, my cousin loves you.

Slender: Ay, that I do, as well as I love any woman in Gloucestershire.

Shallow: He will maintain you like a gentlewoman.

Slender: Ay, that I will, come cut and long-tail, under the degree of a squire.

Shallow: He will make you a hundred and fifty pounds jointure. (III.iv.42–49)

Shallow's movement from a romantic incentive to a monetary one in three lines is entirely in keeping with his character. Although the offer of jointure,

a settlement on a wife for the period during which she survives her husband, seems to indicate a willingness on the Justice's part to make an investment to secure the marriage, the benefits of such an offer were dubious at the time that *Merry Wives* was written. In point of fact, the acceptance of jointure greatly limited the size of a widow's inheritance upon her husband's death.<sup>23</sup> As argued by Reynolds, Shallow "hopes to claim both Anne's fortune and her bride's portion with as small a cost to himself as possible. By offering an unexpectedly large annual amount, Shallow is hoping to entice Anne into agreeing to a jointure before marriage, rather than allowing her the chance of waiving this income at a later date in exchange for dower."<sup>24</sup>

There is no question that Slender and Caius are unsuitable partners for Anne, and *Merry Wives* in no way sanctions the Pages' efforts to marry their daughter to the highest bidder. Their desire to do so is standard New Comedy material; traditional blocking figures, they value money over love and must be overcome to effect comic resolution. Shakespeare had also dealt with the issue of mercenary fathers and marriage in his earlier farce, *The Taming of the Shrew*. In that play, Baptista unabashedly states that the man ". . . That can assure my daughter greatest dower / Shall have my Bianca's love,"<sup>25</sup> while Petruchio's intentions are evident from the beginning: "I come to wive it wealthily in Padua; / If wealthily, then happily in Padua."<sup>26</sup> But *Shrew* and *Merry Wives* unfold in dramatically different fashion. In her discussion of *Shrew*, Margaret Mikesell points out how the play's New Comedy pattern is subverted early on:

By the end of Act II, the conventional standoff between marriage for love and for money has been transformed into a unanimity of desires between parent and child. The "supposed" Lucentio, negotiating with the father, and the real Lucentio, courting the daughter, both gain Bianca at the same time—thus disengaging the mutually exclusive desires of father and suitor that conventionally trigger the conflict and move the plot.<sup>27</sup>

The entire New Comedy scenario is further complicated by the fact that Bianca's marriage, which was predicated on pseudo-Petrarchan passion, turns out to be miserable. The Katherine plot in *Shrew* is unconventional as well, in that Petruchio's blatantly mercenary character abandons any talk of Kate's financial attributes and evolves over the course of the play into a husband who arguably loves and respects her. Like *The Comedy of Errors*, while money may set the plot in motion, it is all but meaningless in the end. In *Shrew*, nothing is as simple as it seems at first blush. In contrast, the Anne Page

plot in *Merry Wives* seems nothing if not conventional in its adherence to all the time-honored conventions of New Comedy, which prompts the question, "Why?" On the evidence of the plays written between *Shrew* and *Merry Wives*, such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Richard II*, it is apparent that Shakespeare's craft was growing increasingly complex in this period. The plays which lay beyond *Merry Wives* bear further testament to a dramatist increasingly unsatisfied with pat answers and hoary plots. Fenton and Anne's defeat of her mercenary parents and their subsequent reintegration into society would appear to be nothing less than a failure of Shakespeare's artistic imagination—unless, as argued earlier vis-à-vis *Merry Wives*' main plot, the fill-in-the-blanks subplot is yet another red herring. Perhaps, as in *Shrew*, all is not as it seems.

If Shakespeare is indeed subverting recognizable conventions, the question remains, "How?" All the standard elements are in place in the subplot: greedy controlling parents, unsuitable mercenary suitors favored by them, and a virtuous maid who wishes to marry according to her choice. Unquestionably, all these are as they appear—which leaves Fenton, who, as described by Slights, is "a young aristocrat, who is good at heart,"<sup>28</sup> the apparent epitome of a New Comedy romantic hero. Yet, in a play that seems to privilege bourgeois common sense and values, Fenton's court background should render him suspect, as it does in Page's mind. The correlation between Fenton and Falstaff (aside from the alliterative, disyllabic similarity of their names) is made evident through Page's objection to the young man on the grounds that "he kept company with the wild Prince and Poins" (III.ii.65–6). This is a past Fenton shares with Sir John, no matter how anachronistic that prospect is. There are two possible readings of this curious reference. Either Fenton is intended to be viewed as another Hal, that is, one whose "reformation . . . / Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes / Than that which hath no foil to set it off,"<sup>29</sup> or he is merely another Falstaff. Many, such as Peter Erickson, would argue the former: "The play's overall design depends on the pairing and counterpointing Fenton with Falstaff."<sup>30</sup> Similarly, George Hunter argues that in *Merry Wives*, "the nobleman/seducer role is doubled, Fenton being allowed to take over the 'noble' side while Falstaff retains the darker role."<sup>31</sup> This reading of the play's two court figures as 'counterpoints' would confirm Fenton's innate worth. However, in other Shakespearean works with distinct subplots, storylines often tend to mirror, rather than contrast each other. For example, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Much Ado about Nothing*, the various romantic plots, as they move from enmity to concord, reflect thematically upon each other. This approach is perhaps best exemplified in *King Lear*, the only Shakespeare play in which

the subplot virtually duplicates the main plot. While Cordelia and her sisters and Edgar and Edmund may well be exemplary counterpoints *within* their respective plots, the Lear and Gloucester stories run almost in parallel. In *Merry Wives*, Fenton may protest that he has no mercenary motives, but upon examination, his pursuit of the wealthy Anne Page seems remarkably similar to Falstaff's designs on Mistresses Ford and Page. Far from offering a counterpoint, the Fenton-Anne subplot appears to reinforce ideas present in the main plot.

Perhaps the primary reason for the tendency to view Falstaff and Fenton as opposites lies in *Merry Wives*' surface reality. Whereas Sir John is "Old, cold, withered and of intolerable entrails" (V.v.152), Fenton has "eyes of youth . . . [and] . . . smells April and May" (III.ii.61–2). In his discussion of various misreadings that occur within the play, John Russell Brown argues that "most of the *dramatis personae* of *The Merry Wives* are over-confident about appearances."<sup>32</sup> While Brown's statement rings true, especially with regard to the mix-ups at Herne's Wood, it needs to be extended beyond the play itself; while Page may suspect Fenton, audiences and critics tend to embrace him—after all, he *looks* the part of a New Comedy hero. Arguably, that embrace is not warranted.

Fenton's underlying dedication to Windsor's prevailing monetary ethos is evident in his first appearance in the play. Echoing Shallow and his offer of jointure, Fenton seems to be aware that, in order to make money, one must make an investment. Accordingly, he offers a bribe to secure Mistress Quickly's influence: "Hold, there's money for thee: let me have thy voice in my behalf" (I.iv.144–5). Interestingly, he is asking Quickly to petition *Anne*, rather than her parents, who presumably should be the primary obstacles in his campaign. As we are provided no background to the Anne-Fenton relationship, his insecurity here raises the question of whether theirs was ever a case of hopeless love at first sight. In the third act, Fenton once again plies Quickly with money in his pursuit of Anne (III.iv.98). Later, it is the Host of the Garter on the receiving end of Fenton's largesse, as the young aristocrat offers to pay what seems, for a dissolute noble, an inordinate sum ("A hundred pound in gold") in order to secure his marriage to Anne (IV.vi.4–5). However, the money is more than likely an investment against future returns; as Giorgio Melchiori ventures, "Fenton is counting on Anne Page's dowry if the Host is successful in assisting him to marry her."<sup>33</sup> Fenton's final words in his scene with the Host are a couplet that reveals much about his values: "So shall I evermore be bound to thee; / Besides, I'll make a present recompense" (IV.vi.53–4). The distance between the two sentiments—on one hand, offering traditional fealty, while on the other reducing their bond to the level of a

financial transaction, with the transition between the two ideas being a cynical “besides”—speaks volumes.

That Mistress Quickly and the Host are an integral part of the financial matrix in *Merry Wives* extends the idea of monetary preoccupation beyond a middle-class versus court construction. Ronald Huebert argues, perhaps a bit too harshly, that “Mistress Quickly treats Anne like a piece of merchandise that must be turned into a quick profit.”<sup>34</sup> A bit more restrained, White observes, “The Host of the Garter Inn and Mistress Quickly need to make money where they can, and the economic imperative leads them to disguise or suppress their own opinions . . . The only judgments they make concern who can pay most.”<sup>35</sup> However, it bears notice that, when it comes to Anne, there are no bidders other than Fenton, who, for example, is the only character to bribe the Host. As well, although both Shallow and Caius rely on Mistress Quickly to advance their case with Anne, they never mention specifically paying her for that service.<sup>36</sup> In fact, the only other character who bribes her, naturally enough, is Falstaff, offering further support for the notion that Fenton and Sir John are more similar than not. This comparison is furthered by Quickly’s first appearance after accepting Fenton’s money being the scene in which Falstaff enlists her help in the matter of Mistress Ford, saying “There’s my purse; I am yet thy debtor” (II.ii.125). Wealth is not only the end in *Merry Wives*; it is also the means to that end, and in light of his successful suit for Anne, Fenton offers tangible proof of Ford’s maxim, “If money goes before, all ways do lie open.”

If Anne and Fenton’s love was intended to be the stuff of New Comedy, perhaps Shakespeare would have accorded the couple more than the spare third-act scene they share, which lasts barely twenty lines. During that brief exchange, Fenton does most of the talking and, while ostensibly pledging his troth, his words unrelentingly center on economic matters and employ material imagery. Fully aware of Page’s primary objection to him (“The gentleman is of no having.” [III.ii.64–5]; “He shall not knit a knot in his fortunes with the finger of my substance.” [67–8]), Fenton first suggests that Anne ignore her father. He follows this up, “rather gracelessly”<sup>37</sup> as pointed out by Huebert, by repeating Page’s charges and, in the process, admits to being of less than sterling character by speaking of his “state being galled with [his] expense, . . . [his] riots past, [and his] wild societies” (III.iv.5/8). In short, he confesses to being akin to dissolutes found in other city comedies who similarly seek the hand of a young heiress. Fenton’s admission may also be an attempt to configure himself as a “prodigal,” a figure that was a mainstay of Citizen Comedy.<sup>38</sup> However, Fenton fails to qualify as a stock “reformed prodigal,” as Shakespeare affords him no overt repentance of his past; the

door is instead left open to view him as a spendthrift who is indeed banking on Anne's riches. Moreover, he baldly admits that money was indeed his original goal: "Albeit I will confess thy father's wealth / as the first motive that I wooed thee, Anne" (13–14). To counteract the impression that he has only economic interests at heart, Fenton does not resort to declarations of undying love; instead, his testimonial to Anne rather perversely reinforces his preoccupation with material wealth:

Yet, wooing thee, I found thee of more value  
Than stamps in gold or sums in sealed bags.  
And 'tis the very riches of thyself  
That now I aim at. (15–18)

Although Fenton is ostensibly addressing Anne's intangible worth, this is nonetheless an evaluation of her in blatantly economic terms. He appears incapable of separating her from images of "gold or sums in sealed bags" and, in the process, commodifies her. On the whole, the unmistakable ambiguity of "the very riches of thyself" perhaps reveals more than young Fenton may have intended.

Given Fenton's economic straits, Page's charge, as repeated by Fenton, seems all too plausible: "And [he] tells me 'tis a thing impossible / I should love thee, but as a property" (III.iv.9–10). What is intriguing is Anne's response: "Maybe he tells you true" (11). Ruth Nevo characterizes this non-committal reply as being suggestive of the heroines of Shakespeare's mature comedies, women who are "capable of . . . standing up for [themselves], of being independent and adventurous and not a mere accessory or 'property' . . . [women] who will become the subject of comic plots, not the object."<sup>39</sup> Nowhere in this brief scene, or elsewhere in the play for that matter, does Anne declare her love for Fenton; instead, she only echoes her father's doubts. Whether that line is delivered teasingly or hesitantly, the impact is the same. While Anne's motivation for marrying a potential fortune-hunter is never made clear in *Merry Wives*,<sup>40</sup> one suspects that a suitor who "capers, . . . dances, [and] . . . has eyes of youth" (III.ii.60–1) is preferable to either the insipid Slender whom Anne openly disdains or the older, choleric, linguistically-challenged Caius. If Anne's fate is to be sold into marriage, Fenton must look awfully attractive, regardless of his motivation or her doubts.

In the end, Fenton does, of course, wed both Anne and her wealth. When the couple reappears following the resolution of the Falstaff plot, it is apparent that Fenton has taken possession of his prize, given that when

Anne's parents question her directly, he answers for her. Rather than attempting to humbly ingratiate himself, Fenton delivers a self-justifying speech (V.v.214–224) with an arrogance reminiscent of the manner in which Ford has just put Falstaff in his place. The commonality between the two men<sup>41</sup> is their economic victories—Ford has maintained his wealth, while Fenton has acquired a fortune. As pointed out by Erickson, “Fenton’s final declaration of the sacredness of love . . . by no means excludes financial considerations. He reckons with and protects against the possibility of Anne’s disinheritance by denying that her elopement constitutes ‘unduteous title’ (V.v.224).”<sup>42</sup> Despite Fenton’s ungracious speech, the happy ending is effected when Page concedes defeat, exclaiming “Well, what remedy? Fenton, God give thee joy! / What cannot be eschewed must be embraced” (V.v.230–1). Recognizing that he has been beaten in the economic battle over his daughter, Page is at least a good loser. When the play finishes, all seems right as the *senex* has been overcome and the young lovers are ready to take their place in society. In *Merry Wives*, however, the underlying societal values are primarily financial, and Fenton’s place in Windsor has appropriately been secured by his acumen in economic gamesmanship. Things have not changed for the better; stasis seems the order of the day.

Anne Barton typifies *Merry Wives* as “in some ways the most realistic of Shakespeare’s comedies,”<sup>43</sup> and, given that this is the only comedy to which Shakespeare gave an identifiable English setting, it seems reasonable to venture that the primacy accorded money in this play reflects how he viewed the priorities of his world. Barton also argues that contributing to the air of “reality” is “the prose-bound nature of this play, eighty-eight percent of which is prose, the ultimate realistic device.”<sup>44</sup> The consistent exception to this syntactic pattern, however, is Fenton, who invariably speaks in iambic pentameter, normally a mark of idealistic romanticism. By differentiating Fenton in this manner, Shakespeare may be communicating that, in late sixteenth-century England, romance heroes who conquer all adversity in the name of love are, in fact, only fiction. In effect, we are invited to look beyond the surface and recognize that the pursuit of wealth as a motivating force in human behavior is pandemic, encompassing even what should be idealized literary types—in this case, a poetry-speaking young lover fighting against all odds.

Delving into the field of textual criticism offers substantial support for the proposition that *Merry Wives*’ overreaching thematic concern with money is remarkably methodical and most likely deliberate. *Merry Wives* exists in two very different forms, namely the 1602 Quarto and the version which appeared in the 1623 Folio of Shakespeare’s collected works (which is the text, in its 2000 Arden incarnation, referred to thus far and used in the



following discussion). The Quarto is considerably shorter; at less than two-thirds the length of the Folio text, it omits numerous speeches and entire scenes such as the “Latin lesson” episode (F.IV.i) and the blessing of Windsor Castle (F.V.v.55–64). What is of particular interest here, however, is that an overwhelming majority of the economically-oriented material discussed above exists only in the Folio edition. Although the Falstaff-wives plot is largely the same in Q and F, the Q version of the Anne Page subplot is little more than conventional New Comedy with the financial undertones virtually missing. In short, we have one *Merry Wives* that conforms with the arguments advanced thus far and another that does not.

Prior to speculating on the reasons for this anomaly, an examination of the evidence is required. To begin with, the play’s opening scene is radically different in the two versions, as Falstaff makes his entrance seventy-seven lines earlier in Q than in F. Missing in Q is Shallow going on about his ancestry; but more importantly, the discussion of Anne’s inheritance and dowry is nowhere to be found, including Evans’ cynical evaluation—“Seven hundred pound, and possibilities, is goot gifts” (F.I.i.58–9). In the most extensive textual study of Q and F *Merry Wives* to date, William Bracy, whose general argument is that the Quarto is an abridgment of the Folio text, makes the following statement: “In this long opening scene only one conclusion will logically explain the striking differences in length. The opening of the scene has been shortened to hasten the action, present the situation, and get the character of main interest, Falstaff, upon the stage.”<sup>45</sup> This seems to be a rather simplistic explanation, as the mercenary elements of Slender’s courtship of Anne are a rather integral part of the “situation” in F. But this is only the first instance of a sequence missing in Q that is germane to the issue of Windsor’s monetary disposition. To wit, Fenton’s initial visit with Mistress Quickly, which shows him willing to buy his way into Anne’s favor, is also not in Q. Again, Bracy offers a similar argument, asserting that the “conversation of Fenton and Quickly about Anne adds little to the development of the plot. . . .”<sup>46</sup> Regarding *Merry Wives*’ other suitor, Doctor Caius, the idea of Anne as a possession is far less pronounced, as his thrice-repeated intent to “*have Anne Page*” is not there. But, much more importantly, the direct link between the Doctor, money and marriage is established only in F. Mistress Page’s speech in Q wherein she plots to wed Caius to Anne is half the length of its correspondent in F, and the Doctor’s wealth and powerful court connections are never mentioned:

And in that Maske Ile make the Doctor  
steale my daughter An, & ere my husband knowes  
it, to carrie her to Church, and marrie her.<sup>47</sup>

Whereas the Folio text overtly configures the suits of Slender and Caius as being founded in economics, the motivations of Shallow, Evans, Slender and Mistress Page are left unexplored in the Quarto.

Further relevant deviations between the two *Merry Wives* can be found in Page's speech in F condemning Fenton, which expands and alters the monetary references found in Q. First, the connection between Fenton and Hal and, by extension, Falstaff, is unique to F. In Q, Page says only that "The gentleman is wild, he knows too much" (Q.809–10). The line which follows is common to both versions ("If he take her, let him take her simply" [F.III. ii.68–9] [Q.811–12]), but the Quarto speech ends with the following: "For my goods goes with my liking, and my liking goes not that way" (Q.812–13). In the Folio text, the syntactic structure is the same, but "goods" become "wealth" (F.69) and "liking" becomes "consent" (F.69) with the result being a strengthening of the connection between money and control. That control and Page's view of Anne as a possession are moderated in Q as Page never utters the line "My daughter is disposed of" there. Finally, while it is clear that Page considers Fenton a fortune-hunter in F ([he] "shall not knit a knot in his fortunes with . . . my substance" [F.67–8]), this is not manifest in the 1602 text, as the references to his daughter's suitor being penniless are missing.

With regard to the economic underpinnings of *Merry Wives*' subplot, nowhere is the difference between Q and F more apparent than in each play's sole discussion between Fenton and Anne. The two scenes start in a sharply different manner; the initial exchange in Q, with its courtly mutual declaration of love and the specter of blocking parents, epitomizes standard New Comedy cant, almost to the point of parody:

Fenton: Tell me sweet Nan, how doest thou yet resolve,  
 Shall foolish Slender have thee to his wife?  
 Or one as wise as he, the learned Doctor?  
 Shall such as they enjoy thy maiden hart?  
 Thou knowst that I have always loved thee deare,  
 And thou hast oft times swore the like to me.  
 Anne: Good M. Fenton, you may assure your selfe  
 My hart settled upon none but you,  
 Tis as my father and mother please:  
 Get their consent, you quickly shall have mine. (Q.1070–9)

At the opening of the corresponding Folio scene, Fenton speaks not of his love for Anne, but rather of his inability to secure her *father's* love (F.III.4.1).

Interestingly, both versions contain Fenton's raising of and defending against Page's suspicion that he loves Anne only for her wealth. In Q, this directly follows the lines above. In F, however, what precedes and follows is so different from Q, it might as well be in another play.

The scene between the two young lovers begins in F with Fenton rejecting any further efforts to curry Page's favor, followed by his allusions to being a bankrupt noble (a detail never mentioned in Q) and a confession to "riots past" and "wild societies." In Q, the "prodigal" angle is not raised. Furthermore, the direct correlation between marriage and the acquisition of wealth is not reinforced in Q the way it is when Fenton concludes his speech in F by saying, "[Your father] tells me 'tis a thing impossible / I should love thee, but as a property" (F. III.iv.9–10). In contrast to the selfless declaration of love Anne offers in Q, her response in F, "Maybe he tells you true" (F.11), as discussed earlier, is highly significant. Both Kathleen Irace and Steven Urkowitz have argued that Anne is a stronger character in the Folio text;<sup>48</sup> nowhere is this more apparent than in this ambiguous comment. Following Anne's pledge of love in Q, when Fenton confesses and then refutes his initial mercenary motives, his words seem plausibly sincere; however, in response to Anne's expression of doubt (regardless of whether it is playful or serious) they look potentially disingenuous. The difference between Q and F in the way Fenton attempts to defuse any doubts about his motivation is consistent with the pattern that has been already established. His declaration in Q, while quite sentimental, seems nothing less than genuine:

Thy father thinks I love thee for his wealth,  
 Tho I must needs confesse at first that drew me,  
 But since thy vertues wiped that trash away,  
 I love thee Nan, an so deare is it set,  
 That whilst I live, I nere shall thee forget. (Q. 1080–4)

In the Folio text, this expression of devotion is transformed into valuations based on material commodities, as Anne's "vertues" and Fenton's "love" are transformed into "gold" and "riches."

The scene between Fenton and Anne ends quite similarly in the two texts with her father's arrival driving them apart. However, Page's dismissal of Anne, which configures his daughter as a piece of property ("My daughter is disposed of") is not in Q. Both sequences also end with Mistress Quickly promising to act on Fenton's behalf, albeit with one interesting difference. Quickly's scene-ending soliloquy is much longer in F and includes one of her trademark malaprops—namely, rather than promising to act "specially

for M. Fenton" (Q.1139) as she does in the Quarto text, her intention in the Folio version is to act "speciously" (III.v.106) for him. The association of specious actions and Fenton via Mistress Quickly's verbal tic is too serendipitous to ignore and seems to be a marvelously subtle way for Shakespeare to sow further doubt about his erstwhile romantic hero. The variations between Q and F recounted thus far all point to a Fenton in the Folio edition who embodies a monetary way of thinking that more than equals his rivals for Anne, but none more so than the difference between his parting words to the Host after arranging the Herne's Wood subterfuge. In Q, Fenton's expression of gratitude seems both noble and heartfelt: "So shall I evermore be bound unto thee. / Besides Ile alwaies be thy faithfull friend" (Q. 1435–6). In the Folio text, however, a promise of friendship becomes a promise to pay as Fenton reduces the bond between the Host and himself to a purely transactional level: "So shall I evermore be bound to thee; / Besides, I'll make a present recompense" (F.IV.vi.53–4). The yawning chasm between the sentiments in Q and F (not to mention the two constructions of Fenton) speaks for itself.

The denouement of *Merry Wives* offers further relevant points of comparison between the Q and F texts, the first of which being that the triumphant speech Fenton makes to Anne's parents appears only in F. In response to Page's demand to know what his daughter has done, Fenton's two lines in Q seem to quietly inform rather than hector, and his addressing Page as "sir" imparts a deference totally lacking in the Folio Fenton: "Married to me, nay sir never storme, / Tis done sir now, and cannot be undone" (Q.1598–9). The Fords also seem less crass in the Quarto's ending as well. While both versions show Ford attempting to exact an economic punishment by demanding that Falstaff repay the money given to him by Brook, Mistress Ford counters him in Q by saying, "Nay husband let that go to make ame[n]ds, / Forgive that sum, and so weele all be friends" (Q. 1561–2). The absence of this conciliatory gesture in F prevents a "softening" of the bourgeois establishment, and, as with Fenton and the Host, the ideal of friendship in Q is subsumed by the monetary concerns of F. As well, Ford's line concerning money buying land and wives being sold by fate appears only in the Folio text.<sup>49</sup> Finally, Page's acceptance of Anne's marriage is markedly different in Q and F. As argued earlier, Page reacts in F much like a gamesman who has been outfoxed. In contrast, his speech in Q evokes the couple's love and is much more typical of a New Comedy happy ending: ". . . since your choise is made of one you love / Here take her Fenton, & both happie prove" (Q. 1616–17).

In all, an inordinate amount of F's additional material, as well as numerous line variations, denotes a society that is overwhelmingly fixated on material wealth. In light of this, the question becomes how to account

for the pattern of difference that clearly exists between the Quarto and the Folio texts. Over the years, textual critics have advanced a variety of theories to account for the existence of these two very different versions of *Merry Wives*, the most prominent being memorial reconstruction, abridgement and revision (authorial or otherwise). Although it has received comparatively less attention in this area than, for example, *King Lear* or *Hamlet*, the status of the 1602 Quarto *Merry Wives* has nonetheless been the subject of lively debate. To date, the discussion has largely focused on aspects such as the horse-stealing intrigue and the homage to Windsor Castle.<sup>50</sup> However, with the exception of Kinney, who has written on some of the discrepancies noted above, there has been precious little discussion of the Folio text's comparative foregrounding of economic concerns to the point that they constitute an unmistakably central thematic concern. Given the evidence presented here, statements such as Hardin Craig's "Little, one might say almost nothing, of dramatic significance was omitted from the abbreviated version"<sup>51</sup> seem decidedly short-sighted.

As pointed out by Urkowitz, ". . . until the twentieth century many critics and editors read the earliest texts as authorial or theatrical documents showing the development of Shakespeare's plays as working drafts or as performing scripts for Elizabethan acting companies."<sup>52</sup> This view gave way to a consensus that the earlier versions of Shakespeare's works were "corrupt" texts with the implication that they were unworthy of serious consideration. In the case of *Merry Wives*, W. W. Greg's 1910 publication of the 1602 Quarto started the textual discussion in earnest. In his introduction to that work, Greg maintains that the Folio edition was the original text and that the Quarto resulted from a member of an acting company recreating the play as he remembered it and selling it to "an enterprising but unscrupulous stationer."<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, Greg goes so far as to identify the source: "One of the hired actors . . . produced . . . a rough reconstruction of the play, in which, naturally enough, his own part of the Host was the only one rendered throughout with tolerable accuracy."<sup>54</sup> Greg amended his theory in 1942, allowing for "an independent reporter relying generally on mine [the] Host's assistance."<sup>55</sup>

Others would later endorse and elaborate on Greg's conjectures, such as William Green, who, in 1965, identified the 1602 Quarto source as a member of the original Lord Chamberlain's production of *Merry Wives*, namely a "hired man"<sup>56</sup> who played the Host. In a more recent study, Kathleen Irace endorses the theory that the Quarto, besides being a memorial reconstruction, was an abridgement designed for touring purposes and, through her own textual analysis, concludes that it was "reconstructed from the reporters' memories

of the familiar longer versions.”<sup>57</sup> One of the shortcomings of the “Host-as-reporter” theory is that variations exist in the Host’s scenes between Q and F, discrepancies which Greg variably attributes to forgetfulness, fatigue and conscious abridgement. As pointed out by Laurie Maguire, “Unfortunately, the veridical detail of [Greg’s] commentary is overshadowed by the speculative narrative of the introduction which necessarily elides the difficulties.”<sup>58</sup> Despite any misgivings about Greg’s work, Maguire’s analysis nonetheless, albeit more prudently, pronounces Q *Merry Wives* to be “probably memorial reconstruction.”<sup>59</sup>

The problem with correlating the differences between Q and F *Merry Wives* with the vagaries of memorial reconstruction in the area of economic matters is the inordinate number of references missing in the Quarto. To accept these differences as being the result of an actor’s faulty memory is to accept that his lapses were consistent and systematic when it came to speeches related to economic imperatives. There are simply too many missing for this to be haphazard. Furthermore, one particular instance appears to belie Greg’s and others’ theory. Prefacing her textual analysis which concludes that the Host is likely responsible for Q, Irace states “If indeed the actor playing the Host reconstructed *Merry Wives* from memory . . . he should also have remembered with some accuracy the lines spoken by other characters while he was onstage.”<sup>60</sup> The scene in Act IV wherein Fenton pledges his friendship in the Quarto (replaced by a promise of “recompense” in the Folio) has only two actors on stage—the Host and Fenton—and therefore has no other characters’ speeches serving as distractions. More importantly, Fenton’s line is an exit line for both characters and, as such, presumably would have carried significance for the actor playing the Host. It seems more credible that Fenton’s line in Q was written as it stands, rather than the Host-reporter misremembering it to the extent that its meaning was completely altered.

The second major school of thought to account for the differences between the Quarto and Folio texts of *Merry Wives* is that of abridgement. In Bracy’s seemingly exhaustive 1952 textual analysis of the two versions, he arrives emphatically at the following conclusion: “The 1602 Quarto text offers unquestioned evidence of extensive adaptation and abridgement for special production purposes.”<sup>61</sup> Bracy goes on to speculate that the abridged text was “probably [adapted for] performance in the provinces . . . [in] 1597 when the Chamberlain’s men took to the road following the closing of the theaters in London” by “a practical adapter-reviser of the company.”<sup>62</sup> He also argues, as noted earlier, that many of the omissions in Q occur because the excised material was unnecessary in the first place; relying on the authority of Grenville-Barker, Bracy states that cuts were required “as a precaution

against loss of interest among the audience.”<sup>63</sup> Whether Bracy considered the establishment of mercenary motivations for characters as being of interest is not apparent. Despite his scene-by-scene analysis of the two texts, he does not address significant elements in this area that are present in F and absent in Q, such as Fenton’s bankrupt status or Mistress Page’s praise of Caius’ financial attributes. As argued with memorial reconstruction, if, indeed, Q is a product of abridgement, then it represents a canny and deliberate deletion of a multitude of economic references that effectively reduces *Merry Wives*’ subplot to an insipid romance yarn. Again, the difference between the two texts is too consistent, and no rationale is offered by Bracy to account for their disparate thematic concerns.

Two more recent textual analyses of Q and F *Merry Wives* do, however, address the Folio text’s greater emphasis on economic considerations. In a 1991 article that deals extensively with geographical references in Q and F, Leah Marcus ventures that “Fenton is distinctly more mercenary throughout [the Folio text], less convincingly in love with Anne than with her money.”<sup>64</sup> Although Marcus shies away from taking a definitive stance on the relationship between Q and F, she offers the following, which builds on her analysis of geographic discrepancies between the texts:

It is tempting to account for the differences between Quarto and Folio *Merry Wives* in terms of a difference in audience: the Quarto version, even though it may, as its title page asserts, have been performed before the queen, seems more oriented towards a middle-class urban public; the Folio, toward the court itself.<sup>65</sup>

Marcus appears to be obliquely leaning towards the abridgement argument, with audience considerations being offered as the primary reason for the texts’ divergences.

Largely concerned with economic issues, Kinney’s extensive 1993 consideration of Q and F *Merry Wives* argues that “*The Merry Wives of Windsor* is at pains to override a humours comedy with the sense of commercialism and commodification of the later city satires.”<sup>66</sup> In support of this contention, Kinney cites some of the same differences between Q and F discussed above that relate to the financial imperatives of many of the play’s characters. Overall, his primary theorizing about the wherefore of the two texts is devoted to situating them historically within late sixteenth-century English economic history. To this end, he draws into the discussion factors such as harvest failures, inflationary trends, death rates, and the fear of Spanish invasion. The conclusion reached by Kinney is that the economic undercurrents present in

F *Merry Wives* would have been anathema given the socioeconomic conditions at the time of its original composition and offers the following rationale: "Shakespeare expected his audiences to apply such a contemporary play to their own present-day suffering . . . and no authentic suffering would do in a play which pretended to be a farce."<sup>67</sup> He continues, "Beneath the comic surface . . . is the more savage reality."<sup>68</sup> Overall, Kinney argues that the monetary concerns evident in F were excised in Q so as not to offend the sensibility of audiences who faced economic hardship outside the theater; only when conditions improved was it prudent to restore the play to its entirety. Combining Marcus' discussion of locale and his own on audience sensitivity, Kinney concludes by saying that

. . . dearth seems to have caused the Lord Chamberlain's Men (and probably later the King's Men) to relocate *The Merry Wives* until relative economic health returned to England and to Windsor, and a play about haves and have-nots, meant to be comic, would not run the risk also of scraping so painfully along the bone.<sup>69</sup>

While one may agree wholeheartedly with Kinney's contention that "the most significant counternarrative for *The Merry Wives* is . . . primarily an economic narrative,"<sup>70</sup> his overall conclusions are not as easy to accept. First, many of his premises are fuelled by either speculation or overstatement—for example, his claim that "Shakespeare expected his audiences to apply such a contemporary play to their own suffering"<sup>71</sup> and the following assertion, which despite the voluminous economic data in his article, is never supported: "It is not ceremony, as in a Garter Feast or Induction for which Windsor was known, among other things, but poverty which is, from the outset, what this play is really about."<sup>72</sup> Second, the argument that Shakespeare would excise material relating to untoward economic conditions in order to preserve the levity of a comedy is highly questionable, given the evidence of other plays he wrote in the 1590s. For example, both *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *As You Like It* make what are presumed to be references to historic climatic and economic adversities, references certainly as direct as any that can be found in *Merry Wives*.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, while Falstaff's abuse of Shallow's lodge might have conceivably invoked late-sixteenth-century vagabondage in the minds of playgoers as Kinney infers, it is harder to envisage a subplot concerning mercenary marriage triggering associations with prevailing economic conditions. Even if that possibility were granted, why would the Falstaff plot, which is no less concerned with fortune-hunting, be left almost intact in Q?



Given the problematic nature of theories which promote either memorial reconstruction or abridgement, the prospect of the Folio *Merry Wives* being a systematic Shakespearean revision of his 1602 text is more attractive than the ideas discussed thus far, as well as more plausible. Recently, the position that earlier versions of Shakespearean works such as *Merry Wives*, *Hamlet*, and *Richard III* among others, merit the designation of “bad” quartos has come increasingly under attack. In the Marcus article discussed above, a “leveling” of Shakespearean texts is advocated, “not to pull his ‘best’ texts to the ground and to elevate the ‘worst’ but to grant—at least provisionally and for exploratory purposes—all of the early texts equal claim to our critical attention.”<sup>74</sup> Over the last few decades, the arguments for “revision” have grown louder, led by critics such as Urkowitz, Michael Warren and Gary Taylor. To quote Urkowitz:

I and others are trying to encourage scholars to consider the possibility that each of the multiple texts represents a different stage in Shakespeare’s and his acting company’s composing and revising process, and then to read variant texts simultaneously, learning their distinctions firsthand rather than accepting an editor’s representation of them.<sup>75</sup>

The advent of “revisionism” has prompted a revisiting of several of Shakespeare’s works with an eye towards establishing Folio versions as refinements of their original Quartos.

Some revision theorists have pinpointed a phenomenon that seems particularly apropos to the discussion of *Merry Wives*—that of “serial revision.” This is the crux of Nevill Coghill’s work with the Quarto and Folio texts of *Othello*, in which he argues that there is a pattern to Folio speeches that were originally viewed as being cut from the Quarto, namely that they are “serially connected” in a way that expands and adds significant depth to the character of Emilia: “It is as if Shakespeare had set himself methodically to strengthen her part. . . .”<sup>76</sup> Similarly, Michael Warren’s analysis of the discrepancies between Q and F *King Lear* contends, “Whereas in Q [Edgar] ends the play a young man overwhelmed by his experience, in F he is a young man who has learned a great deal, and who is emerging as the new leader of the ravaged society.”<sup>77</sup> As Ernest Honigmann notes about the cases of Emilia and Edgar, “. . . in the Folio versions . . . I think, that we are looking over the dramatist’s shoulder as he rethinks his work.”<sup>78</sup> It is equally arguable that Fenton is a far more thematically relevant character in F *Merry Wives* than he is in the Quarto version. It bears repeating that in Q, Fenton is a typical New Comedy romantic lead, almost to the point of parody, a virtual prisoner

of an innocuous storyline; in F, however, his reconfiguration as a mercenary suitor strengthens the play structurally, as the overt acquisitiveness of Falstaff in the main plot finds its equivalent in the covert avarice of Fenton in the subplot. As well, the additions in F that establish the greed of Shallow and Mistress Page are serially connected to the alterations of Fenton's role in that the entire subplot and Anne Page herself are subsumed by widespread expectations of financial gain. The end result is a far richer and more complex subplot, and it seems quite feasible that a strategy of revision is at play in F *Merry Wives*.

In order to mount a consistent argument for the Folio text being the product of authorial revision, the Quarto edition must also be accepted as coming from Shakespeare's pen. However, the deception aspect of the main plot, as argued earlier, is weak, and the subplot is simply lame. How then to account for this inferior Shakespearean work? It seems common to most textual criticism that any attempt to explain Q-F differences at some point requires a leap of faith to pull the loose ends together. The proposition advanced here is that the story that Elizabeth commissioned the play and "was so eager to see it Acted, that she commanded it to be finished in fourteen days"<sup>79</sup> may be founded in truth. In short, Q *Merry Wives* was a rush job. Shakespeare did, in truth, execute a fairly good farce in the main plot, but it appears that he tacked on a fill-in-the-numbers New Comedy subplot, perhaps to accommodate the young lovers that are seemingly requisite in all comedies of the period. In light of how Shakespearean comedies generally knit together plot and subplot in a thematically relevant way, the tenuous relationship between the Falstaff and Fenton plots in Q emerges as a major weakness. Moreover, the Quarto has fundamentally very little to say about the human condition and in general lacks intellectual heft. The Folio text addresses all of these shortcomings and emerges as a more coherent and cohesive satire of the economic mores of Shakespeare's contemporary society. In *Merry Wives*, we are invited to look beyond surface appearances and uncover the truth that, from respectable bourgeois citizens to a seeming paragon of a male romantic lead, greed holds sway.

It has been long accepted that two specific differences between Q and F *Merry Wives* are the result of revision, namely, the change of Ford's assumed name from Brook in Q to Broom in F and the expurgation of Q's oaths. The former is assumed to have been done out of deference to the Cobham family, while the latter was necessitated by state censorship. In comparison, the idea of F *Merry Wives* being revisited in order to comment on the pervasive role that money plays in society seems far more palatable than the "revision by necessity" we already accept as having transpired. Kinney states, "I think

to establish authorial revision is to some degree dependent on establishing causes for change.”<sup>80</sup> Given the obvious economic themes in the Falstaff plot, the opportunity to write a vastly better play that expanded on those ideas in his only portrayal of his contemporary society perhaps proved irresistible to Shakespeare. The consistency of the added material in the Folio text and the results achieved would certainly suggest as much. In the RSC production described earlier, that times and values were changing was cleverly communicated by Herne’s Oak being newly reduced to a stump; presumably, that symbol of a mythic England had been felled to make way for a new development. Through visual shorthand, Alexander effectively conveyed the ascendance of cash and exchange values and the decline of “traditional” ones, a thematic concern that Q *Merry Wives* largely neglects, but one that the Folio text pointedly underlines.

Chapter Three

“My purse, my person”

Conflating the Economic and the Personal in *The Merchant of Venice*

In the opening scene of *The Merchant of Venice*, Solanio and Salarino, attempting to divine the cause of Antonio’s melancholia, suggest that the titular merchant is overly preoccupied with his commercial fortunes. Empathizing with what he supposes to be Antonio’s concern, Salarino offers the following:

. . . Should I go to church  
And see the holy edifice of stone  
And not bethink me straight of dangerous rocks  
Which, touching but my gentle vessel’s side,  
Would scatter all her spices on the stream,  
Enrobe the roaring waters with my silks,  
And, in a word, but even now worth this,  
And now worth nothing?<sup>1</sup>

Later in the play, Lancelot Gobbo chides Shylock’s daughter, Jessica, over her recent conversion to Christianity from Judaism, observing, “This making of Christians will raise the price of hogs. If we grow all to be pork-eaters, we shall not shortly have a rasher on the coals for money” (III.v.21–3). The conflation in these two instances of what properly should be incongruent spheres, namely the religious and the economic, manifests the extent to which fiscal considerations dominate life in Venice. That they are made by gentleman and clown alike offers further testament to the breadth of the underlying economic mindset in the play.

Obviously, the central Shylock-Antonio storyline betokens *Merchant’s* interest in the economic relationships that exist between individuals in mercantile societies. And, indeed, the coming together of the usurer and the commercial trader enables Shakespeare to explore issues that run far beyond

whether Antonio can pay his bond. But what is somewhat unexpected in *Merchant* is its failure (or perhaps its refusal) to provide a convincing contrastive approach to the world—that is, one that does not center on money. More than any other play written by Shakespeare in the 1590s, *The Merchant of Venice*, through its overall societal representation and its multiple love plots, places *homo economicus* under the microscope. What should be a simple counterbalance between a greedy Jewish usurer and a generous Christian community is rendered problematic, as John Gillies notes, “by the fact that all the Venetian characters have recourse to a common commercial vocabulary.”<sup>2</sup> The lexicon of finance is pervasive in *Merchant* and constitutes a virtual *lingua franca* for its characters. Referring to Lancelot Gobbo’s aforementioned observation on pork prices, Thomas Moisan argues that “in having economic theory uttered from the mouth of a fool, the *Merchant* glances reflexively and parodically at the very sort of discourse in which it has involved itself and immersed us.”<sup>3</sup> Arguably, the financial motivations of many of its characters and their method of self-expression contribute to the desire in some quarters to group *Merchant* in the category of “problem play.”<sup>4</sup> In Shakespeare’s Venice and Belmont, certainly a fundamental problem is that practically all aspects of interpersonal relationships seem tainted by the scent of money.

The choice of locale for *Merchant* provides the play with an apt atmosphere for the mercantile preoccupations that drive much of its narrative. Like the Ephesian setting of *The Comedy of Errors*, Venice was a renowned trading centre. However, unlike the long-ago-and-far-away Ephesus, Venice was a more immediate and known quantity in Elizabethan England, not to mention a sometimes suspect one. As noted by Karoline Szatek, “Several Early Modern English tracts and pamphlets depict the often contemptuous sixteenth-century attitude toward Renaissance Venice, specifically against Venetian commerce and its subsequent wickedness.”<sup>5</sup> In Venice, the movement from a hierarchy based on land or inherited title to one built on financial holdings found its epitome. Citing Venice as “the single, most spectacular example of the power of wealth to beget wealth” and noting “its miraculous setting in the sea,” A. D. Nuttall characterizes Venice as “the landless landlord over all.”<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, Shakespeare’s Venice is a city of mercantile venturing, of economic relationships and, of course, of usury. Yet, despite *Merchant*’s ostensible status as a comedy, this milieu is not exploited for humor. If one harks back to Shakespeare’s earlier work in which merchants figure prominently, the contrast is striking; it would appear that, in the intervening years between *Errors* and *Merchant*, his views towards the emerging capitalist mercantile world had darkened considerably. The open and energetic Ephesian

mart is replaced in *Merchant* by what invariably seem to be the dark, shadowy corners of the Rialto. Whereas before, the foundering of a merchant's ship resulted in the fantastical separation of an improbable set of twins, the same circumstances in *Merchant* engender more dire consequences. Egeon's story may have ended happily with his reunion with his wife and family, but, at *Merchant's* end, Antonio stands apart from the couplings which mark the comedic genre, making him more akin to a Jacques or a Malvolio than a titular comedic hero. Overall, Shakespeare's naming of this play seems curious as Antonio is not at the centre of the play and is hardly its hero. Perhaps our attention was meant to be drawn not to the man, but rather to his profession and the mercantile attitudes which permeate social relationships in *Merchant*.

If *Merchant* does indeed constitute an indictment of money's influence on the human condition, then, at first glance, the grasping usurer Shylock seems to incarnate the mercenary inclinations of Venetian society. However, if the focus turns solely to money being a primary motivation for human behavior, it would appear that Shakespeare has presented us with something of a paradox. On one hand, Shylock is a wealthy man whose primary source of income is the lending of money at interest; on the other, however, he seems to be the character in *Merchant* least motivated by economic imperatives. It is his single-minded desire for revenge, not financial gain, that drives him in his dealings with Antonio. As pointed out by Walter Cohen, "The crisis of the play arises not from his [Shylock's] insistence on usury, but from his refusal of it."<sup>7</sup> Linda Anderson also notes that the "'pound of flesh' bargain . . . is, as [Shylock] himself points out, . . . ridiculous from a business standpoint."<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, Shylock's refusal of a settlement of three times the original bond does not denote an agenda of material acquisition. The only instance in *Merchant* when Shylock seems to privilege monetary concerns is Solanio's account of him running through the streets bemoaning his loss of ducats and jewels following Jessica's elopement (II.viii.15–22). Yet, even in this instance, much deeper issues are at play. Shylock's subsequent desire to see his daughter "hearsed at [his] foot and the ducats in her coffin" (III.i.85) betrays more a blind need for vengeance than a wish to recoup his monetary losses. Interestingly, in a society in which material wealth and the discourse of finance consistently supplant intangible human values, it is Shylock who effects a rare reversal of that trend when he learns from Tubal that Jessica has traded his turquoise ring for a monkey. The shift from Shylock's lamentations about how much money the search for Jessica is costing is palpable, and his words make evident that the ring as a material object is irrelevant; it is instead something deeper that has been violated: "Thou torturest me,

Tubal. It was my turquoise. I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor. I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys” (III.i.113–16). Through these words, the intangible, namely love and memory, brings meaning and value to the material object, instead of the reverse, which is often the case in Venice and Belmont.

In light of the above, it seems possible that, amongst the myriad of critical approaches that can be and have been taken to understanding Shylock’s role in *Merchant*, there is perhaps one further to be considered. Without wishing to minimize the complexity of Shakespeare’s rendering of the character or the issues raised by Shylock’s presence in the play, it seems arguable that, as proposed earlier regarding Falstaff in *Merry Wives*, Shylock, in the thematic realm of the role money and acquisition play in *Merchant*, is a bit of a red herring as well. While appearing to personify the ethos of a world governed by economics (and, in the time outside the events of the play, he may well have done so) his actions are far less mercenary than those of the community surrounding him. Shylock is patently no Barabas, and Shakespeare invites us to look beyond the surface of what should be an obvious scapegoat and examine the economic mores of Venice and Belmont. The central message of the Belmont caskets, “All that glisters is not gold” (II.vii.65), spreads throughout *Merchant* as appearances fail to line up with reality. Among other incongruities, the play offers for consideration a romantic hero who may be little more than a fortune hunter, a Christian community that owns slaves (echoing *The Jew of Malta*), a champion of mercy who shows surprisingly little of that quality, and, overall, a comedy that veers uncomfortably close to tragedy. Citing its revenge plot and trial, Kiernan Ryan argues that in *Merchant* “an apparently civilized society is unmasked as premised on barbarity, on the ruthless priority of money values over human values.”<sup>9</sup> In light of the communal condemnation heaped upon Shylock for his preoccupation with the economic, the rest of *Merchant*’s characters put one in mind of the proverbial dwellers in glass houses.

It is sometimes easy to forget that *Merchant* does qualify as a comedy, but its various romance plots and its movement towards reconciliation and marriage conform to the surface expectations of that genre. But these are not the love stories of Illyria or the Forest of Arden. Beneath the surface of Jessica and Lorenzo’s New Comedy subterfuge and the fairytale air of the caskets that hold Bassanio and Portia’s fates are love stories largely underwritten by the economic. In this respect, *Merchant* and *Merry Wives* stand apart in the Shakespearean comedic canon.<sup>10</sup> However, *Merry Wives* differs in that the pursuit of Anne Page and her fortune constitutes a one-way financial street; in this play, complementing their suitors, Portia and Jessica seem aware of the

role money plays in the courtship process and act accordingly. In *Merchant*, all the lovers (and, if Antonio is included, would-be lovers) are in one way or another involved in economic gamesmanship. The primary courtship plots share one obvious element—both Portia and Jessica are women of means (legitimate or not) who bestow wealth on spendthrift Venetian suitors. In each case, though, the play resists reading these matches as being on a purely mercenary level, as there is enough in the text to suggest that varying degrees of love are spurring the characters on. That said, however, there can be little doubt that Portia and Jessica recognize the role that wealth plays in their allure. Unlike Anne Page, their "dowries" are ultimately under their own control, despite the casket test for Portia<sup>11</sup> and the fact that Jessica must steal her marriage portion. In word and deed, they actively transfer their wealth, and the penniless husbands on the receiving end cannot help but engender a measure of cynicism about love in Venice.

In the Jessica-Lorenzo plot, with its casket of ducats thrown from a window, money is a tangible presence and not merely an underlying consideration. Conventional in many ways, the lineage of this storyline can be traced, as noted by Graham Holderness, to "Italian Comedy," the forbear of English Citizen Comedy, in that it concerns poor but romantic and resourceful protagonists, a miserly parental blocking figure and a scheming servant.<sup>12</sup> Despite the presence of these elements, the conventional expectations of this type of intrigue are left largely unfulfilled in *Merchant*. Rather than being uncomplicated points of identification that an audience can cheer on, Jessica and Lorenzo are marked by a dubious morality and spendthrift ways, rendering our acceptance of them problematic. The scant romantic banter that passes between them invariably gives way to misgivings, especially on Jessica's part, and Shakespeare never really allows us to feel truly happy for the couple, a fact reflected in productions of the play that end with the image of an isolated Jessica.<sup>13</sup>

Since his motivation in wooing Jessica is rendered suspect from the beginning, Lorenzo never quite fulfills the role of an idealized romantic figure. Preparing for his elopement, he offers no Petrarchan extollings of his lover to his comrades, his admiration of Jessica's "fair hand" (II.iv.12) being the extent of his praise before speaking of more pragmatic matters: "She hath directed / How I shall take her from her father's house, / What gold and jewels she is furnished with" (II.iv.29–31). For not the last time in *Merchant*, Antonio's succinct first-act conflation of "purse" and "person"<sup>14</sup> serves as a way of reading character utterances. Here, Lorenzo's typification of Jessica as being "furnished" with riches blurs the lines between the woman and the money, thereby inviting suspicion as to where his true interest lies. Lorenzo's



later typification of courtship and marriage as “play[ing] the thieves for wives” (II.vi.23), which seems to refer as much to absconding with Shylock’s ducats as it does to his elopement, only compounds that doubt. Although the reference to “playing the thief” is suggestive of Elizabethan legal reality, i.e. “that eloping with an heiress, as well as the theft of ducats” was regarded “to be a crime,”<sup>15</sup> a legalistic reading is not needed to be discomfited by *Merchant’s* secondary “love story.” A more romantic mien could have mitigated the perception of Lorenzo as a fortune-hunter; the play, however, offers little to dispel that impression.

When the Venetian masquers gather beneath Jessica’s window, their conversation focuses on the degenerative capacity of love, of how, once the prize is won, the allure diminishes—speeches, which, while ostensibly jocular, effectively trivialize romantic love. The distance between this and another Shakespearean representation of love is pointed out by John Lyon: “. . . when he does finally arrive on the scene, Lorenzo’s behavior does not prove the contrast that we might find in similar circumstances between the lover Romeo and *his* cynically witty friends.”<sup>16</sup> Jessica’s subsequent appearance above prompts an exchange in which her appeals for a confirmation of Lorenzo’s love elicit an ambiguous response that could be read as only affirming her love for him, rather than a romantic mutuality:

Jessica: And now who knows

But you, Lorenzo, whether I am yours?

Lorenzo: Heaven and thy thoughts are witness that thou art.

(II.vi.30–2)

In fact, Lorenzo’s only straightforward declaration of love is delivered not to Jessica, but to his friends: “Beshrew me but I love her heartily” (52). On paper, this reads well, but it should be kept in mind that, in performance, the visual potentially outweighs the verbal as Jessica is nowhere in sight when this declaration is made, and Lorenzo is clutching a casket full of ducats, awaiting a lover who has promised to descend with even more. In that same speech, his subsequent praise, “And true she is, as she hath proved herself” (55), almost begs the question of whether he is merely referring to Jessica having held up the fiscal end of the bargain. He continues, “And therefore, like herself, wise, fair, and true, / Shall she be placed in my constant soul” (56–7). While these words undeniably carry a patina of romanticism, the centrality and visibility of money in this short scene cannot help but color our reading of it.

Alexander Leggatt argues that, in the scene discussed above, “metaphorically, Jessica is taking love from her father and transferring it to her

husband; but . . . the focus [is] on the literal wealth she is stealing."<sup>17</sup> As well, the theft Leggatt refers to effectively subverts the standard exchange of money associated with marriage, that is, a dowry. Much like what transpires in the elopement scene, the convention of the dowry conflates the economic and the romantic. Jessica's overall apprehension and desire for reassurance before throwing down the ducats, however, indicate a need on her part to separate the two. In the end though, when her plea for "more certainty" (II. vi.26) and her attempts to wring a declaration of love from Lorenzo fall short, she secures the match by throwing down the money she has stolen from her father. In her defense of Jessica, Camille Slight's argues that her "willingness to marry a man without means, in fact, demonstrates relatively little concern with wealth."<sup>18</sup> Besides that point being moot due to Jessica's provision of a substantial "dowry," the issue is not so much whether Jessica is greedy; it is more how she recognizes the role that ducats play in Venetian courtship. After all, as *Merchant's* central love story confirms, it is not the penniless girls who marry the handsome spendthrift nobles.

From the moment that the money changes hands, Jessica's discourse is not that of an exuberant lover, but of one with moral misgivings over her actions. Although she appears to be speaking of her cross-gender disguise,<sup>19</sup> her repeated invocation of "shame" seems out of proportion to that standard comedic device. Thus, her declarations of "I am much ashamed of my exchange" (II.vi.35) and "What, must I hold a candle to my shames?" (41) logically denote an awareness of the immorality of her theft as well, a reading made all the more plausible by the pluralization of her "shames." If her demeanor were one of glee, it would be possible to ignore the dubious morality and view this scene as purely comedic and Shylock's just deserts. Her uncertainty precludes that possibility, however, and the ducats seem more an end than the means to an end of marital happiness. Jessica's final words in this scene merge the ideas of "purse" and "person" yet again: "I will make fast the doors, and gild myself / With some more ducats, and be with you straight" (49–50). By adorning herself thus, she effectively subordinates her own identity in order to become the economic object itself, and the potential pun of "gild," "gilt" and "guilt" reinforces the reading of her "shames" being in part of economic origin. Beyond that, her final action upon leaving her father's house seems to be a pathetic ploy to make herself more attractive to Lorenzo by increasing her economic desirability—in short, an attempt to purchase affection and security.

The reports that arrive via Tubal of Jessica and Lorenzo's subsequent behavior do little to allay the suspicion that their relationship is largely economic. No explanation is given for their journey to Genoa, and the

impression is that they are directionless on more than just a moral level. Moreover, their reportedly lavish lifestyle (fourscore ducats in one night) places the emphasis firmly on the financial rather than the amatory aspect of their lives. Most importantly, the sheer thoughtlessness of Jessica's exchange of her mother's ring for a monkey accomplishes what should be impossible in a New Comedy storyline, namely, the transference of sympathy from a newly-liberated couple to the materialistic father they have escaped. As noted earlier, Shylock's valuation of the ring transcends material consideration, and his lament, "I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys" (III.i.115–6) stands in stark contrast to the series of unthinking and lawless transactions enacted by his daughter.

Jessica's transference from Shylock's house to the streets of Venice, Genoa and, finally, to Belmont carries additional significance. Existing on the margins of Venetian society because she is Jewish, her intention to "become a Christian" (II.iii.21) denotes a desire to merge with the mainstream. Given the lack of theological musings on her part, the impression is that, for Jessica, conversion offers an entrée into a world she has only seen from her window. The other entrée, of course, is money, money that might make a spendthrift Christian suitor overlook a Semitic background. Effectively, Jessica purchases her freedom from both Shylock and her Judaic faith, but to what avail? Upon the couple's arrival in Belmont, it becomes apparent that social acceptance is not a simple commodity to be bought with stolen ducats—Graziano identifies them as "Lorenzo and his infidel" (III.ii.216), while Bassanio ignores Jessica completely, saying "Lorenzo and Salerio, welcome hither" (217). Jessica has not achieved the status of equal or even wife; when she is finally acknowledged, it is as "yon stranger" (235). Whereas previously she had been able to translate her financial worth into, at the least, recognition via Lorenzo, in Belmont she seems virtually invisible.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, Jessica has by this point lost the economic card she had been holding. The stolen ducats were inevitably finite, and the couple is presumably penniless, as indicated by Lorenzo's later describing their state as "starved" (V.i.294). Even if the two had not squandered their fortune, their wealth would have paled next to the apparently limitless resources of Belmont. Now dependent on Portia's largesse, Jessica and Lorenzo are far removed from the prospect of independence and societal integration that marked the elopement scene. The money that was so central has been proven ephemeral, and Jessica still seems marginalized.

Following the dramatics of the Venetian courtroom that bring about Shylock's economic and personal defeat, *Merchant* returns to the spendthrift couple. The list of less-than-exemplary lovers that Lorenzo and Jessica invoke

in the conversation that opens the fifth act adds to the impression that, along with acceptance, money has not bought love. The names exchanged, Troilus, Cressid, Thisbe, and Dido, all figure in unhappy romances and are points of identification for them, leading Moisan to opine that "the texts in which they would inscribe themselves . . . deepen our suspicion that Jessica and Lorenzo themselves either are not or will not or do not deserve to be happy."<sup>21</sup> In the midst of their literary and historical musings, Lorenzo abruptly shifts the conversation to their present circumstances and situates their relationship within this continuum of failed romances in terms that evoke economic considerations:

In such a night  
Did Jessica steal from the wealthy Jew  
And with an unthrift love did run from Venice  
As far as Belmont. (V.i.14–17)

Once again, his syntax and lexical choices are more than somewhat obfuscatory, and Lorenzo's conscious or unconscious exploitation of the instability of linguistic meaning suggests an underlying unease with the scenario he draws. Jessica may well have "stolen" from her father, i.e. escaped, but Lorenzo's grouping of her action with the image of "the wealthy Jew" engenders a larcenous reading of the verb. Similarly, his reference to an "unthrift love," while potentially self-reflexive and rueful, follows the image of a stealing Jessica, thereby suggesting that her love is wasteful. While he may speak of "love," the word's meaning by now has been excessively colored by financial considerations. Overall, Lorenzo seems to reductively cast their adventures as the theft of Shylock's ducats, effectively removing all doubt that his objectives were economic from the beginning.

In response, Jessica reprises the uncertainty she had displayed earlier regarding Lorenzo's affections:

In such a night  
Did young Lorenzo swear he loved her well,  
Stealing her soul with many vows of faith  
And ne'er a true one. (V.i.17–20)

Jessica's expression of doubt is redolent of Anne Page's response to Fenton's denial of her father's charges in *Merry Wives*, "Maybe he tells you true." While, like Anne, Jessica may be merely teasing, in context, her words still convey realization and regret. Perhaps she, like Anne before her, has caught

a glimpse of how the world really is. Her appropriation of Lorenzo's word "steal" and its application to an intangible value, her soul, rather than material wealth, would suggest as much. As in the elopement scene, their priorities remain different—in this exchange, by evoking "the wealthy Jew," Lorenzo privileges the material, while Jessica focuses on the spiritual "vows of faith." Having squandered the money, the couple is left with little between them, and Jessica's profound unhappiness is evident in her claim "I am never merry when I hear sweet music" (69). As noted by Marc Berley, "she is present at the final celebration at Belmont, but she is not part of it."<sup>22</sup> Significantly, her self-excluding statement is her final utterance in the play. After initially trying to cast a positive light on Jessica's words ("The reason is your spirits are attentive" [70]) Lorenzo's subsequent assertion that condemns those without music in themselves as being "fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils" (85) seems a not very thinly-veiled rebuke of Jessica. His disdain for the methods he himself employed to spirit Jessica away reveals Lorenzo to be little more than a hypocrite. In Belmont, he may wish to occupy a high moral ground and distance himself from the notion of "spoils" and base monetary motivation, but his penultimate statement in this scene, "Let no such man be trusted" (88), only seems ironically self-reflexive.

At the end of *Merchant*, Jessica and Lorenzo remain, as they have throughout the play, free from censure. Their alignment against "the wealthy Jew" and Jessica's conversion to Christianity would seem to preclude any potential misgivings that should exist about their thievery and extravagance. The question of their love and its quality is never revisited; in fact, the play's finale focuses on their economic status as Portia and Nerissa bestow Shylock's legacy upon them, prompting Lorenzo to pompously configure his financial good fortune as a miracle of biblical proportions, saying, "Fair ladies, you drop manna in the way / Of starved people" (V.i.294–5). The restoration of Lorenzo and Jessica to moneyed status being part of *Merchant's* resolutions strongly suggests that, in Belmont, living happily ever after means being rich. In this respect, Lorenzo and Jessica's fate mirrors the lot of Bassanio at the end of *Merchant*; he too has made the journey from Venice to Belmont and has prospered as a result. In both the main and the sub romance plots, financial considerations constantly underwrite both thought and deed; however, what is at the surface in the subplot is at times more covert in the Portia-Bassanio storyline. For example, while the caskets in Belmont play a metaphoric role by seemingly offering economic life lessons, the one that Jessica throws from her window carries only its surface meaning—tangible material wealth. Similarly, Portia and Nerissa attempt to imbue their rings with a meaning beyond the material

in contrast to Jessica who uses a ring as a unit of economic exchange. Raymond Waddington argues, "The relationship of Jessica and Lorenzo to the primary lovers, Portia and Bassanio, consistently is contrastive and negative: they undergo no tests of character or faith; they are obedient to no bonds; they take all, rather than giving all; they hazard nothing."<sup>23</sup> Yet, given the financial parallels that exist, it seems fair to question whether the love between Portia and Bassanio is really all that different from their spendthrift counterparts—or, again, to question whether all that glisters is truly golden.

While the economic themes in *Merchant's* main love story are subtler in some ways, one of Bassanio's motivations for wooing Portia is evident from the start. Like Fenton in *Merry Wives* and Petruchio in *The Taming of the Shrew*, Bassanio belongs to a very exclusive club of male Shakespearean romantic leads, being one of only three that configure their beloved as an economic prize. In these instances, Shakespeare momentarily abandons the notion of idealized romantic love that marks the great comedies and instead reflects the fundamentally economic reality of love and marriage in the early modern era. Writing of marriage norms in the late sixteenth and seventeenth century, Richard Grassby observes the following:

Choice was clearly based on material circumstances. The financial negotiations were as important as the courtship. . . . It is tempting to ask whether marriages became more mercenary during the period, but this is not a question that can be answered in a meaningful way. Some men and women certainly used marriage as a means of economic advancement, and few businessmen would marry without an adequate portion.<sup>24</sup>

G. R. Hibbard makes the same point, only much more directly, claiming, "The main considerations [of Elizabethan marriage] were lands, rank, and money, not love."<sup>25</sup> Matrimony in *Shrew*, *Merry Wives* and *Merchant* assuredly reflects what Grassby and Hibbard are referring to, but in very different ways. While Petruchio's mercenary aims prompt his arrival in Padua, they seem quickly forgotten amidst the rough-and-tumble of his and Kate's love story; in terms of working out their relationship, the financial considerations are largely irrelevant. Fenton, as argued earlier, is primarily interested in Anne Page's financial attributes, but the love story he figures in is relegated to *Merry Wives'* sub-plot and barely registers. *Merchant*, however, offers a sympathetic central protagonist with stated monetary objectives involved in a love story that, while appearing genuine enough, is one in which money

seems to be a linguistic as well as a thematic mainstay. This contradiction has prompted such faint-praise assessments as the following from Nuttall: “Bassanio is not an *out-and-out* fortune hunter . . . He really loves [Portia] and her wealth is simply a component of her general attractiveness.”<sup>26</sup> (italics mine) While one might want to configure Bassanio as a conventional Shakespearean romantic lead, his position at the beginning of *Merchant* of a penniless debtor with a plan to get rich is impossible to ignore.

Bassanio’s priorities are clear from the opening scene in which Antonio probes the young aristocrat about the lady to whom “a secret pilgrimage” (I.i.120) has been made. Rather than responding with a Petrarchan tribute to Portia, or indeed any word about her, Bassanio instead expounds on his financial ill-health (122–34). Like Fenton and many real-life Elizabethan spendthrifts, Bassanio is a “gentleman” (III.ii.253) who is overextended due to a lavish lifestyle, or as he puts it, he has “disabled [his] estate” (I.i.123). Money is the measure of a man in Venice, and the declining ability of rank, in and of itself, to bestow status is evident when Bassanio later constructs his “nobility” in purely fiscal terms: “. . . all the wealth I had / Ran in my veins” (III.ii.252–3). Far from affirming that noble birth constitutes a kind of riches, he implies instead that all the blue blood in the world is meaningless unless one has the cash to back it up. This contingency puts the entire primary narrative of *Merchant* and its resultant near-tragedy into motion. In his quest to gain Portia, Bassanio faces competition from suitors with greater economic resources, and his borrowing from Antonio is predicated by a need for “the means / To hold a rival place with one of them” (I.i.173–4). Although Venice is ostensibly the play’s hub of mercantile activity, the competitive marriage market of Belmont evidently constitutes something of a mart in itself. Sokol and Sokol’s observation that “The lure of immense property or wealth . . . motivates Portia’s suitors in *The Merchant of Venice*, where capitalist investment in dowry-hunting in fantastic Belmont mirrors actual Elizabethan practices”<sup>27</sup> underlines how public and private spheres of economic activity run parallel in the play. Belmont is clearly a locale where investment brings reward, and, while Bassanio may profess that the overall objective is Portia herself, his stated purpose is simple enough: “to get clear of all the debts [he] owe[s]” (134).

Although Bassanio seemingly imparts a genuine affection and perhaps love for both Portia and Antonio, this tends to be undermined by his organization of priorities. Furthermore, the language he employs when speaking of his lover and friend consistently configures his relationships with them as economic. For example, his tribute to Antonio privileges the fiscal over the emotional by virtue of syntactic order: “To you, Antonio, / I owe the most in

money and in love" (I.i.130–1). When Bassanio does finally speak of Portia in *Merchant's* opening scene, his praise of her "wondrous virtue" (163) comes after what is evidently uppermost in his mind: "In Belmont is a lady richly left" (161). He then continues to construct Portia using words and phrases allusive to finance; Portia is "nothing undervalued / To Cato's daughter" (165–6) and "Nor is the wide world ignorant of her worth" (167). Given Bassanio's fixation on his financial straits and the variety of international would-be suitors who come to seek Portia's fortune, it is difficult to gloss "worth" in anything other than material terms.<sup>28</sup> A similar problem arises when he compares Portia's hair to "a golden fleece" (170); as Leggatt succinctly puts it, the comparison is "not metaphorical enough to be romantic; his concern for the gold *as gold* is all too real."<sup>29</sup>

Bassanio's removal to Belmont in search of riches and love seems intended to be analogous to the mercantile adventuring spoken of and undertaken elsewhere in *Merchant*. This correlation is made clear at the play's outset when Solanio equates ships at sea with "the better part of [his] affections" (I.i.16). As well, the engagement of Bassanio, an erstwhile "gentleman," in metaphoric "trade" echoes the involvement of the English landed classes in commercial ventures such as the joint stock companies discussed earlier with regard to *The Comedy of Errors*. As pointed out by Mark Netzloff, Bassanio "operates as an investor . . . he utilizes the capital provided him by Antonio to turn a profit, to win Portia."<sup>30</sup> A further parallel between Belmont and Venetian concerns, i.e. between romantic and mercantile quests, may be drawn between the failed efforts of Aragon and Morocco to secure Portia after long voyages and Antonio's loss of his argosies. In both cases, much is risked, and all is lost. Even the motto on the lead casket, in its admonition to "hazard all" (II.vii.16), which stands for Belmont's philosophy of love, is emblematic of the late sixteenth-century mercantile spirit. Portia herself is as much an economic objective that men set sail for as a romantic one, her financial desirability confirmed when Morocco configures her as a unit of currency as he stands before the gold casket:

They have in England  
A coin that bears the figure of an angel  
Stamped in gold, but that's insculped upon;  
But here an angel in a golden bed  
Lies all within. (II.vii.55–9)

While Catherine Belsey's typification of Belmont as "a refuge for eloping lovers, who flee the precarious world of capital and interest and trade, to find



a haven of hospitality”<sup>31</sup> may hold a certain appeal, *Merchant’s* two venues have more in common than might first meet the eye—commonalities that suggest the inescapability of the economic.

As the play’s action moves from Venice to Belmont, there is an ostensible shift from matters of business to those of romance; yet there are constant reminders of the foundational role that money plays in *Merchant’s* love narrative. Almost certainly, Bassanio’s speeches during the casket-choosing scene were written by Shakespeare with his tongue firmly in cheek, as our knowledge of the young Venetian’s financial situation imbues the entire proceedings with what must be intentional irony. For example, having arrived, presumably decked out in new finery, bearing “gifts of rich value” (II.ix.90) that have been bought with borrowed money, Bassanio’s first words before the golden casket are at the very least disingenuous: “So may the outward shows be least themselves. / The world is still deceived with ornament.” (III.ii.73–4). With regard to his ultimate pronouncement on the matter before him, “Therefore, thou gaudy gold, / Hard food for Midas, I will none of thee” (101–2), Harold Goddard’s cynical gloss seems spot on: “No, gold, I’ll have none of thee, . . . except a bit from Antonio-Shylock to start me going, and a bit from a certain lady ‘richly left’ whose dowry shall repay the debts of my youth and provide for my future. Beyond that, none.”<sup>32</sup> Much like Lorenzo’s denunciation of “treason, stratagems and spoils,” Bassanio’s hypocritical rejection of gold only reinforces the economic moorings of *Merchant’s* less-than-ideal romances. Both men mouth platitudes to distance themselves from a materialistic view of the world; their self-presentation as financially disinterested not only conforms with idealized constructions of lovers, but is also patently designed to establish them as embodying spiritual rather than monetary values. Yet the play completely undercuts these attempts, and we are left to wonder whether love is ever truly disinterested and whether those who claim to disdain material wealth can be taken at their word.

Despite the apparent hypocrisy, there are still poetic utterances in the casket scene of an ardency that would seemingly belie the notion that money, not love, is all that is at stake in Belmont, such as Portia’s aside when the correct casket is chosen: “O love, be moderate! Allay thy ecstasy, / In measure rain thy joy, scant this excess! / I feel too much thy blessing.” (III.ii.111–3). However, even in such a sentiment, there are traces of Venetian business; John Russell Brown sees a connection between the “excess” of love that Portia fears and usury, which Antonio had earlier rejected as the “taking [and] giving of excess” (I.iii.59), observing that “love is prodigal in its natural interest or usury of blessing.”<sup>33</sup> While such lexical echoes may be ultimately contrastive,

they also, at the same time, establish common ground between the worlds of finance and romance, between Venice and Belmont. By the end of this scene marked by the winning of a fair maid and the resultant nuptial vows, any illusion that things have changed is effectively removed when Graziano returns us to a Venetian mindset by reprising the metaphor used earlier to proclaim his and Bassanio's romantic triumph: "We are the Jasons, we have won the fleece" (III.ii.239).

In the words of betrothal that pass between Bassanio and Portia, the vocabularies of love and money undergo a marriage of their own.<sup>34</sup> Using words reminiscent of a commercial contract's terminology, Bassanio claims his bride "by note" (III.ii.140) and waits for their union to be "confirmed, signed and ratified" (148). Portia, for her part, employs the jargon of an accountant ("to term in gross" [158]) and refers to herself as "the full sum of me" (157). Moreover, she wishes to "stand high in [Bassanio's] account" (155) and "in virtues, beauties, livings, friends / Exceed account" (156–7). Portia's entire speech moves towards, and culminates in, not an unqualified declaration of love, but rather a transference of material property, specifically her "house" and "servants" (170). In a straightforward manner, she tells Bassanio, "Myself and what is mine to you and yours / Is now converted" (166–7). The emphasis on property and ownership in Portia's speech diminishes the fairy-tale veneer of the union which is taking place as the traditional humanistic values of marriage vows such as love and devotion are effectively reified by materialist discourse. For his part, Bassanio responds with words that appear to temper *Merchant's* financial orientation:

Madam, you have bereft me of all words.  
Only my blood speaks to you in my veins,  
And there is such confusion in my powers  
As after some oration fairly spoke  
By a beloved prince there doth appear  
Among the buzzing pleased multitude,  
Where every something being blent together  
Turns to a wild of nothing save of joy,  
Expressed and not expressed. (III.ii.175–83)

Its sentiment reminiscent of Orlando's "What passion hangs these weights upon my tongue?" (AYLI I.ii.242), this speech, taken out of context, would surely rank with Shakespeare's most romantic. In context, however, it is difficult to avoid thinking that Bassanio is speechless and full of joy because he now possesses Belmont's riches and all of his financial problems have

disappeared. Like Lorenzo's, his declarations of love come after the exchange of wealth has taken place.

Portia's relinquishment of "[her]self and what is [hers]" (III.ii.166) once more brings the convergence of 'purse' and 'person' in *Merchant* to the surface. The yoking of her personal identity and boundless wealth suggests an act of conscious self-commodification, and this propensity within her character is nowhere more apparent than in her hyperbolic desire to be more than what she is: "I would be trebled twenty times myself, / A thousand times more fair, ten thousand times more rich" (153–4). As Nuttall observes, it is wealth that is "placed at the summit of an ascending rhetorical scale involving character and beauty."<sup>35</sup> Portia's apparent belief that her intrinsic worth would be enhanced by a ten-thousand-fold increase of money confirms her dedication to viewing the world in quantifiable, rather than qualitative terms. This cannot help but seem slightly ironic given that her most famous speech centers on "the quality of mercy" (ironic, indeed, as the "mercy" she ultimately metes out to Shylock seems more quantitative than qualitative). Her desire to multiply her wealth at a rate five hundred times greater than she would increase the quality of her character speaks volumes, and the thematic importance of this line should not be underestimated as its very structure calls attention to itself. Out of the twenty-five lines of iambic pentameter that comprise Portia's "wedding speech," "a thousand times more fair, ten thousand times more rich" is the only irregular one, and its final, extra beat falls heavily on the word "rich." Portia is calling attention to her strong suit and foregrounding what she knows appeals to Bassanio. Her propensity to view the self in terms of material value extends to Bassanio as well. Following her gift to him of Belmont's riches and her offer to pay Antonio's debt, Portia reminds her intended that he comes at a cost, saying, "Since you are dear bought, I will love you dear" (311).<sup>36</sup> Once more, Portia's character can be discerned through her rhetorical style, the antanaclasis and balanced two-part construction of the line effectively establishing a correspondence between the actions of buying and loving.<sup>37</sup> What would be a straightforward romantic sentiment in other Shakespearean comedies is tainted by its presence in *this* comedy and the material values that have predominated it. One wishes to take Portia and the second half of the line quoted above at face value, but the conditional "since" and the double play on the word "dear" in the midst of all *Merchant's* other financial parlance lessens any inclination to do so. With her amatory calculations, Portia stands in stark contrast to Anthony, who dismisses Cleopatra's need to quantify their passion by saying, "There's beggary in the love that can be reckoned."<sup>38</sup>

From the casket/wedding scene to *Merchant's* resolution, Belmont is constructed as a fiscal utopia where heiresses bestow fortunes, spendthrift nobles are relieved from financial pressure and commercial setbacks are magically reversed. When the note regarding Antonio's plight arrives summoning Bassanio back to Venice, it brings a sobering reminder that, in the world beyond Belmont, money and its obligations carry consequences. Moreover, the reality that money is not a panacea is made apparent by the reports of Shylock's intransigence regarding his bond. To wit, Salerio affirms that "if [Antonio] had / The present money to discharge the Jew, / [Shylock] would not take it" (III.ii.270–2). Jessica adds that her father "would rather have Antonio's flesh / Than twenty times the value of the sum / That he did owe him" (284–6). Portia is present for both of these direct statements and the fact that she is completely oblivious to them is startling and suggests that she lives in a world of her own. Her reaction to Antonio's crisis demonstrates that Portia views human volition as being predicated on economics, regardless of evidence to the contrary. Not once, but twice she essentially argues that happy endings can be bought:

Pay [Shylock] six thousand, and deface the bond.  
 Double six thousand and then treble that,  
 Before a friend of this description  
 Shall lose a hair through Bassanio's fault. (III.ii.297–300)

This offer is followed up with another: "You shall have gold / To pay the petty debt twenty times over" (304–5). As in her betrothal speech, her discourse stresses multiplicative quantifications with the "how much" aspect of an issue holding sway. Leggatt argues that Portia "does not yet understand how money is used in Venice. It is not the amount that matters: she could bury Shylock in a heap of ducats without once touching his real need, which is for vengeance."<sup>39</sup> Or to put it more simply, this is not a problem that can be solved by throwing money at it.

The allusion in Leggatt's statement to the difference between the Venetian and Belmont attitudes towards wealth is germane to the consideration of *Merchant's* primary love story. Venice is a world of want, untoward fiscal circumstances and animosity, with complex patterns of human behavior the result. In contrast, Belmont represents surplus, bounty and what seems to be a simplicity to human motivation. The offer to purchase Antonio's salvation suggests that money holds potential to be a positive force in the world; Portia possesses limitless resources, and her willingness to use her wealth to do good would seemingly contradict all talk of agendas of acquisition, such as the one

implicit in Bassanio's voyage to Belmont. In short, generosity in a fiscal sense would appear in Portia to correspond with a generosity of spirit. Yet, in context, the belief that money can solve *this* problem implies only that wealth is a fountainhead of naiveté and that a reliance on fiscal solutions is reductive in a way that, at best, ignores and, at worst, negates the complexity of human behavior. As M. M. Mahood correctly points out, "A major irony of the play is . . . that in the end Antonio is saved by Portia and not by her money."<sup>40</sup> The type of reductionism espoused by Portia within *Merchant*, i.e. applying simplistic economic solutions to irreducible situations, extends to our perception of the play's love story from without. While it may be preferable to believe in the mystery of true love, the economic subtexts in *Merchant* offer a way of simply explaining what in other Shakespearean comedies is inexplicable. A return to a comparison made earlier illustrates this: when Orlando is struck dumb at his first meeting with Rosalind in *As You Like It*, his ardor lacks a reason, and we are confronted with that aspect of love and human behavior that defies all rationale. In contrast, Bassanio's speechlessness, as argued earlier, may be prompted simply by his economic good fortune or it may be the result of something nobler. The problem is that we are constantly able to ask questions such as this in *Merchant*; in this case, the combination of Portia's wealth and Bassanio's penury invites us to do so. If it is possible to reduce the inexplicability of human emotion that exists elsewhere in Shakespearean comedy and tragedy alike to questions of economic exigencies, it cannot be happenstance. The end result is that *Merchant's* main love story invites a degree of cynicism, rather than wonder.

A discussion of *Merchant's* love stories and their economic underpinnings would be remiss not to consider what by consensus has been viewed as the play's third romantic entanglement—that between Antonio and Bassanio. From W. H. Auden, who typifies the titular merchant as "a man whose emotional life, though his conduct may be chaste, is concentrated upon a member of his own sex,"<sup>41</sup> to Alan Sinfield, who describes Antonio's feelings for Bassanio as "[having] an air of homoerotic excess,"<sup>42</sup> many critics have viewed *Merchant's* primary romance plot as triangular. The correlation between Portia and Antonio with regard to Bassanio, extends, unsurprisingly, beyond the emotional to the economic. The monetary ties between the merchant and the noble are evident in their opening scene, when Bassanio declares that he owes Antonio both "in money and in love" (I.i.131) and Antonio's responds by putting his "purse" and "person" at the young man's disposal. The unequal economic status of the two men begs comparison to the disparity between Portia and Bassanio with the ultimate impression engendered by this doubling being that the way to the young noble's

heart is through his pocketbook. Characteristic of interpersonal relationships in *Merchant*, the flow of money and obligations between the two men constitutes a sort of human Mobius strip. Bassanio may "court" Antonio to finance his quest for riches, but as Sinfield points out, "the mercenary nature of Bassanio's courtship . . . is Antonio's reassurance. It allows him to believe that Bassanio will continue to value their love, and gives him a crucial role as banker of the enterprise."<sup>43</sup> On the flip side of Sinfield's observation, it also seems arguable that Bassanio leads Antonio to think so by deliberately underplaying his romantic interest in Portia. The correlation between Bassanio's two "loves" also manifests itself in their propensity to express love in fiscally quantifiable terms; fittingly, given how the play unfolds, Portia's wish to multiply her wealth by ten thousand as a sign of devotion finds its counterpart in Antonio's willingness to reduce his to nothing:

You know me well, and herein spend but time  
 To wind about my love with circumstance;  
 And out of doubt you do me now more wrong  
 In making question of my uttermost  
 Than if you had made waste of all I have. (I.i.153–7)

When this does indeed come to pass, the merchant calls in the loan in a way that renders Bassanio's devotion a transactional commodity: "All debts are cleared between you and I, if I might but see you at my death" (III.ii.316–7). While it seems telling that Antonio deems it necessary to include a financial incentive in his plea, this conversion of love into debt ultimately speaks to the character of both men—one who is willing to use money to secure emotional ties and the other whose economic needs continually shape his personal relationships. Although plots involving bankrupt nobles marrying for money may have reflected and magnified the underlying economics of Elizabethan marriage norms such as dowries, the relationship between Bassanio and Antonio is, in a way, more unsettling. If they are somehow emblematic of homosocial devotion and love, then *Merchant* suggests that all bonds between men, and, by extension all societal bonds, are material, rather than spiritual.

During *Merchant's* courtroom scene, the material and the affective coalesce most aptly in the pound of flesh that is to be "cut off / Nearest the merchant's heart" (IV.i.229–30). The seat of human emotion is effectively transformed into a quantifiable, weighable object with an assigned value by virtue of its ability to settle a three thousand ducat debt. While the defeat of Shylock may imply the play's overall rejection of this equation,

Antonio's martyr-like embrace of the penalty suggests that he accepts the implicit principle of exchange. On a surface level, the sacrifice of his heart will discharge his financial obligation, but, more importantly, the physical consequences will, in his view, prove his love in ways both quantifiable and qualitative. Antonio's central courtroom speech to Bassanio confirms a philosophic stance that permeates *Merchant*, namely that social relationships are economic and love constitutes a form of debt:

Grieve not that I am fall'n to this for you,  
 For herein Fortune shows herself more kind  
 Than is her custom; it is still her use  
 To let the wretched man outlive his wealth,  
 To view with hollow eye and wrinkled brow  
 An age of poverty—from which ling'ring penance  
 Of such misery doth she cut me off.  
 Commend me to your honourable wife. (IV.i.263–70)

Although the final line of the above appears to juxtapose what precedes it, Antonio is contrasting his ties to Bassanio with the latter's new spousal ones, using, not surprisingly, fiscal imagery. The "wealth" of his love for Bassanio has been transformed to a state of "poverty" by virtue of the young noble's new attachment. Antonio's phrasing collapses the ruined public merchant with the private unrequited lover, which is fitting since, over the play's course, his financial and emotional trajectories have run in parallel. Furthermore, the interchangeability of affective and material debt in the merchant's mind is clear in the same speech's closing lines:

And when the tale is told, bid [Portia] be judge  
 Whether Bassanio had not once a love.  
 Repent but you that you shall lose your friend,  
 And he repents not that he pays your debt;  
 For if the Jew do cut but deep enough,  
 I'll pay it instantly with all my heart. (273–8)

The figurative has become the literal as Antonio views the sacrifice of his heart as the currency to free Bassanio from all debt.

In the courtroom scene's denouement, the language of financial obligation merges once again with abstract qualities and values when Antonio tells Portia / Bellario that he "stands indebted over and above / In love and service . . . evermore" (IV.i.409–10). Notably, it is also Antonio who insists

on that debt being paid on a material level when he urges Bassanio to surrender Portia's ring in words which demand that love, merit, and obligation undergo a quantifiable valuation to determine the ultimate worth of each: "My Lord Bassanio, let him have the ring / Let his deservings and my love withal / Be valued 'gainst your wife's commandement." (445-7). This is the parlance of the marketplace, and its presumption of stable and assignable exchange values for intangible human qualities reinforces the extent to which the mercantile mindset predominates in *Merchant*.

As if to demonstrate that Venice and Belmont are more similar than they are different, Antonio continues to treat abstractions as transactional commodities when the play shifts to Portia's domain in the fifth act. During the argument over the rings, he offers to break the impasse with the following:

I once did lend my body for his wealth  
Which, but for him that had your husband's ring,  
Had quite miscarried. I dare be bound again,  
My soul upon the forfeit, that your lord  
Will never more break faith advisedly. (V.i.249-53)

This proposal is problematic on multiple levels; as Ryan points out, it "expose[s] an ominous duplication in the sexual domain of the triangular financial bond upon whose implications the comedy has foundered, but with Portia now cast in the role formerly assigned to Shylock."<sup>44</sup> As well, Antonio is offering to use his "person" (i.e. his "soul") as his "purse," once again blurring the lines between the two.

Referring to Antonio's predilection for applying a marketplace mentality to deals made in the personal arena, Elliot Krieger observes, "These are the public, material attitudes of Venice, the counterparts of Shylock's calculations and measurements. . . ."<sup>45</sup> This correlation would appear to fly in the face of the fundamental contrast which *Merchant* seems at pains to draw between Antonio and Shylock. Unlike the usurious Jew, the merchant "lends out money gratis and brings down / The rate of usance . . . in Venice" (I.iii.41-2). As well, Antonio is vilified by Shylock for freeing men from debt (III.iii.22-3). Like Portia's offer to pay Antonio's bond, this would appear to be an instance of money being a vehicle for moral good. Yet, at almost every turn, the play subtly seems to undermine this picture of Antonio as a benevolent and financially disinterested model of a merchant capitalist. First, his unrepentant physical abuse of Shylock, the kicking and spitting, tarnishes his veneer of righteousness and raises the suspicion that his deliverance of



debtors “from [Shylock’s] forfeitures” (III.iii.22) is more part of an overriding antipathy towards the Jew than a selfless act. Alternatively, by analogy with his relationship with Bassanio, he is arguably buying, if not the love, than at least the gratitude of those he frees. William Hazlitt’s observation regarding Shylock and his enemies, “He is honest in his vices; they are hypocrites in their virtues,”<sup>46</sup> seems quite apropos in light of Antonio’s “Christian” behavior towards the usurer. Moreover, while Antonio may be unwilling to exploit debt for gain in the case of strangers, he is certainly not averse to structuring his relationship with Bassanio as one wherein the interest on a loan is calculated in emotional capital.

Finally, and most interestingly, in a play in which Lorenzo denounces “stratagems and spoils,” Bassanio abjures gold and Portia characterizes herself as an “unschooled girl,” perhaps Shakespeare is setting up yet another deliberate irony in his portrait of a merchant who rejects usury. To a contemporary audience, this may have appeared more than slightly incongruous as members of the mercantile class were among the leading practitioners of lending money at interest in late sixteenth-century England.<sup>47</sup> Approaching the play from a Marxist perspective, Cohen argues that “If the play revealed that merchants were as exploitative as usurers, that they were in fact usurers, then its entire thrust towards harmonious reconciliation could only be understood as a fiendishly oblique instance of ironic demystification.”<sup>48</sup> However, perhaps it is just as reasonable to assume that, rather than hiding this apparent contradiction, Shakespeare was in fact relying on his audience to recognize an anti-usury merchant as oxymoronic. Furthermore, it seems eminently arguable that the play *does* reveal merchants to be akin to usurers and that one of *Merchant’s* objectives may in fact be “ironic demystification.” If, as argued throughout this examination of specific comedies, Shakespeare is portraying a society evolving from one based on land and rank to one based on money, then the occupations of merchant and usurer coalesce in a way alluded to in Marx’s argument that “usurer’s capital and mercantile wealth bring about the formation of a monetary wealth independent of landed property.”<sup>49</sup>

By the play’s end, the correspondence between Antonio and Shylock is evident as they are the only two characters left out of the play’s comic and romantic resolutions.<sup>50</sup> But even more telling is the manner in which Shakespeare ties them together through utterances that reveal common values. Antonio’s final speech comes after his fortunes have been magically restored through Portia’s agency: “Sweet lady, you have given me life and living, / For here I read for certain that my ships / Are safely come to road.” (V.i.286–8). As Nuttall observes, “It is typical of Shakespeare’s genius that in his great comedy of economic reality he finds the single point where language most

powerfully asserts the interdependence of economics and humanity, in the etymological affinity between a person's *life* and a person's *living*.<sup>51</sup> Antonio's restoration to wealth and the bounty of Belmont at the end of Act V may contrast with the impoverishment of Shylock at the end of Act IV, but the merchant's last words unmistakably echo one of the Jew's final speeches. Having lost everything, Shylock unknowingly demonstrates an affinity with his nemesis when he merges "purse" and "person" in his protestation, ". . . you take my life / When you do take the means whereby I live" (IV. i.372–3). Upon entering the courtroom, Portia asks "Which is the merchant here, and which the Jew?" (171) a question which resonates throughout the play as Antonio and Shylock embody different, yet parallel, strands of capitalist endeavor in the late sixteenth century. Both men are shown to hold the reductive belief that one's life is definable as one's living. In the case of Antonio, who is largely a cipher throughout the play and not a part of its final couplings, this would appear to have resulted in the subjugation of a personal identity in favor of an economic one. If we consider the generally favorable position of Elizabethan merchants in conjunction with Antonio's inexplicable melancholia which opens the play, Shakespeare may well be reflecting the mindset of an emerging middle-class in the early modern period described by Deleuze and Guattari: ". . . something new occurs with the rise of the bourgeoisie: the disappearance of enjoyment as an end, the new conception of the conjunction according to which the sole end is abstract wealth and its realization in forms other than from consumption."<sup>52</sup> On so many different levels, *Merchant* critically examines the belief that the world is interpretable on an economic basis and finds it wanting. The ennui of a rich merchant is merely one manifestation of this theme.

Given the dynamic profile enjoyed by merchants in the late sixteenth century, as outlined earlier in the discussion of *Errors*, Shakespeare's rendering of Antonio seems curious from the outset. Certainly Salerino's flattering portrayal of Antonio's ventures, typified by Frank Whigham as fusing "commercial and social superiority,"<sup>53</sup> indicates success in the mercantile arena:

Your mind is tossing on the ocean,  
 There where your argosies with portly sail,  
 Like signors and rich burghers on the flood,  
 Or as it were the pageants of the sea,  
 Do overpeer the petty traffickers  
 That curtsy to them, do them reverence,  
 As they fly by them with their woven wings. (I.i.8–14)

As well, Antonio appears to command the respect of the state, as evidenced by the Duke's suit on his behalf in the courtroom scene during which he refers to him as "a royal merchant" (IV.i.28). Gillies ventures that "Shakespeare seems at pains to represent Antonio as an embodiment of the Venetian civic ideal . . . a kind of merchant-prince whose trading empire embraces the whole of the Renaissance maritime world."<sup>54</sup> Yet, this merchant who might have constituted a celebration of the mercantile-capitalist ethos remains an unrelentingly dour presence in what is ostensibly a comedy.

This disjuncture between an idealized merchant and the one that confronts us in this play is partly attributable to the fact that Antonio, by virtue of his profession, embodies the values of a society that has been subsumed by the parlance and mindset of the marketplace. The extent to which this is true is evident in Antonio's reply to Solanio's hopeful conjecture that the Duke will not allow Shylock to collect on his bond:

Solanio: I am sure the Duke  
 Will never grant this forfeiture to hold.  
 Antonio: The Duke cannot deny the course of law,  
 For the commodity that strangers have  
 With us in Venice, if it be denied,  
 Will much impeach the justice of the state,  
 Since that the trade and profit of the city  
 Consisteth of all nations. (III.iii.24–31)

In this brief exchange, Solanio's pragmatic and humanistic beliefs are translated by Antonio into rigid mercantile cant; the abstract ideal of "the justice of the state" is held up against the material "profit of the city" and is deemed subordinate. Evidently, we are in a world where the will to do right is rendered impractical by economic imperatives, one in which Dukes must obey the dictums of trade protocol. Jonathan Hall perceptively draws a comparison between the situation in *Merchant* and that which begins *Errors*, when the Duke of Ephesus has no choice but to condemn Egeon because of the trade war with Syracuse.<sup>55</sup> Yet the two plays differ fundamentally in the extent to which the mercantile mindset has infected society at large, a divergence particularly evident in the romantic plots of each. In *Errors*, the only hint that love and economics are linked comes in Luciana's one-line conjecture that Antipholus of Ephesus *may* have married for money. In *Merchant*, we are witness to an across-the-board monetizing of interpersonal relationships that reflects the primacy of trading principles. Ephesian ducats may buy gold chains, but Venetian ones secure husbands and heiresses. The earlier play

seems so much more benign in its merchant portrayals—both Egeon and his Syracusan son enjoy happy endings with their beloved at their side. At the end of *Merchant*, Antonio may have had his wealth restored, but he is noticeably alone and excluded from the play's comic resolution. The point is almost moot, however, as *Merchant's* couplings are rendered suspect due to their economic foundations. Notably, unlike Shakespeare's other comedies of the period, such as *Much Ado*, *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*, *Merchant's* final resolutions resist bringing romantic love and the prospect of marriage to the fore; instead, the positive outcomes all centre on money. As the play winds down, Antonio is restored to solvency and Jessica and Lorenzo learn of their rosy financial future; Bassanio, it hardly needs saying, has already hit the proverbial jackpot. All of this is effected through the agency of Portia, the play's personification of stable and endless wealth. One of the truly problematic aspects of *Merchant* is how its outcome works against genre expectations. In comedy, the final emphasis should be on affective ties; in this play, that premise is effectively upended as cash values ultimately displace humanist ones. Portia has been regarded in some quarters as Shakespeare's strongest comic heroine, and, indeed, her courtroom victory and her presiding over *Merchant's* ending would seem to offer proof of that supposition. However, her dispensation of riches cannot help but seem a bit prosaic when considered alongside the way that Rosalind effects reconciliations and marriages at the end of *As You Like It*. That play, however, is unlike *Merchant* in that the love stories in the Forest of Arden have no financial dimension. As with *Twelfth Night* and *Much Ado*, to be happy in *As You Like It* is to be in love, whereas to be happy in *Merchant* is to be rich.

The three comedies examined thus far all have plots that revolve largely around economic contingencies. However, the intervening years between *Errors* and the two comedies of mercenary romance, *Merry Wives* and *Merchant*, seem to have engendered a more cynical view of the role money plays in personal relations on Shakespeare's part. In other comedies, Shakespeare constructs ideal worlds wherein love, friendship and obligation are not just so many commodities. The two aberrations of the late 1590s, *Merchant* and *Merry Wives*, offer disillusionment instead and point towards the worlds of the "problem comedies" that were to come. There is something lacking at the heart of *Merchant*, and when Portia states in her final speech, "I am sure you are not satisfied / Of these events at full" (V.i.296–7), she may well be speaking to us all.

Chapter Four

## The Exchange Economy of *Measure for Measure*

“You will needs buy and sell men  
and women like beasts”

The picture John Wheeler paints of the English mindset in his 1601 *Treatise of Commerce* is a fascinating one, due in no small part to the commercial single-mindedness he perceived:

For there is nothing in the world so ordinary and natural unto men, as to contract, truck, merchandise, and traffic one with another, so that it is almost impossible for three persons to converse together two hours, but they will fall into talk of one bargain or another, chopping, changing, or some other kind of contract. . . . The Prince with his subjects, the master with his servants, one friend and acquaintance with another, the captain with his soldiers, the husband with his wife, women and among themselves, and in a word, all the world choppeth and changeth, runneth and raveth after marts, markets, and merchandising.<sup>1</sup>

As the Elizabethan era drew to an end, England was evidently a realm that, in the eyes of some, revolved on an economic axis. Wheeler’s view was undoubtedly somewhat London-centric, as that city was at the turn of the century the epicenter of English commercial activity—Gresham’s Royal Exchange, the great sheep and cattle markets, and the trading companies, such as the Merchant Adventurers, were all headquartered there; if you wanted a sizable loan, London was the also the only place one could be obtained on short notice. But what is somewhat disquieting about the vision Wheeler unfolds is its inclusion of correspondences that one might reasonably expect to fall outside the purview of commerce, such as Prince-subject, friend-friend, and husband-wife. The impression left is that all interpersonal relationships had become fundamentally economic, and, by extension, human values in 1601 London had been replaced by cash ones.

Two years after Wheeler wrote his *Treatise*, James I ascended the throne and the age of Elizabethan parsimony gave way to one of Jacobean profligacy. The economic effects of the change in monarch were significant, a fact best illustrated by the level of crown debt, which at the end of Elizabeth's reign stood at one hundred thousand pounds; by 1608 it had increased ten-fold.<sup>2</sup> In part, the ostentatious lifestyle at James' court fuelled this increase as it necessitated heavy borrowing at interest; other methods of raising cash were relied on as well, such as an increased sale of patents of monopoly to favored courtiers and licenses to informers who enforced obscure laws and collected the fines.<sup>3</sup> However, money flowed out more rapidly than it came in, and the Stuart court's lavish level of entertainment and dress was but one aspect of James' spendthrift ways. In the first seven years of his reign, approximately eighty-eight thousand pounds was given away as gifts, and the new King made grants of old debts totaling over one hundred and fifty thousand pounds, all of this primarily to Scottish friends.<sup>4</sup> Inevitably, there was fallout from the Stuart manner of conducting the nation's business. Referring to the redistribution of wealth engendered by royal patronage and the profits that could be earned from concerns such as monopolies, Christopher Clay observes the following:

. . . when combined with resentment at the extravagance of the court, especially under James I, and at the ways in which the early Stuart regime attempted to raise additional revenue, it drove a wedge between the monarchy and the majority of its politically articulate subjects, depriving the crown of the instinctive loyalty of the mass of the gentry who had to meet so much of the cost.<sup>5</sup>

While James' economic practices would appear to confirm Wheeler's reduction of the relationship between King and subject to a money-based one, Clay's assessment points to a dissatisfaction with that reconfiguration. Linda Levy Peck's account of how the court was perceived further attests to the market atmosphere that prevailed:

But if the expanding role of government in sixteenth and seventeenth-century England and its constrained finances in the early seventeenth century created incentives to corruption, the changing values and behavior of office-holders and King James' refusal in the first half of his reign to hold high-ranking officials accountable for corrupt practices created a culture of political corruption in which everything was perceived to be for sale at the English court.<sup>6</sup>

If one were to choose the epitome of what Peck describes, as well as how a commercial mentality had supplanted traditional—feudal, if you will—values in James' early reign, then the practice of selling knighthoods must surely take pride of place. Whereas, to Chaucer's narrator, a Knight embodied "chivalrie, / Trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisie,"<sup>7</sup> the title virtually became a mere honorific in 1603 that could be purchased for forty pounds. Before James' reign was three months old, 906 new knights had been created, patently not because of service to King and country; more likely, this transpired as a result of James' proclamation ordering all those worth forty pounds a year to present themselves at court. The newly-arrived Scottish courtiers seized the opportunities at hand and began selling recommendations to the King. Lawrence Stone notes that the right of nomination to a knighthood "passed, like stocks and shares, into general currency among London financial speculators."<sup>8</sup> It is small wonder that Francis Bacon appropriated a term from a different sort of flesh market when he referred to the position as "this divulged and almost prostituted title of Knighthood."<sup>9</sup> The intangible values of a noble character that the title signified were effectively eradicated by the cash values of the sum required to secure it, and a debased knighthood reified into a commodity was just one of many signs of the times.

It is against this backdrop that Shakespeare wrote what most consider to be his first Jacobean play, *Measure for Measure*. Although it is ostensibly set in Vienna, much circumstantial evidence suggests that *Measure* paints a thinly-veiled portrait of London in 1603–4. This includes the Duke's James-echoing dislike of crowds, Mistress Overdone's complaints about war and plague, the bawdyhouses of the suburbs being torn down and Lucio's discussion of an impending peace.<sup>10</sup> Beyond the minutiae of historical correspondences however, the overall atmosphere of *Measure* betrays an affinity with the early seventeenth-century English commercial mindset described by Wheeler above. Unlike the plays discussed thus far, *Measure* has no overt sustained financial plots; there are no missing bags of ducats, no gold chains and no mercenary suitors pursuing heiresses. Yet, the forces of commercialization and commodification are endemic in the play. In the real world, a knighthood had become a marketable item; in *Measure*, a postulant's maidenhead becomes an exchange commodity. Pointedly, the principles of exchange are pervasive—even justice and mercy fall under the hammer in Vienna. As well, the discourse of finance permeates, the non-payment of dowries prevents marital bonds, and, in the brothels, sex is a consumer good. It was Frederick Boas who first designated *Measure* as one of what he termed Shakespeare's "problem plays." He argued that a commonality amongst these plays was

their depiction of “highly artificial societies, whose civilization is ripe unto rottenness.”<sup>11</sup> In Shakespeare’s Vienna, the reduction of human beings and their values to commodity status and the city’s mercantile mindset combine to embody what Boas perceived.

It does not take long for the dialect of finance to appear in *Measure*; in the Duke’s opening speech, he employs the play’s recurrent coining metaphor, asking Escalus of Angelo, “What figure of us think you he will bear?”<sup>12</sup> Angelo, in turn, extends the numismatic allusion when he protests the suggested transfer of power by saying, “Let there be some more test made of my mettle, / Before so noble and so great a figure / Be stamped upon it” (I.i.49–51). While the stamping metaphor may, as Jonathan Dollimore argues, “signif[y] the formative and coercive power of authority,”<sup>13</sup> it also effectively reduces rulership and those engaged in it to an objectified status, as one coin must be, theoretically, the same as the next. Accordingly, a duke may manufacture a substitute in the same way he mints identical coins bearing his image. What occurs in this opening scene is that Angelo is ascribed an extrinsic value that bears no relation to his intrinsic worth. This gap becomes apparent over the course of *Measure*, mirroring what would have been not-too-distant history at the time of the play’s writing—namely, the mid-sixteenth-century “great debasement,” when coins circulated with a face value at odds with their lower bullion content, creating a crisis in national confidence.<sup>14</sup> That practice and having Angelo assume Vincentio’s power via minting metaphors only to debase his office both, in effect, destabilize the notion that money constitutes an objective and immutable yardstick. Shakespeare further undermines that tenet by giving Angelo, who is clearly not what he seems, a name corresponding with a coin in circulation at the time of *Measure*’s writing—the angel.

In that same first scene, the Duke blends usurious and monetary imagery to make a broad philosophic statement:

Spirits are not finely touched  
But to fine issues, nor nature never lends  
The smallest scruple of her excellence  
But, like a thrifty goddess, she determines  
Herself the glory of a creditor,  
Both thanks and use. (I.i.36–41)

Considering the spiritual intent of the speech, the relentless financial language conveys an almost complete overthrow of human values by materialist ones. Beyond what Robert Watson refers to as the “loan-shark[ing] aspect



of God”<sup>15</sup> raised in this homily, the Duke’s juxtaposition of words is both jarring and telling; rather than bounteous, as one might expect “nature” to be, the goddess he describes is “thrifty.” As well, the religious connotations of “glory” sit uncomfortably with the secular money-oriented “creditor,” while the intangibility of gratitude (“thanks”) is yoked with the cash values of “use.”<sup>16</sup> This quid pro quo approach to how man can best manifest himself in the world reeks of the principles of exchange and signals thematic concerns that resonate throughout the play.

The economic discourse favored by those in power in Vienna is, however, shown to be less than universal, particularly in the second-act interview scenes between Angelo and Isabella. The economy of these linguistic exchanges is skewed as the two participants are operating under two different standards of valuation. While Angelo’s equations connote an objectivity that reduces everything to a common economic denominator, Isabella’s reconfigurations of the same terms employed by the Deputy demonstrate a subjective and personal set of values. For example, Angelo’s claim that Claudio “is a forfeit of the law” (II.ii.72) renders justice to be the equivalent of debt-collecting and Claudio to be a bad marker that must be called in.<sup>17</sup> Isabella, in turn, seizes the right to ascribe meaning from the Deputy and gives his term a radically different reading, saying, “Why, all the souls that were forfeit once, / And He that might the vantage best took / Found out the remedy” (74–6). Set beside the foundational act of Christianity, Angelo’s economic relativism becomes the sign of spiritual poverty. This type of linguistic disjuncture is reprised at the end of the first interview scene when Isabella offers to “bribe” (147) Angelo upon her return. His response of “How? Bribe me?” (148) suggests an indignation stemming from an equation of “bribe” and material benefit,<sup>18</sup> especially in light of his propensity for interpreting the world via the language of finance. Isabella responds by reconfiguring “bribe” as “gifts that heaven shall share with you” (149). She continues by redefining the term:

Not with fond sicles of the tested gold,  
Or stones whose rate are either rich or poor  
As fancy values them, but with true prayers  
That shall be up at heaven and enter there  
Ere sunrise . . . (151–5)

While Isabella’s repudiation of “gold” and “stones” in favor of more precious spiritual goods speaks to her value system, it also stands as a recognition on her part of the dominant value system in Vienna. In order to communicate

her higher intent, she must draw a comparison to secular goods as her “prayers” are only understandable in relation to material wealth. What is interesting as well are her two references to the instability of such standards—gold must be “tested,” and “stones” have “rates” as evaluated by “fancy.” By extension, a linguistic dependence on the terms of finance becomes equally unreliable. Terry Eagleton views this correlation as indicative of “a sense of value . . . lying primarily in the human response [being] part of that whole relativism which destroys the continuity of formulated law and language.”<sup>19</sup> The objective continuity of financial signs and significations is assumed by Angelo, whereas Isabella recognizes and implicitly condemns the subjective valuations of conventional society. For her, stability lies only in what she insists are eternal values.

In the first interview scene, it is Isabella, rather than Angelo, who avails herself of economic tropes, using them comparatively to establish the worth of non-material values. In the second, Angelo’s moral descent is echoed by his increased reliance on those tropes. Early on, he returns to numismatic metaphors to justify his condemnation of Claudio:

It were as good  
To pardon him that hath from nature stolen  
A man already made, as to remit  
Their saucy sweetness that do coin heaven’s image  
In stamps that are forbid. (II.iv.42–6)

Countering Isabella’s plea to view her brother as something human, the objectification at the heart of his argument relies on making spurious equivalencies that are rooted in a philosophy of economic exchange. In much the same way that a coin is implicitly viewed as the value equivalent of what it purchases, the murder of a man can become the same as the begetting of a bastard, and the bastard itself is no different from a false coin. The correlation between murder and counterfeiting, two crimes hardly on the same moral level, is telling. In a society predicated on commercial values, the bogus coin and stamp constitute a genuine threat on two levels. First, the stability of that society is dependent on the validation of the ducal stamp, which, as pointed out by Marc Shell, “is the common denominator that allows for sexual reproduction [through marriage rites] as well as commercial exchange without anarchy.”<sup>20</sup> Second, the very existence of counterfeit coins implies that a culture that uses monetary allusions and the principles of exchange to define and express itself is perhaps as false. The significance of this potential discontinuity is perhaps not lost on Angelo, as, immediately after drawing

the parallel a first time, he reformulates and makes the same “murder equals counterfeiting” equation again (46–9).

Continuing his verbal assault on Isabella, Angelo configures himself as one who is in a position to “redeem” (II.iv.53) Claudio, having “credit with the judge” (92), thereby bestowing a usurious taint upon the Viennese justice system under his control. His framing of the situation thus facilitates his assumption of the role of a quasi-Shylock; only instead of three thousand ducats, it is Claudio’s life that is on offer, and rather than a literal pound of flesh, Isabella “must lay down the treasures of [her] body” (96). Again, however, Isabella seizes control of the linguistic agenda and draws her imagery from sacred, rather than economic, texts. As pointed out by Brian Gibbons, “Angelo speaks of the ‘treasures’ of her body in sensuous, material terms, but Isabella transforms her tortured body’s blood into symbols of spiritual treasure, echoing biblical imagery of rubies as she does so.”<sup>21</sup> Moreover, she rejects the Deputy’s offer using the kind of comparative and fiscal phrasing that underpins his valuations, words that he is sure to understand: “. . . ’twere the cheaper way” (106). Isabella’s ensuing invective is peppered with economic allusions; Angelo’s offer is called “ignomy in ransom” (112), and men are condemned for “profiting” (129) by women. As well, her typification of the proposed deal as “foul redemption” (114) stands in stark relief against Angelo’s earlier use of “redeem” (53) to connote exchange principles. Isabella’s novice status and her previous voicing of religious values ensure that the idea of Christian “redemption,” the deliverance from sin and damnation, looms large, thereby diminishing Angelo’s construction.

Isabella’s linguistic shifts, her grasping of the power of Angelo’s terminology, are interestingly inverted when the Deputy tries unsuccessfully to employ the discourse of non-material values, telling her, “Plainly conceive I love you” (II.iv.142). She, in turn, points out that the term “love” lacks a fixed value for him as he has deemed the love of Claudio for Julietta to be without worth. While Isabella may be able to distinguish, reconfigure and refute Vienna’s fiscal rhetoric, her humanistic approach is ultimately ineffective as both political and linguistic power lay finally in Angelo’s hands. This is made clear in his final utterance in the scene by which he affirms that his words of denial trump hers of accusation. The phrasing, evocative of a merchant’s or jeweler’s scales, reduces truth to a quantifiable object: “. . . my false o’erweighs your true” (171). In the spirit of the prevailing parlance, Teresa Nugent notes that “in terms of social credit, Isabella is bankrupt.”<sup>22</sup> In contrast, Isabella’s earlier invocation of the concept of weighing repudiates trying to place abstract qualities or individual lives in an arbitrary balance: “We cannot weigh our brother with ourself” (II.ii.128).<sup>23</sup>

On both a linguistic and a practical level, justice in *Measure* appears to be quantifiable as well. Picking up on the idea of scales being used to “weigh coins and assay their true metal and worth,” Gibbons connects that image to “the emblem of Justice’s scales, symbolic of the weighing of men’s deeds and motives to assay their worth.”<sup>24</sup> And, indeed, as demonstrated in the “trial” of Master Froth, it seems that the application of the law in Vienna is predicated on economic considerations. Coming before Escalus, Pompey’s defense plea focuses not on Froth’s innocence of any moral turpitude, but rather on the defendant’s good financial standing, a fact attested to by his having paid for his stewed prunes “very honestly” (II.I.99). Furthermore, Pompey points to Froth being “a man of fourscore pound a year” (118). During that same scene, *Measure’s* erstwhile representative of the law, Elbow, makes his own dedication to the financial ethos clear when he baldly explains his motivation for being a constable: “I do it for some piece of money” (257–8). His subsequent convoluted explanation of the charges underlines the lack of coherence in the justice system and is put to a stop when Escalus asks just two questions of Froth before rendering judgment: whether he was born in Vienna, and “Are you of fourscore pounds a year?” (186). Froth’s solvency apparently is what secures his release, while Pompey, self-described as “a poor fellow that would live” (212) is threatened with a whipping. That a lack of financial resources makes one vulnerable in Vienna is further evidenced when the prison fills up with the “custom-shrunk” (I.ii.82) Mistress Overdone and a raft of her clients.<sup>25</sup>

Claudio, whose lack of dowry has rendered him a target of the law, further manifests the connection between justice and money in *Measure* by describing his predicament in the language of merchants: “Thus can the demi-god, authority, / Make us pay down for our offence by weight” (I.ii.119–20). But perhaps the idea of justice operating under the aegis of an economic mindset reaches its apogee in the fifth act when Isabella and Mariana plead for Angelo’s life before the Duke, who has assumed the role of Justice. His curt response to their ministrations is a show of power and is delivered in hard financial language: “Your suit’s unprofitable” (V.i.456). Georg Simmel’s claim that “the law . . . and money are characterized by their complete indifference to individual qualities”<sup>26</sup> on one hand points to the common objective stability expected in the legal and monetary arenas, while on the other still configures them as separate and parallel. What is discomfiting about Vincentio’s pronouncement is the conflation of the two. Through these words, the judicial system is transformed to a marketplace as the humanity inherent in Isabella’s somewhat absurdly selfless plea is rhetorically subsumed by a cash-value consideration of investment and return.

*Measure for Measure's* engagement with the dehumanizing effect of objective economic evaluations informs its approach to marriage as well as justice. Normally the mainstay of Shakespearean comedic resolution, the institution is highly problematized, despite the play's ostensible "happy" ending of three, perhaps four, couplings. Matrimony in *Measure* is not grounded in a free exchange of love; instead, it is either impeded by financial exigencies or treated as a market transaction. In *The Merchant of Venice*, although the latter contingency seems to apply to Portia and Bassanio's union, the perceived degree of mutuality in their relationship tends to mitigate our perception of it. In *Measure*, that mutuality is all but absent, save for Claudio and Julietta, who are persecuted in part for that very quality. In what turned out to be Shakespeare's final "comedy," cynicism rather than romanticism predominates.

Indeed, the central crisis in *Measure* is precipitated by sanctioned nuptials not taking place because of economic impediments. Regardless of the critical debate as to whether he and Julietta entered into a *per verba de futuro* or a *per verba de praesenti* marriage,<sup>27</sup> Claudio evidently believes in the legitimacy of the union. Availing himself of the prevailing argot, he expresses the values of his marriage (which seemingly include the idea of ownership) in transactional terms: ". . . upon a true contract / I got possession of Julietta's bed. / . . . she is fast my wife" (I.ii.143–5). His explanation of the cause of his arrest, the non-solemnization of vows, attests to marriage being as much a transfer of property as it is an affective relationship:

This we came not to

Only for propagation of a dower

Remaining in the coffer of her friends

From whom we thought it meet to hide our love

Till time had made them for us. (I.ii.147–51)

While one is inclined to believe in this couple's love, especially in light of Julietta's claim that their sin was committed "Mutually" (II.iii.27), Claudio's word-choice, i.e. "*propagation* of a dower," raises the possibility that he is not totally removed from Viennese cash-values, that their marriage may have been delayed in anticipation of a larger payout in the future.<sup>28</sup>

The commercial aspects of marriage in *Measure* gain amplitude by virtue of a dowry being pivotal in the Angelo-Mariana plot as well. One senses that the stress on this issue created by its being doubled is quite deliberate as dowries play no part in any of Shakespeare's apparent source materials' corresponding Angelo storyline. In this case, it is the loss of the

marriage portion, not the anticipation of it, which severs affective bonds. Mariana's story of being discarded after she lost both brother and dowry at sea unambiguously paints the Deputy as acting solely out of mercenary interest. As Vivian Thomas observes, he abandoned Mariana when "she ceased to be a profitable investment."<sup>29</sup> Angelo's economic objectification of Mariana is apparent when he confronts her in the fifth act; first, he confirms that their marriage had been aborted "Partly for that her promised proportions / Came short of composition" (V.i.220–1). More significantly though, his major objection is that "her reputation was disvalued" (222). The language of financial calculation is hardly surprising by this point in the play, but an intriguing comparison may be drawn between Angelo and Bertram, who faces a similar situation in a play *Measure* is often linked generically with, *All's Well that Ends Well*. In that play, when Diana comes forth publicly to lay claim to Bertram in marriage, he defends his callow behavior by invoking sexual slander, calling her "a common gamester to the camp."<sup>30</sup> Angelo's impulse to couch roughly the same charge in the language of economic evaluation speaks volumes about the mercantile mentality in *Measure*.

The Duke's intervention in the Angelo-Mariana plot renders the expected affective reciprocity of marriage entirely ironic, as the commodification of Mariana is mirrored by his reduction of Angelo into an economic objective. When Vincentio first proposes the bed trick to Isabella, the stated goal is akin to an item on a balance sheet: "If the encounter acknowledge itself hereafter, it may compel him to her recompense," leaving "the poor Mariana advantaged" (III.i.252–5). Moreover, by configuring Angelo as subject to ownership, he furthers the process of objectification, i.e. his promise to Mariana that "the justice of [her] title to him" (IV.i.72) will be established. Upon Angelo's exposure in the fifth act, any illusion that the 'recompense' speculated upon earlier might be of an affective nature is dispelled by the Duke's judgment:

For [Angelo's] possessions,  
Although by confiscation they are ours,  
We do instate and widow you with all,  
To buy you a better husband. (V.i.423–6)

Ensuring that Mariana will reap economic rewards, the Duke's decision to "widow" her is significant as it further establishes the interconnectedness of legal and financial considerations. Angelo's status as a felon would mean that his goods would be forfeit to the state, denying Mariana her "dowry"

as it were. By granting her widow's rights, Mariana's claim to inheritance is secured.<sup>31</sup> The entire purpose of this edict is to translate human values, as contemptible as they are in the shape of Angelo, into cash ones. Moreover, his suggestion that Mariana buy herself a better husband turns the metaphor of "the marriage market" into a crass commercial reality.

Mariana's implicit wholesale rejection of financially-based equations, "O my dear lord / I crave no other nor no better man" (V.i.426–7), represents a rare moment in *Measure for Measure*. Her inexplicable devotion to Angelo would not be remiss in other, more conventional, Shakespearean comedies as it places interpersonal relationships on a plane far removed from Vienna's objective and fiscal valuations. As well, it bears noting that Mariana's speech throughout the play is unlike everyone else's, being devoid of financial references. Vincentio's subsequent reduction of her suit to the status of "unprofitable" nullifies the possibility of the human values Mariana embodies; those values seem to be simply irrational. At the beginning of *Measure*, power is exercised through elevated rhetoric employing fiscal metaphors; here, near the end, it is manifested in mercantile jargon. Although it is possible, given his knowledge of Claudio's rescue and Angelo's non-culpability, to argue that the Duke's interactions with Mariana are merely performative, the way he constructs the roles of justice and justicers through a market-view of the world cannot be underestimated. In the end, when all the hoods are off and Angelo is pardoned, Vincentio's words of admonition still bear a patina of objective valuation and quantification in this market atmosphere as the double meaning of the "worth," i.e. financial and intrinsic, adds a measure of ambiguity: "Look that you love your wife, her worth worth yours" (V.i.500). The syntax of the second clause marked by a balanced trade-off of words (yet another exchange), the ostensible shift from monetary to affective discourse can only be taken at face value in consideration of his earlier fixation on Mariana's financial future.

The third coupling in *Measure's* finale, that between Lucio and the prostitute Kate Keepdown, carries economic implications as well. Angelo's earlier reification of illegitimate children into counterfeit coins resonates in their story, as the cost of maintaining Lucio's bastard child provides the focus of Mistress Overdone's railing as she is taken away to prison: "[Lucio's] child is a year and a quarter old come Philip and Jacob. I have kept it myself, and see how he goes about to abuse me." (III.i.458–60). Lucio's apparently higher socio-economic status and Kate's low station have likely prevented him from meeting Claudio's fate for the same crime. Yet, despite his apparently careless downloading of his own monetary responsibility onto Mistress Overdone, Lucio's earlier backhanded praise of the Duke denotes a recognition that, in

Vienna, children are equated with economic liability: "Ere he would have hanged a man for the getting a hundred bastards, he would have paid for the nursing a thousand" (III.i.378–81). The caring for children is not the focus in this market society, the paying for them is. The question of responsibility for offspring produced outside of marriage potentially creates further socio-economic problems for the Duke; as Michael Friedman argues, ". . . in the absence of other means of financial support, the care and sustenance of illegitimate children falls to the responsibility of the state." He continues by noting that "given the prevalence of bastardy in Vienna, illegitimacy constitutes a serious economic threat to the city government."<sup>32</sup> As it happens, the Duke does overtly refer to Lucio's child when he metes out his punishment of marriage, ensuring that along with the ignominy of marrying beneath his class, Lucio's punishment is economic as well.

The final coupling of the play, between the Duke and Isabella, is one that has vexed critics, audiences and directors alike. That Vincentio, who had proclaimed himself immune to the "dribbling dart of love" (I.iii.2), suddenly wishes to marry Isabella after having callously deceived her in the matter of Claudio's fate has only contributed to the host of cynical readings of his character. For example, Shell argues that the Duke's first "marriage proposal" is, "in a sense, asking Isabella to yield him a satisfying reward for saving her brother."<sup>33</sup> That proposal, "If he be like your brother, for his sake / Is he pardoned, and for your lovely sake, / Give me your hand and say you will be mine" (V.i.493–5), is grounded in exchange values and culminates with undertones of ownership. The second proposal the Duke makes begs to be seen in the context of the deal previously offered Mariana by virtue of its emphasis on acquisition: "I have a motion much imports your good, / Whereto if you'll a willing ear incline, / What's mine is yours, and what is yours is mine" (538–40). Earlier, when disguised as the Friar, the Duke lays the groundwork for the bed trick by telling Isabella the following: "The satisfaction I would require is likewise your own benefit" (III.i.159–60). The principle of *quid pro quo* exchange, the foundation of a functioning market economy, is equally evident in practically the first words he says to Isabella as it is in his final proposal. The object of his earlier concern, Isabella's "benefit," is merely restated as her "good," which Friedman interprets in part as being "the status and financial rewards associated with being a duchess."<sup>34</sup> With its preponderance of possessive pronouns, "What's mine is yours, and what is yours is mine" carries little intimation of spirituality or human values; instead it seems like an exchange of "goods" of commensurate objective worth. Typifying the Duke as a commercial trader, Shell perceptively argues that the "negative discomforting aspect of Vincentio's merchantry is



that, since it tends to use human beings as money . . . and to trade them for money . . . it is antithetical to the genuine reciprocity in marriage that it seeks.”<sup>35</sup> In light of Isabella’s earlier rejection of material values, her failure to respond to a marriage proposal constructed upon such terms seems almost inevitable.

To say the very least, *Measure’s* interpretation of a marriage-filled traditional comedic ending runs against the grain of generic conventions. Claudio and Julietta are ordered wed, their marriage uncelebrated by virtue of the silence of the principals throughout the fifth act. Angelo and Lucio are forced to marry women they disdain, if not abhor. Finally a Duke’s proposal to a novice nun goes unanswered. In all, it appears as if Shakespeare was intent on constructing a macabre parody of the multiple weddings that point to a happy future in plays such as *Much Ado about Nothing* and *As You Like It*. But then again, the idea of buying better husbands as a way of resolution would be anathema in the festive comedies. Moreover, although the idea that marriage is essentially an institution born of market exchange values is integral to *Merry Wives* and *Merchant*, at the very least our expectation is that Anne and Fenton and Portia and Bassanio will be reasonably happy after the plays they appear in end. Despite what one might hope for Claudio, that eventuality is more difficult to entertain in *Measure* due to its mélange of unreciprocal love and insistence on viewing marriage through a lens of possession, circulation and exchange. This commercialization of relations between men and women is reinforced and rendered literal in the play’s subplot, which revolves around prostitution. Drawing attention to that trade’s dehumanizing process of commodification, which finds its correspondence in the Duke’s approach to Mariana’s future happiness, Jyotsna Singh observes that “we can also see an implicit parallel between the commercialization of women in the brothel and the economic impediments to Juliet’s and Mariana’s marriages.”<sup>36</sup> Yet, however much *Measure’s* upper and lower societies run in tandem and share implicit values, their fates are pointedly divergent. Mistress Overdone and her cohort are the object of suppression for their putting into practice the ethos of market objectification, while the same values remain unrecognized within the “upstairs” plot as they constitute the status quo and stay safely cloaked in metaphor.

Both the prominence and development of the prostitution plot in *Measure for Measure* differ from Shakespeare’s other representations of the world’s oldest profession. In *The Comedy of Errors*, the courtesan who beguiles the Ephesian Antipholus is more or less benign, although her presence serves as a reminder that human relations can be commodified. In the end, however, her role is innocuous, much like the threat of market values overtaking humanistic ones

in the play. She is as marginal a character as *Othello's* Bianca, whose profession is never really explored for thematic purposes. Notably, these two women are listed in their respective plays' *dramatis personae* as courtesans; in *Measure*, we feel that we are in a world of bawds and whores. At the other end of Shakespeare's career from *Errors*, Marina's foray into the brothel in *Pericles* coalesces with that play's thematic concern with rebirth and reconciliation. Her transformation of the whorehouse into a quasi-house of worship and the conversion of its patrons ensure that the commercial aspects of personal relations are supplanted by spiritual ones. However, in *Measure*, prostitution is largely a dark business, particularly in its connection with disease,<sup>37</sup> and, in this respect, the play anticipates *Timon of Athens'* Phrynia and Timandra, who will "do anything for gold,"<sup>38</sup> but are engaged, not for sexual pleasure, but rather to spread pestilence. Perhaps the closest parallel to *Measure's* underworld can be found in *Henry IV Part II's* Doll Tearsheet as she too is the victim of a state clean-up at that play's end. However, unlike Mistress Overdone, Doll is more of a sexual presence than an economic one and her alternately bawdy, witty and sentimental banter with Pistol and Falstaff finds no correspondence with Overdone's financial laments. Moreover, Doll's arrest provides an implicit parallel to the vanquishing of the rebels and the rejection of Falstaff, the three actions presumably assuring a more stable commonwealth. In *Measure*, however, there are no illusions that the values embodied in prostitution can be overcome as they are in *Errors*, *Pericles* and *Henry IV Part II*, a fact attested to by Lucio: ". . . the vice is of a great kindred, it is well allied; but it is impossible to extirp it quite . . . till eating and drinking be put down" (III.i.364–6).

The linkage between sexuality and economics inherent in prostitution is a negative one in *Measure*, as evidenced by the socio-economic disparity between those that ply the trade and those that operate outside its sphere. Speaking of *Measure's* "social realism" and "the tension which exists between these social strata," Thomas argues that "There is probably no other play of Shakespeare's where this social dichotomy is so clearly exposed."<sup>39</sup> The straits of Pompey and Mistress Overdone would have been in keeping with the economic situation of those who worked in London's stews in the early seventeenth century. Anne Haselkorn writes:

Poverty was an important aspect which led to the increased rise in prostitution in the seventeenth century. In fact, no modern English or American city of comparable size could lay claim to having more prostitutes than London. It is important to note that the economic conditions which played no small part in sowing the seeds of capitalism also gave rise to a new class—the enterprising poor.<sup>40</sup>

Interestingly, Haselkorn's argument bears implicit testament to the case advanced above regarding the convergence of values between *Measure's* upper and lower worlds. In seventeenth-century England, it would seem that the Greshams and the Merchant Adventurers et al were not that different from London's entrepreneurial bawds and whores; arguably, they differed only in scale.

However, as also noted by Haselkorn, the economic dimensions of prostitution at the time were largely subsumed by moral considerations: "Though men like Latimer and Stubbes decried the poverty that existed, there were none who could view prostitution as an aspect of poverty, and the prostitute as victim. The whore was still regarded as the temptress . . . she was the agent of unbridled lust."<sup>41</sup> The Duke's diatribe wherein he calls Pompey "a wicked bawd" (III.i.286) who profits "From such a filthy vice" (290) is the embodiment of such displacement. Dollimore maintains that the Duke's fixation on morality "occludes the fact that it is Angelo, not Pompey, who, unchecked, and in virtue of his social position, will cause most 'evil . . . to be done'" and concludes that "through a process of displacement an imaginary—and punitive—resolution of real social tension and conflict is attempted."<sup>42</sup> Although Dollimore's argument centers on issues of power, anarchy and ungovernability, his words ring equally true regarding the dominant exchange values in Vienna; suppressing those that sell women's sexuality in no way undermines those who high-mindedly promote the buying of husbands. In early modern drama, representations of the brothel and the whore bear multiple interpretations such as Theodore Leinwand's view that "a prostitute . . . is an emblem for anarchy"<sup>43</sup> or Dollimore's observation that the bawdyhouse is at times the romanticized "place of carnivalesque low-life."<sup>44</sup> In *Measure*, the Duke's moralizing aside, the stew functions as the personification of a society co-opted by economic principles.

Vienna's upper and lower worlds, fittingly, come together through the language of finance. For example, Angelo's first-act elevation to power which lays the seeds for corruption is expressed in lofty rhetoric laced with coining allusions. In the scene which immediately follows, that corruption finds its counterpart in the venereal diseases discussed via the same vein of tropes by Lucio and two Gentlemen:

Lucio: Behold, behold, where Madam Mitigation comes! I have purchased as many diseases under her roof as come to—

Second Gentleman: To what, I pray?

Lucio: Judge.

Second Gentleman: To three thousand dolours a year.

First Gentleman: Ay, and more.

Lucio: A French crown more.

First Gentleman: Thou art always figuring diseases in me, but thou art full of error; I am sound. (I.ii.43–52)

Whereas the earlier scene's conflation of abstract and material values (e.g. rulership equals coinage and nature as a usurer) carries a large measure of incongruity, Lucio and the two gentlemen's banter imparts a frank recognition of the market economy in which they are participants, something which is lost on Angelo and the Duke. Regarding the above conversation's being "cast in terms of money," Pearlman's observation seems highly germane: ". . . since the subject is diseased sexuality, the coins are similarly diseased."<sup>45</sup>

The commonalities of discourse between *Measure's* two worlds is evident as well when Pompey conflates the practices of both by using a single economic term: "'Twas never merry world since of two usuries the merriest was put down, and the worser allowed by order of law a furred gown to keep him warm . . ." (III.i.274–6). Nugent observes that "Pompey's remark not only records his opposition to usury, but also suggests growing toleration of moneylending by implying that when Angelo resurrected the laws against prostitution, which had been unenforced for 14 or so years, he also legalized moneylending."<sup>46</sup> Perhaps as importantly, as it is seldom the poor who practice usury, this shift in attitudes further reinforces the premise that, in Vienna, justice and money go hand-in-hand. But Pompey's merging of these two diverse trade practices under one lexical umbrella effects an equivalency that is outdated in the world he inhabits, as well as the Jacobean one that Shakespeare wrote *Measure* in. The commonality Pompey is drawing upon is that both prostitution and usury had been traditionally viewed as moral issues. During the Elizabethan period, tracts such as Thomas Wilson's 1569 *A Discourse upon Usury* and Philip Stubbes' 1582 *The Anatomie of Abuses* zealously attacked moneylending and harlotry, respectively, on the grounds that they were sins. But, whereas the sins of the flesh remain open to the moral sanction of the Puritanesque Angelo and the prudish Duke, Vienna, as a state, has reconfigured its ethical standards to accommodate the needs of a market society. This sort of moral relativism corresponds with the transition from Tudor to Stuart views on usury; as argued by Norman Jones,

. . . we can see that there was a new rationalization for the regulation of usury emerging at the beginning of the new century. Certainly the battles over usury in the Jacobean parliaments were fought on the basis of a different set of assumptions than those in 1571. Then the Members

were most concerned with squaring the new law with the law of God, the Jacobean Members were most concerned with squaring usury legislation with good economics.<sup>47</sup>

Evidently, pragmatism was able to face down the moral complexities of capitalism. Pompey's humanistic standpoint, however, is resistant to such equivocation, as the "financial" usury remains an evil, the "worser" in comparison to his profession, whose persecution signals the end of a "merry world." While his construction of his own trade denotes either an ignorance or a disregard of its fiscal nature, which makes it an integral part of society at large, his antipathy towards established economic practices is clear.

If the growing acceptance of usury in the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods connotes that cost-benefit analysis was a valid way to interpret the world, then Shakespeare's creation of Mistress Overdone is in keeping with his times. Her lament of "Thus what with the war, what with the sweat, what with the gallows, and what with poverty, I am custom-shrunk" (I.ii.80–2) is commonly cited to provide historical evidence of *Measure* being written in the first years of James's reign.<sup>48</sup> In the context of the current discussion, however, it has further resonance in that profound societal and political problems are reduced to the sum of their economic impact. No longer are war, plague, treason and poverty the enemies of a just and humane society; they are, instead, simply bad for business. Moreover, Overdone's repetitive syntax effectively levels such concerns; there is no differentiation between them as the singular enormity of each goes unrecognized, and all become one in their ability to disrupt the flow of trade, offering support to Simmel's argument that "The technical form of economic transactions produces a realm of values that is more or less completely detached from the subjective-personal substructure."<sup>49</sup> Pointedly, in the same scene, events portending potential societal good are similarly reducible; rather than war, Lucio and the two Gentlemen consider the prospect of peace in a discussion which Lever parallels with actual English concerns in 1604: "The anxiety of Lucio's companions at the imminence of an end to the war reflected a mood prevalent amongst gentlemen of fortune who feared for their occupation as soldiers or pirates."<sup>50</sup> Affording us insight into the concerns of both ends of the socio-economic spectrum, this opening street scene in *Measure* exposes Vienna's inability to relate the world to the self on a qualitative and moral level; ultimately, the acts of man and God alike are only to be factored into the bottom line.

The similarity in thought between gentleman and madam support the premise that we are not dealing with two worlds at all in *Measure*, given that a primary hallmark of any identifiable society is shared values. At many

junctures in the play, its two realities effect a crossover that belies their apparent separate status. For example, the business of prostitution is not under the purview of the underworld alone; when Mistress Overdone asks Pompey the fate of the city's brothels, he replies, "They shall stand for seed; they had gone down too, but that a wise burgher put in for them" (I.ii.98–9). This apparent privileging by the middle class of an investment opportunity over what should have been moral qualms corresponds as well with circumstances in early seventeenth-century London, given that "Great lords, like Queen Elizabeth's cousin Lord Hunsdon, were not above dabbling in this immoral traffic. In 1603 he is recorded as having leased out a mansion in Paris Garden to a famous Madam, setting down the terms on which men and women were to be received."<sup>51</sup> On the buying side of the equation, there is also a meeting of the two worlds as the gallant, the usurer and the gentlemanly "tilter" (IV.iii.15) end up in prison, guilty of patronizing Overdone's establishment.

In his seminal article "Transgression and Surveillance in *Measure for Measure*," Dollimore advocates a reading of the play which "insists on the oppressiveness of the Viennese state and which interprets low life transgression as *positively* anarchic, ludic, carnivalesque—a subversion from below of a repressive official ideology of order."<sup>52</sup> Characterizing the lower order in *Measure* as "the spectre of unregulated desire," he argues that "they are exploited to legitimate an exercise in authoritarian repression."<sup>53</sup> Notwithstanding his recognition of the similarities of the corruption of desire in both Angelo and the stews, Dollimore pulls apart *Measure's* two worlds in a power-subversion paradigm; yet, while fully acknowledging the merits of this argument, it seems equally, and paradoxically, possible that repression in the play results from its worlds being far too similar. In one of Elbow's few unconvoluted statements, he focuses on the commercial aspect of prostitution, admonishing Pompey thus: ". . . you will needs buy and sell men and women like beasts" (III.i.270–1). The moral distaste evident in this charge, as well as in the Duke's later diatribe against the bawd, seems to center on the dehumanizing aspect of Overdone's trade—the reduction of humans to commodities. Yet the same Duke who condemns the buying of a whore will later advocate the buying of a husband. Rather than running contrary to the state, the brothel runs in parallel, holding up a grim mirror to the exchange values that permeate Vienna. Those values are exemplified in the Duke's appropriation of Biblical text that gives the play its name; spoken as the state's philosophy of fair and equitable justice, "Like doth quit like, and Measure still for Measure" (V.i.412), embodies the fundamental *raison d'être* of the mercantile ethos, namely, the exchange of goods of equal value. But, throughout the play, the "measure for measure" equation is applied in a

sort of fill-in-the-blanks fashion, and the “goods” exchanged, being human, are not the stuff of objective market evaluation. In light of the pervasiveness of monetary thought, deed and language in *Measure*, perhaps what Alexander Leggatt identifies as “a pattern of substitution, virtually a chain reaction, that runs through the play”<sup>54</sup> can be reconfigured as a relentless pattern of exchange born of a market mentality.

Echoing prostitution’s “buying and selling of men and women,” the majority of *Measure*’s exchanges involve a trading of people. The play is book-ended by the initial exchange of Angelo for the Duke and its reversal in the fifth act, the former, despite the Duke’s forebodings, indicating a belief in a potential equivalency between men, much as there is between like units of currency. While Vincentio’s self-re-instatement should indicate an acknowledgment that such transactions are unworkable, he betrays his dedication to the principles of exchange by trading the Deputy once again through the equation “An Angelo for Claudio” (V.i.410). Evidently, Angelo’s market value fluctuates, in Isabella’s words, “as fancy values.” More notoriously, the Duke had earlier proposed exchanging Claudio for Barnardine, demonstrating that men’s lives and deaths alike are translatable into transactional commodities. In Simmel’s view, “reciprocal balancing, through which each economic object expresses its value in another object, removes both objects from the sphere of merely subjective significance. The relativity of valuation signifies its objectification.”<sup>55</sup> While Simmel’s interpretation may have merit in a discussion of inanimate market goods, the problem in *Measure* is that the same principles are being applied in the human arena. Consequently, his belief that economic exchange “frees the objects from their bondage to the mere subjectivity of the subjects and allows them to determine themselves reciprocally, by investing the economic function in them”<sup>56</sup> proves unworkable in the play. While subjectivity may well be a form of “bondage” when determining the value of a horse or a pair of gloves, it is also at the heart of what it means to be human. The prevailing system of exchange in *Measure* eliminates that subjectivity; people become tokens of exchange and their individuality is leveled. What enables this depersonalized system of barter is Vienna’s reliance on cash values. Andy Mousely, paraphrasing Marx, defines money as “being that utterly indiscriminate medium of exchange which renders unlike things, including people-as-things, anonymously alike.”<sup>57</sup> The manner in which the proposed exchanges of Isabella for Claudio, Mariana for Isabella and Barnardine for Claudio manifest this premise may in part explain why Marx felt such an affinity for Shakespeare.

The deal which precipitates all the ones that follow in *Measure*, that proposed by Angelo to Isabella, has been rightly read as an attempt to commodify her humanity by reducing it to its corporeity only, an argument

summarized by Shell thus: “*Measure for Measure* explores the significance not only of paying money for a body but also of using a body as money, for in this play heads and maidenheads are traded as if they were commensurate.”<sup>58</sup> Angelo’s wording of the proposition, “Redeem thy brother / By yielding up thy body . . .” (II.iv.164–5), does indeed focus on the materiality of Isabella and the calculations used to arrive at the offer are evident: Isabella equals her body, which in turn equals a third removed value that is equal to Claudio’s life. However, whereas, in the sources for *Measure*, the Isabella figure completes the transaction, the refusal to do so here widens the debate on exchange values in a way that suggests a desire to confirm the unworkability of those values outside of the realm of traditional commercial transactions. This is first accomplished by having the resistance voiced by a novice nun, thereby pitting spiritual values against mercantile ones; again, this is a departure from Shakespeare’s sources, one which potentially speaks to authorial intent. Secondly, her implicit rejection of Angelo’s objective computations works to restore subjectivity to the principles of valuation. To Isabella, her chaste state holds intangible worth and is not commensurate with her physical being, something made clear when she tells Claudio, “O, were it but my life, / I’d throw it down for your deliverance / As frankly as a pin” (III.i.106–8). Regardless of what one may think of her priorities, when Isabella makes the pronouncement “More than our brother is our chastity” (II.iv.186), her comparative language speaks to the existence of a hierarchy of values that opposes the leveling of all things to equitable status. The prevalence of monetary values in Vienna that manifests itself both metaphorically and physically in *Measure* is what has engendered the privileging of quantitative thinking over qualitative, money being the great intermediary leveler which enables the equation and exchange of unlike commodities. Isabella stops the process of exchange cold by categorically refusing to accept the possibility of a commonality between what in her estimation are intangibles, proclaiming, “Ignomy in ransom and free pardon / Are of two houses; lawful mercy / Is nothing kin to foul redemption” (II.iv.112–14). Her words reverse the reification of herself and Claudio in their insistence on translating their material bodies as constructed by Angelo into the abstractions of “mercy” and “redemption.” Significantly, those terms and the Christian resonances they carry come in a scene which opens with Angelo’s recognition of his estrangement from God (1–7).

As Isabella’s second-act rejection of exchange values seemingly constitutes a bulwark against the principles of human commodification, her somewhat baffling acceptance of the bed trick promoted by the Duke in the third, is, to say the least, problematic. The entire premise of this oft-used comedic



device being that women are reducible to the sum of their bodies, the use of it in *Measure* to ostensibly effect resolution would appear to contradict what has thus far been argued regarding the exchange mentality. Katherine Maus underlines this dichotomy by pointing out that *Measure* asserts, on one hand, that “human beings differ radically from one another,” while on the other, that “human beings are not all that different from one another and can . . . be exchanged for one another, quite freely.”<sup>59</sup> Leggatt reconciles this problem to a certain extent by stressing differences between the bed tricks in *All’s Well* and *Measure*. In the former, he argues that Helena being pregnant at the end of the play constitutes a sign that, if nothing else, the bed trick “represents a stage in the relationship of the participants,” unlike in the latter, where “there is something blank and anonymous about it.”<sup>60</sup> To expand on that idea, it would seem, in *Measure*, that when an exchange that effectively dehumanizes its parties does transpire, it is shown to be ultimately unproductive and sterile.

The other aspect of the bed trick in *Measure* that bears comparison to *All’s Well* is the issue of agency. In the earlier play, Helena is the architect of her substitution for Diana and thereby maintains both control and a measure of dignity. While the bed trick, in and of itself, objectifies by its very nature, that process is compounded in *Measure* by virtue of the Duke, who, much like a commodities broker, trades Mariana for Isabella (albeit with their co-operation) to effect a transaction that is very much in his interest.<sup>61</sup> His minimization of Mariana’s subjectivity is evident as he speaks like a man preparing goods for market: “The maid will I frame and make fit for [Angelo’s] attempt” (III.i.256–7). As noted earlier, the proposal is also contextualized in terms allusive to monetary dealings, i.e. “benefit” and “recompense.” The Duke’s overseeing of the whole affair in effect puts the state’s imprimatur on an exchange system that envelops men and women as well as material commodities. In the end, it is the hitherto zealously pious novice who ensures Mariana’s participation in the Duke’s morally dubious exchange, a narrative turn that seems confounding. The question arises whether Isabella’s involvement constitutes a tacit acceptance of Vienna’s transaction-based economy and indicates how far she has traveled from the spiritual values embodied in her decision to enter a convent. Her lack of positive response to the Duke’s final deal, that is, his marriage proposal in *Measure*’s finale, would suggest that this was not the intended reading. Arguably, the bed trick being proposed by what she believes to be a man of God is what underpins her acquiescence. If so, then in turn, Vincentio being a friar in garb only suggests that, underneath any higher spiritual stamp that is put on exchange values, there lies a secular, self-interested one. Either way, i.e. whether she is gullible or has

grown cynical, Isabella is diminished both personally and theatrically by the play's end.

Since Isabella's resistance turns to acceptance and then silence by the end of *Measure for Measure*, the only steadfast opposition to the play's economy of exchange is ironically in the form of the condemned prisoner Barnardine. On a moral scale, the bed trick pales next to the Duke's scheme to exchange Barnardine for Claudio, which involves killing a man before his appointed time; in pursuit of yet another transaction, Vincentio for all intents and purposes doffs the robes of friar and assumes those of God. His reduction of the condemned man to first "this Barnardine" and then merely "his head" (IV.ii.169,170) conveys the distancing and anatomization which enables the objectification of the human subject. Reminiscent of how Mariana was to be fitted and framed, Barnardine is to be shaved and his beard tied in a fatuous attempt to manufacture an equivalency with Claudio, one that patently can only approximate the outer man while ignoring the inner. Shell's succinct comment that "in death one body passes for another just as in monetary exchange one coin is as good as another coin of the same denomination"<sup>62</sup> encapsulates the economic foundations which inform the Duke's machinations. But, Barnardine, a man whom the Provost (arguably *Measure's* sole unambiguously sympathetic character) humanizes by describing him as "desperately mortal" (IV.ii.145) has lived apart from Viennese values for nine years by virtue of his physical separation from them. As a result, he is uniquely and paradoxically empowered to just say no. As Kiernan Ryan points out, Barnardine "marks the boundary of the moral universe by which the denizens of Vienna are circumscribed . . . he affords us a position uncontaminated by the codes that constrain the rest of the cast."<sup>63</sup> While his earlier rejections of Pompey's entreaties to die are played for humor, what bears notice is how Barnardine's confrontation with the Duke seems as measured as it does resolute:

Duke: Sir, induced by my charity, and hearing how hastily you are to depart, I am come to advise you, comfort you, and pray with you.

Barnardine: Friar, not I. I have been drinking hard all night, and I will have more time to prepare me, or they shall beat out my brains with billets. I will not consent to die this day, that's certain.

Duke: O, sir, you must, and therefore I beseech you  
Look forward on the journey you shall go.

Barnardine: I swear I will not die today for any man's persuasion.

Duke: But hear you—

Barnardine: Not a word. If you have anything to say to me, come to my ward, for thence will not I today. (IV.iii.47–60)

Vincenzio's subsequent back-pedaling concerning the prisoner being unfit for death and therefore risking damnation is patently specious—taken aback, he has just found out that barriers exist in the market economy he has constructed, namely an indomitable spirit that will not sink to the level of commodity. Leggatt defines Barnardine as “an acid test of the principle that no human being is replaceable or expendable.”<sup>64</sup> That list might be augmented with the words “quantifiable” or “exchangeable.”

It is an appealing thought that Shakespeare may have been tweaking the nose of the Duke he had created by having Barnardine re-appear at the end of *Measure* to be pardoned of all crimes by the man with whom he had refused to make a deal. That gesture, which rubs against the entire grain of what had up until that point appeared to be the universal values of exchange, constitutes, with apologies to Jonathan Dollimore, a truly subversive act. The world that Shakespeare created in his last “comedy,” the one that Vincenzio presides over, is remarkably similar to the England that Wheeler saw in 1601, namely one in which “all things come into commerce, and pass into traffic (in a manner) in all times, and in all places.”<sup>65</sup> Arguably, Barnardine's is the play's lone victory over that premise.

## Chapter Five

# Reconciling the Two Timons

## Shakespeare's Philanthropist and Middleton's Prodigal

While the underlying antipathy towards economic values in *Merry Wives*, *Merchant* and *Measure* may have pointed the way, nothing in them prepares us for the frontal assault on the monetary ethos that is *Timon of Athens*. That Shakespeare may well have had the story of the Greek misanthrope stewing in the back of his mind for a long time seems probable; in *Love's Labour's Lost*, Biron rails against the hypocrisy of his comrades-in-abstinence, comparing them to "great Hercules whipping a gig . . . / and critic Timon laugh[ing] at idle toys!"<sup>1</sup> However, what merited a passing joke a decade earlier became the mature playwright's vehicle for his most fully-developed and overt exploration of the clash between humanistic and monetary values. Having integrated this theme in his comedic writing during the intervening years, it appears that Shakespeare felt the need to turn to tragedy in order to fully impart the deleterious effects of money on interpersonal relationships and society as a whole. While his early seventeenth-century contemporaries, such as Jonson and Middleton, were confronting economic issues through the satire of Citizen Comedy, Shakespeare evidently saw them ultimately as no laughing matter. Given the present critical consensus that *Timon* is the result of a collaboration with Middleton, the manner in which the writing load was apparently divided would certainly suggest as much; that is, while the satirist penned scenes such as the dunning by the creditors, Shakespeare was responsible for the vitriolic nihilism that permeates the later parts of the play.

Historically, *Timon* has never been lauded as an exemplar of Shakespearean tragedy; it seemed to lack an overall coherence, and sections of its poetry have been judged as being below standard. While some attributed the play's shortcomings to Shakespeare himself, such factors have also driven speculation for over a hundred and fifty years that *Timon* was not the product of a single author,<sup>2</sup> much of it suggesting that Middleton was the second hand involved. Although a scant twenty-five years ago, Rolf Soellner felt

confident enough to claim that “few people now doubt that *Timon* is wholly Shakespeare’s,”<sup>3</sup> there now appears to be general agreement that the play was co-authored by Middleton, a fact manifested by the 2004 Oxford edition of the play whose title page bears both playwrights’ names.<sup>4</sup> While the tentative identification of Middleton’s role in *Timon* dates back to the 1920s, recent linguistic analysis by scholars such as Brian Vickers and John Jowett has not only made a highly convincing case supporting a Shakespeare-Middleton collaboration, but has also broken down *Timon* into constituent parts attributable to each author.<sup>5</sup> The argument which unfolds in this chapter is based on the identification of sections of the play as either Middletonian or Shakespearean made by Vickers and Jowett,<sup>6</sup> as their work represents the most current scholarship on the issue. The presence of two hands in the writing of *Timon* goes a long way to explain why reactions to its title character have been so much at odds; but more importantly, in the present context, an examination of Shakespeare’s contribution, in isolation and in contrast to the work of Middleton, reveals the underlying nature of Shakespeare’s ultimate pronouncement on *homo economicus*.

While *Timon* generally works as a narrative whole, stylistic elements are at times jarring, and thematic elements often appear contradictory. Dividing a collaborative work and considering the work of each writer, both in isolation and dialogically, offers a means of resolving such problems; as well, articles such as Jowett’s “Middleton and Debt in *Timon of Athens*”<sup>7</sup> demonstrate that an examination of specific authorial intent within a collaboration can be a fruitful exercise. Shakespeare’s *Timon* is different from Middleton’s, and exploring those differences can only add to our understanding of this difficult play. In the above-mentioned article, Jowett argues that “the copula-phrase ‘Shakespeare and Middleton,’ in which the word ‘and’ simultaneously separates and joins, enables a more productive reading of the play in relation to the social, cultural, and economic dimensions of the moment at which it was written.”<sup>8</sup> In addition, it allows us to situate *Timon* more confidently within Shakespeare’s writings on economic matters and principles.

While co-authorship can account for many of *Timon*’s oft-noted vagaries, the play’s singularity within the Shakespearean canon is manifested in a number of ways as well. For example, unlike the other tragedies Shakespeare wrote in the same period, such as *King Lear* and *Coriolanus*, the emphasis in *Timon* does not rest ultimately on the tragic character, but rather on the death of ideals. As argued by Dieter Mehl, “what is revealed about the general state of human society is more important for the intention of the play than the mental state of the protagonist.”<sup>9</sup> Although *Lear* and *Coriolanus* also confront man’s ingratitude, at the end of those plays

we dwell on the men themselves; when *Timon* ends, it is the monstrous ingratitude that remains with us, and the role that money has played in the tragedy is what we are left to ponder. In fact, the play's concentration on monetary issues, both lexically and thematically, also sets *Timon* apart from other Shakespearean plays. The word "gold" appears thirty-six times, more than in any other play Shakespeare wrote; notably, all but three of these occur in the portions of the play that have been attributed to him.<sup>10</sup> In addition, *Timon's* eight mentions of "usury" outstrip even *The Merchant of Venice*. The language of the play is relentlessly commercial; pointedly, it is by and large the language of men. Indeed, the all-but-absence of women in *Timon* is palpable—lacking any mothers, daughters, wives or lovers, the play explores only homosocial bonds (a phrase fraught with double meaning in *Timon*). This cold world of economic relationships brooks no tempering by the kind of love plots present in *Merchant*. Aside from two lines (attributable to Middleton) spoken by the Amazons hired to perform at Timon's masque, the only feminine speech comes from the mouths of whores, themselves the embodiment of the economic nexus. As Kenneth Burke observes, "Since the play is almost wholly concerned with relations among men (as though all the world were a kind of secular monastery devoted perversely to a universal god of gold), women figure only in a supernumerary capacity."<sup>11</sup> The near-irrelevance of the female voice in *Timon*, in itself, only reflects the overwhelming maleness of the mercantile and commercial world, both in Athens and the Jacobean England in which Shakespeare was writing.

A further distinctive aspect of *Timon* is one which Richard Fly identifies as a mark of Shakespeare's final tragedies, namely "the disappearance of the malicious middleman."<sup>12</sup> Without a Tamora, Claudius or Iago, the play denies the comfort zone engendered by a localization of malice within an individual whose downfall is germane to the catharsis offered by the tragic mode. Despite the commonality of a titular character raging against mankind, *Lear*, the play most often linked with *Timon*, is fundamentally different in that it remains possible to assign culpability to Edmund, Goneril and Regan, no matter how simplistic such a reading might be. The rot in *Timon* is societal rather than personal, the namelessness of the poet, jeweler, senators et al conveying that, rather than being malevolent individuals, they are representative of what the world has become. Those who view the play are therefore implicitly indicted by it. Much like Hamlet's commissioning a play with the intent to "catch the conscience of the king," Shakespeare demands, through *Timon*, that audiences and readers confront their roles in the derogation of human values in favor of cash ones.

Although there is no record of *Timon* ever having been performed during Shakespeare's lifetime, the play's reflection of early seventeenth-century historic and economic circumstances suggests that it was intended to have contemporary resonances. E. C. Pettet argues that "the fact that the speeches put into the mouth of Timon have a social and economic reference far beyond the situation of the play makes it likely that Shakespeare was using Timon . . . as a mouthpiece through which he could occasionally express his own attitude to certain historical developments of his own time."<sup>13</sup> In particular, it seems likely that Timon's liberality, which results in crippling debt, was a nod at the then-reigning monarch. Citing the Jacobean court's "ethos of royal liberality and magnificence," Coppelia Kahn notes that historians "agree that the imbalance between revenue and expenditure that dogged James's reign can be traced mainly to the king's compulsive giving. . . . The ultimate source of bounty, throned at court like Fortune on her hill, was James."<sup>14</sup> As well, *Timon's* portrayal of usury both continues and escalates the treatment of the practice in *Merchant* and *Measure*, in that it is shown to be both ubiquitous and contrary to societal interests. While Pompey may have implied that lending at interest was state-sanctioned, *Timon* ups the ante by directly engaging the embodiment of the state, the senators, in a business that was still regarded in Shakespeare's time as morally dubious. Contemporary city comedies, such as *Eastward Ho!*, may have depicted cartoonish usurers who exploit young prodigals only to receive their eventual comeuppance, but Shakespeare offers pillars of the community calling in Timon's loans and ruining him in the process. Late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century debt cycles described by Lawrence Stone as a "gigantic merry-go-round, with the great moneyed men of London in effect paying each other off every six months or so"<sup>15</sup> are reflected in the Senators' reason for doing so:

. . . but tell him (Timon)

My uses cry to me, I must serve my turn  
 Out of mine own, his days and times are past,  
 And my reliances on his fracted dates  
 Have smit my credit.<sup>16</sup>

On the surface, as a financially ruined noble, Timon would appear to incarnate both a literary and historical type. The comedic stuff of city comedies, such as Middleton's depiction in *Your Five Gallants* of down-on-their-luck nobles pawning their clothes, was not that far removed from the truth. As Christopher Clay points out, ". . . it was easy, in this climate of increasingly

lavish levels of conspicuous consumption superimposed upon a general inflation, to run by degrees into serious debt.”<sup>17</sup> Figures that Clay cites also bear out the truth behind Timon’s selling of his lands to raise funds: between 1602 and 1641, out of thirty-seven families of peerage whose histories are known, fourteen had lost half or more of their manors, while twenty-two lost a quarter.<sup>18</sup> Yet when compared to the impoverished gentles of Shakespeare’s earlier comedies, *Merry Wives’* Fenton and *Merchant’s* Bassanio, Timon challenges our assumptions about such types. First, the situation of the two comedic figures is presented as a *fait accompli*, and the focus of their stories is on the matrimonial restoration of their fortunes. Furthermore, Fenton confesses that “riots past” and his “wild societies” have brought about his ruin, while Bassanio’s history of borrowing indicates that he is an inveterate spendthrift. Yet, however one may view their fortune-hunting, their ability to pick themselves up and rebuild their capital base lends them an air of entrepreneurial pluck in keeping with the adventuresome spirit of mercantilism. In *Timon*, the emphasis is on the process and repercussions of one man’s economic downfall, and the possibility of recovery and re-integration is precluded. While, as discussed below, the nature of Timon’s spending is ambiguous enough to spark debate on whether he is a prodigal or not, the dunning by the creditors is straightforward, as hardnosed economic imperatives outrank the personal and affective ties Timon believes exist between men. Over the course of the play, cash values are shown to reign supreme, and the resultant disillusionment that Timon undergoes is so profound that, when given a chance to rejoin society in a position of restored economic strength, he rejects what we can presume Bassanio and Fenton would jump at. Once Timon’s eyes have been opened, only the destruction of Athens and the exchange economy it represents will satisfy him.

A sidelong glance at what are presumed to be Shakespeare’s sources for *Timon* provides further illumination of the play’s underlying intents. While it seems certain that Plutarch’s brief account of Timon’s misanthropy provided the play’s seed, there is also a general consensus that Shakespeare drew upon the traditions of moral interludes in *Timon’s* depiction of the ephemeral nature of worldly wealth and its consideration of spiritual values. In particular, the parade of false friends who refuse to help Everyman on his way down has obvious resonance. However, Shakespeare’s displacement of Morality traditions into a pagan setting suggests that the Christian tenets that underpin the genre are no longer sustainable; in Athens, money is the deity of choice and the Golden Rule has become the rule of gold. As Anne Lancashire argues, “. . . for [Timon], as for Everyman, a time of ‘reck’ning’ . . . will come, though for Timon, since the world of the play is secular, it will be a secular, not a spiritual, reckoning and will thus be expressed in terms of material payment:



bonds, dues, bills.”<sup>19</sup> The clash between the spiritual and economic meaning of “redemption” that Shakespeare played with in *Measure* looms large in *Timon*; however, in this tragedy, only the latter reading seems tenable.

The other potential source for *Timon of Athens* is the early seventeenth-century academic comedy, *Timon*. If Shakespeare had seen this play, as James C. Bulman suggests,<sup>20</sup> the differences in his version are telling in three significant areas. First, the ambiguity of Shakespeare’s protagonist’s generosity is in stark contrast to his comedic counterpart’s blatant embracement of the money-equals-friendship equation, evident in his cheerful admission, “I putte my talents to strange usury / To gaine mee friends, that they may follow mee.”<sup>21</sup> Second, rather than being crushed by usurious false friends, the comedic Timon is victimized by fate, in that, like *Merchant’s* Antonio, he is ruined when his ships run aground. Finally, and most importantly, as befitting its genre, the earlier play offers the hope of reconciliation as its protagonist promises at its end to return to the city, an option that is totally precluded in Shakespeare’s play. Needless to say, the economic world portrayed in *Timon of Athens* is a much darker place. The expansion of the academic play’s title would also signify that the individual’s relationship with his society, rather than the individual, is what is of interest.

In the allusions made thus far to the indeterminacy surrounding the nature of Timon’s largesse lies a key to discerning Shakespeare’s stance regarding economic relationships and exchange-based societies. Nicholas Grene summarizes the variant critical views that have dogged *Timon* in this area as “the notoriously polarized interpretations of the play: Timon as the satirized gull or as the much-wronged idealist, a figure of prodigality or of generosity.”<sup>22</sup> To those typifications can be added the opinion that Timon gives (subconsciously to some, consciously to others) with the expectation that he will receive, a view evident in Robert Heilman’s summation of Timon’s generosity as “timony—that is, a secular simony, a buying of good offices.” He explains that “only an expectation that other men have made a compact with him—have obligated themselves to him—can explain the rancorous violence and indefatigability of his rants against Athenians and mankind.”<sup>23</sup> Attempts have also been made to pathologize what Soellner calls “Timon’s prodigal recklessness of giving,”<sup>24</sup> such as A. D. Nuttall’s assertion that “Timon’s generosity is indeed so intense as to suggest . . . an obscure competitive anxiety which is itself the opposite of real love.”<sup>25</sup> The middle ground of *Timon* criticism tends to reflect its protagonist’s claim, “Unwisely, not ignobly, have I given” (4.169). For example, Gail Kern Paster opines that “the hopeful vision of ideal society . . . becomes instead the symptom of naiveté,”<sup>26</sup> while Mehl defines *Timon* as an “exemplum of an imprudent but unselfish waster.”<sup>27</sup> Still others hold a much more idealized view

of *Timon* and what he stands for, such as Victor Kiernan, who sees the play as “Shakespeare’s haunting nostalgia for a lost Golden Age, free of private property with its dividing and corroding taint . . .” adding, “In this play he is setting against the acrid self-interest of the new age an opposite conception (however much it leaves out) of how life ought to be lived.”<sup>28</sup> While the above myriad of critical opinions are in various ways opposed to one another, it may be possible to see merit and truth in all. This absence of consensus is arguably unavoidable due to the collaborative process that wrought the play. Perhaps the answer to the conundrum that Soellner perceives, “. . . It is debatable where [Timon’s] generosity ends and his prodigality begins,”<sup>29</sup> is as simple as pointing to the end of the first scene, which Shakespeare wrote, and the beginning of the second, which was penned by Middleton.

The arc of the “Shakespeare play” within *Timon* becomes more apparent when contrasted to the thematic concerns and tone of the Middleton sections. While the attribution of small sections of dialogue in the play remains unresolved, it is generally agreed that Middleton wrote all of Scene Two, the parade of rejection by Timon’s flatterers, Alcibiades’ confrontation with the Senate and most of the scenes involving the steward, Flavius. Jowett conjectures that “Shakespeare as senior dramatist . . . would presumably have made the first decision about working on the play,”<sup>30</sup> while Vickers notes that F. G. Fleay’s work “suggest[s] that Shakespeare was the chief plotter, leaving Middleton a clearly marked section of the play in which to work out conflicts already prepared for.”<sup>31</sup> Middleton’s participation in a play so concerned with the corrosive effects of money is entirely fitting, as he was one of the leading writers of *Citizen Comedy*, a genre relentlessly satiric of the interplay between the financial and the personal. His work in the play bridges Timon’s philanthropy and misanthropy and provides some of the play’s only moments of levity, in particular the increasingly disingenuous excuses of Timon’s “friends.” Those episodes, more than any other in the play, devastatingly satirize how self-interest reigns supreme when money is at stake. Given our knowledge of Timon’s desperate straits, Lucullus’ oily expectation of further bounty when Timon’s man arrives to request a loan (“And what hast thou there under thy cloak, pretty Flaminius?” [5.14–5]) is a masterstroke of dramatic irony that lays bare the principles under which Athens operates. Middleton is also the primary source of the play’s implicit caricature of court extravagance, as per Timon’s second-scene doling out of jewels bought on credit mirroring what Kahn calls “the baffling persistence of the Jacobean patronage system in the face of its sheer unworkability.”<sup>32</sup> In addition, Timon’s predilection for hunting and producing elaborate masques (both on display in the second scene) lends Middleton’s incarnation of the character a James-like bent and a resultant contemporary relevance. As these satirical elements work

to make *Timon* a more accessible play, perhaps Shakespeare, who was after all a businessman as well as playwright, perceived Middleton to be an ideal collaborator who could leaven what was otherwise a bleak tragedy. In this respect, the melding of two authorial styles works positively.

Middleton is also responsible for some of *Timon*'s most memorable lines, ones that are in keeping with the sentiment and tone of the Shakespearean sections, such as Timon's assertion, "Unwisely, not ignobly have I given" (4.169). Further evidence of a synchronicity between the two authors comes in Middleton lines such as Timon's reaction to his creditors' demands, "Cut my heart in sums" (8.88), and his cry of

. . . must my house  
Be my retentive enemy, my jail?  
The place which I have feasted, does it now,  
Like all mankind, show me an iron heart? (8.79–82)

The former connects *Timon* to *Merchant* via its imagery, and the latter effectively conveys the desperation of a man imprisoned in an exchange economy who has nothing left to exchange. That said, however, Middleton's construction of Timon in the play's second scene seems at odds with the philanthropist of the first in that he appears to be an active and aware participant in the cycle of exchange. Moreover, his Timon comes across as the spendthrift he is often accused of being. Prior to exploring the philanthropic "Shakespearean Timon," an examination of the Middletonian one is in order.

Middleton's contribution to *Timon* actually begins at the end of Scene One with a conversation between two Lords providing a thematic bridge to what ensues. In it, the Second Lord links Timon with "Plutus the god of gold" (1.279), a deity who is often the spiritual victor in Middleton plays. The description that follows reconfigures the philanthropy of the first scene through the language of investment, profit and loss, and implies that Timon's gift-giving is actually a mode of cyclical financial exchange that carries the taint of usury:

. . . no meed but he repays  
Sevenfold above itself; no gift to him  
But breeds the giver a return exceeding  
All use of quittance. (1.280–3)

The word "use," a term which Kahn notes "in Shakespeare's world . . . always connotes usury,"<sup>33</sup> emerges again during the second scene's banquet, only this time it comes from Timon's mouth. His speech, which is ostensibly a paean to

selfless friendship, ends up instead defining relations among men as being on a quid pro quo basis:

‘O you gods,’ think I,  
 ‘what need we have any friends if we should ne’er have  
 need of ‘em? They were the most needless creatures  
 living, should we ne’er have use for ‘em . . . (2.91–4)

Only a fine philosophic line would appear to separate this speech and the Second Lord’s view that any gift to Timon will be returned sevenfold with “use” providing a tangible link between the two. By having Timon dismiss Ventidius’ offer to repay his debt with interest,<sup>34</sup> Middleton may have strived to comply with the character Shakespeare created in the first scene who gives, as will be argued below, without expectation of return; however, his “Timon” more often than not betrays an affinity with the society of which he is part. In his article, “Derrida, the Gift, and God in *Timon of Athens*,” Ken Jackson argues that the “need of friends” speech

reveals the contradiction between Timon’s responsibility to [the ideal of the truly selfless, unreciprocated “gift”] and his responsibility to other people . . . One might say that Timon does not seek the gift here . . . but instead demonstrates a hyper-interest in exchange relationships, collapsing all other into that relation . . . His friends would be “the most needless creatures living” outside an exchange network, and he weeps for joy that all are so thoroughly interwoven in an this network . . . (sic).<sup>35</sup>

Further confirmation of Timon’s exchange mentality comes in the Middleton-penned fourth scene; when he sends Flavius to request funds, it is evident he feels he is owed something:

Go you, sir, to the senators,  
 Of whom, even to the state’s best health, I have  
 Deserved this hearing. Bid ‘em send o’th’ instant  
 A thousand talents to me. (4.190–3)

Jackson also raises the image of the potlatcher in his discussion of critical reactions to Timon; he defines the term as one who “‘give[s] . . . everything away, even to the point of self-destruction; the chief’s excessive gifts, in other words, prevent any reciprocation and establish his superiority to rivals

by demonstrating his different social position in the exchange network.”<sup>36</sup> This view of Timon is subscribed to by Michael Chorost who claims that “Timon really is a *potlatcher*, because he contrives to give far more than he gets.”<sup>37</sup> Citing Ventidius’ offer of repayment, Chorost argues that Timon’s refusal is predicated on a desire not to “diminish the accumulated sense of obligation built up in his courtiers.”<sup>38</sup> Notably, the vast majority of the evidence that Chorost bases his construction of Timon upon is sourced from the Middleton sections of the play. Kahn similarly argues that Timon’s generosity “prevents reciprocity and makes others appear his dependents, his inferiors, ‘subdued’ to his love.”<sup>39</sup> This aspect of Timon surfaces most obviously when, after the masque, he hands out jewels to all the Lords like so many party favors. When given two brace of greyhounds, Timon responds, “. . . let them be received / Not without fair reward” (2.190–1). This is followed by more seemingly pointless gift-giving that culminates with an attendant Lord being given a bay courser simply because he had previously admired it. Given the general tone of this scene, it is small wonder that Jonathan Miller’s BBC production of the play shows Timon making his way through his assembled guests indiscriminately throwing gold into the air. With regard to the gift of the bay courser, one further point needs to be made. In response to the recipient’s assuredly half-hearted protestations, Timon replies thus: “. . . I know no man / Can justly praise but what he does affect” (2.215–6). This aphoristic observation speaks to a belief that subjective valuations hold sway in this world and that objective, disinterested standards do not exist. In *Troilus and Cressida*, the question “What’s aught but as ‘tis valued?”<sup>40</sup> encapsulates the lack of ethical stability endemic in that play. Here, Timon’s expression of the same sentiment seems somewhat incongruous coming from the idealist encountered in the first scene.

A further component of Middleton’s contribution, the confrontation between the Senate and Alcibiades, is yet another aspect of *Timon* which fosters confusion over the play’s intent and Timon himself. In 1847, Charles Knight attributed the entire episode to an unknown co-writer, stating that “the banishment of Alcibiades is perfectly unconnected with the misanthropy of Timon.”<sup>41</sup> If, as it appears, the purpose of this scene is to establish a story of ingratitude and alienation parallel to *Timon*’s central plot, the corollary effect of its inclusion is to muddy the waters of our perception of Timon’s character. This is due to Alcibiades painting his relation to the state not as one of selfless service, but rather as part of an exchange economy in which he is owed for services rendered. The question which then arises is whether Timon’s gift-giving is to be viewed in the same light. Moreover, the captain’s argument is couched in commercial language that belies his status as an outsider in

Athenian society. After proposing a deal framed in fiscal terms (“I’ll pawn my victories, all my honour to you / Upon his good returns” [10.80–1].) that is rejected, his condemnation of the Senate not only commodifies his injuries, but also unsubtly drives home what Shakespeare only implies about Athens’ economic practices prior to Timon’s self-imposed exile:

I’m worse than mad. I have kept back their foes  
 While they have told their money and let out  
 Their coin upon large interest, I myself  
 Rich only in large hurts. (10.104–7)

Why we should care about Alcibiades’ unnamed comrade who has killed in anger is never apparent, and, as Vickers points out, “The fact that Alcibiades accuses the Athenian Senate of endorsing usury . . . is also irrelevant . . . as it stands, [he] is clearly in the wrong, his wish to benefit from Athenian gratitude a perversion of that virtue.”<sup>42</sup> Alcibiades seems more petulant than anything else, and his speeches bear little resemblance to the measured words that mark his later Shakespeare-penned encounter with Timon in the woods. That Shakespeare in that scene makes only the most passing of references to the Senate confrontation indicates how ultimately irrelevant it was to the play he was writing.

While Jowett maintains that “The senate scene has proved to be the most difficult discontinuity in the Folio text for both critics and performers,”<sup>43</sup> I would argue that the meeting of Timon and his steward, Flavius, in the woods is far more disruptive on both a dramatic and a thematic level. In that episode, Timon’s invectives against gold and mankind are momentarily quelled as he acknowledges the existence of a “singly honest man” (14.522). This tempering, if not undermining, of Timon’s all-encompassing misanthropy is all Middleton’s. It is tempting to view Flavius through the lens of Shakespearean characters such as *As You Like It*’s old Adam and *Lear*’s Kent in that he ostensibly represents the selfless old world values of fealty and service. Indeed, Adam’s offering up of his life savings to help Orlando is echoed when the steward tries to give Timon gold. However, an analysis of *Timon*’s authorial distribution reveals that Flavius is overwhelmingly a Middleton creation. In fact, less than fifteen per cent of the scenes in which the steward has a speaking part are considered to have been written by Shakespeare, whose lack of input in the shaping of this character (albeit with one notable exception that will be discussed below) suggests that he had little desire to mitigate his portrayal of a world corrupted by the pursuit and love of money. Earlier, in relation to *Merry Wives*, the disjunction between Fenton’s poetry

and actions was argued as indicating the impossibility of an idealized lover in a material world; in *Timon*, Shakespeare's relative non-involvement with a character who exemplifies selfless service suggests a correspondent view of that virtue, i.e. that Kents, or for that matter, even Dromios, no longer existed.

An examination of the steward prior to Timon's downfall provides further evidence of divergent authorial agendas. Flavius' first appearance comes in the second scene when Timon calls on him to bring in a casket of trinkets he wishes to bestow upon his guests. In an aside, the steward responds to his task by muttering,

More jewels yet?

There is no crossing him in's humour,

Else I should tell him well, i' faith I should.

When all's spent, he'd be crossed then, an he could. (2.157–60)

While Apemantus' role in this scene is to rail against the flattery of false friends, Flavius seems to exist dramatically to point out Timon's fiscal irresponsibility. We later become first aware of the shaky foundations of Timon's wealth in yet another aside from the steward: "What will this come to? / He commands us to provide, and give great gifts, / And all out of an empty coffer" (2.191–3). When Flavius reappears in Scene Four, the urgency of his rhetoric and the intensity of his criticism of Timon have increased in accordance with the mounting pressure of the creditors:

No care, no stop; so senseless of expense

That he will neither know how to maintain it

Nor cease his flow of riot, takes no account

How things go from him, nor resumes no care

Of what is to continue. (4.1–5)

His voice being one of honest sanity in a sea of fiscal madness, Flavius carries weight in the shaping of our perception of Timon. In the above quotation, the word "senseless" and the phrase "flow of riot" cannot help but suggest prodigality, which is the hallmark of the Timon fashioned by Middleton in the second scene. The comparison of the steward to Apemantus bears consideration once again; while Apemantus is also present in the first scene to inveigh against the hypocrisy and greed of Athenian society (and, by implication, Timon's gullibility), there is no steward and no direct criticism of Timon's gift-giving to be found. In short, the Timon that Shakespeare creates

apparently has no need for a Greek chorus-like Flavius to critique his largesse as it is selfless, rather than prodigal.

With Middleton responsible for roughly a third of *Timon*, what remains is, as Jowett notes, “little more than half the length of a typical Shakespeare play.”<sup>44</sup> Where the two playwrights converge thematically (such as their common exploration of the economic basis for interpersonal relations in Athens) or structurally (Shakespeare’s banquet of stones and water inverting the feast of the second scene), one gets the impression of the kind of dialogic relationship the process of collaboration should engender. Yet, in light of the Shakespeare portion of the play, Middleton’s satiric depiction of a prodigal, who, on one hand, is paralleled with Alcibiades, who gives voice to the ethos of exchange, and, on the other, is tempered with the compassion of Flavius, suggests that the two were barely speaking. In the “Shakespearean *Timon*” lies the portrait of an absolute misanthropist driven to extremes by the realization that his society runs completely counter to the selfless philanthropy he had once incarnated. In the context of his discussion of Derrida’s contention that true giving (i.e. without the possibility or expectation of reciprocation) is impossible because “what we would normally consider a gift immediately enters into the circle of economic exchange or becomes part of an exchange, thus nullifying it as a gift . . . [because the] economy of exchange cannot be broken,”<sup>45</sup> Jackson argues that “There is much evidence to suggest that Timon sought an impossible escape from the circular economy,”<sup>46</sup> and that he displays a “desire for the Derridean gift, the impossible.”<sup>47</sup> The Timon that Jackson alludes to is much more the Shakespearean one of the opening scene than it is the man depicted in the second.

When *Timon* opens, the stage is filled with a veritable microcosm of society, as representatives of art, commerce and politics have all assembled with one objective in mind—partaking in the “magic of bounty” (1.6). Shakespeare begins the play by seamlessly weaving together two conversations, one between the poet and the painter, the other between the merchant and the jeweler, thereby collapsing two disparate spheres. It soon becomes evident that in Athens verse and art are as much exchange commodities as the wares the jeweler wishes to sell Timon. This connection between cultural endeavors and commerce via juxtaposition is later reprised when Apemantus cuts short his conversation with Timon regarding the worth of a jewel by greeting and then insulting the poet. Nameless, these “every-artists” seeking patronage convey that, as Paster argues, “Athenian materialism is so profound that it has infected those traditional guardians of the spirit of the city—its artists.”<sup>48</sup> The poet’s offering, an obviously prescient piece concerning how



the cyclical nature of Fortune casts down those like Timon, culminates in a scenario that condemns thankless followers:

. . . all his dependants,  
Which laboured after him to the mountain's top  
Even on their knees and hands, let him flit down,  
Not one accompanying his declining foot. (1.86–9)

Yet, the poet's unctuous praise of Timon's "good and gracious nature" (57) and "his love and tendance" (58) marks him as a sycophant, breeding suspicion that his verse is being tendered for its exchange value, rather than for moral instruction. Moreover, he seems utterly unaware that he is part of the problem that his work confronts. The painter's assertion that his *métier* can more effectively demonstrate moral themes (90–5) (and presumably command a higher price) only tars him with the same brush.

Timon, however, seems to negate any overt commercialization of his cultural dealings by accepting the proffered poem and painting in non-economic language, telling the poet only "You shall hear from me anon" (1.157) and the painter "Wait attendance / Till you hear further from me" (165–6). Picking up on this, Karen Newman alludes to Timon's detachment from the ethos of cash and exchange values, saying, "he never handles money, rarely handles a gift. We never see him engaged in the work of exchange . . . Instead, Timon's gift giving is linguistic, performative."<sup>49</sup> In this respect, the Timon of the second scene who calls for a casket of jewels to hand out is fundamentally different. The dichotomy between the two Timons manifests itself in other ways. For example, whereas the Timon discussed earlier espouses the philosophy of subjective evaluation, here he actually objects (albeit, perhaps jokingly) to the instability of value when he suggests that the price of the stone in question is inflated: "If I should pay for't *as 'tis extolled* / It would unclew me quite" (171–2).

In the first scene, expressing the idea that objective standards are no longer taken for granted falls more properly to one whose mercantile trade is more or less dependent upon that very tenet, the jeweler. As the topic of discussion is the same, Isabella's derogation of "stones whose rate are either rich or poor / As fancy values them"<sup>50</sup> in *Measure* provides a context in which to view his response:

My lord, 'tis rated  
As those which sell would give; but you well know  
Things of like value differing in the owners  
Are prized by their masters. (1.173–5)

In Athens, as in Vienna, values are in flux; that the jeweler's views are not an aberration is made clear by the merchant's commentary on them: ". . . he speaks the common tongue / Which all men speak with him" (178–9).

As if to suggest that his generosity is an ongoing phenomenon, we first hear from Timon *in medias res* resolving the "ransoming" of Ventidius. Immediately, the constructive use of wealth is demonstrated, and one of Timon's first utterances is self-definitional: "I am not of that feather to shake off / My friend when he must need me" (1.102–3). In that simple sentence, there is no evidence of an expectation of reciprocal kindness; instead, Timon expresses a belief that the essence of friendship obliges him to do a good within his power. Furthermore, that moral obligation reaches beyond the single gesture, or the "grand gesture" some have accused him of making, as it is coupled with a recognition that benevolence must be an ongoing concern to be effective and meaningful: "'Tis not enough to help the feeble up, / But to support him after" (109–10). In this short vignette, however, Shakespeare makes evident the chasm that lies between Timon and his society, as the selfless gift becomes reconfigured as part of a pattern of obligation:

Timon: I'll pay the debt and free him.

Messenger: Your lordship ever binds him. (1.105–6)

Whereas Timon speaks of use-values, i.e. his money is a vehicle for liberation, he is met with an exchange mentality that connotes the fetters of a circular economy.

The episode which immediately follows further supports the proposition that Timon is a philanthropic anomaly in Athens. Like Page in *Merry Wives*, the old Athenian who petitions Timon commodifies his daughter, threatening to dispossess her if she weds a man of meager means. In response to the petition, however, Timon brushes aside economic considerations, focusing instead on fundamental human qualities. After confirming the honesty (1.131–3) of the prospective bridegroom, his man Lucilius, his concern is whether mutual love is the basis of the proposed union (138–9). That established, his wealth is used once more as the means to unselfish ends. Timon's reasoning for his actions—"To build his fortune I will strain a little, / For 'tis a bond in men" (147–8)—is a philosophic manifesto that takes a fiscal term, transcends its material meaning, and returns it to its more medieval sense. While this statement being prefaced by "This gentleman of mine hath served me long" (146) might prompt the cynical to view the gesture as merely quid pro quo, the spontaneity of Timon's action seems designed to contrast with the premeditated exchanges the poet, jeweller et al wish to effect.

The critical desire, or as it sometimes seems, the need, to problematize Timon's generosity takes many forms, such as Soellner's assertion that "Timon should not endorse the old man's attitude, that of greedy Athens, which buys and ties human relationships through money."<sup>51</sup> Yet this seems to miss the point. Rather than endorsing the ethos of money, Timon short-circuits it by using his gold in a disinterested manner. His actions say that money is not important to him, a stance in direct contrast with those who surround him. Paradoxically, his offhanded altruism negates the Athenian's mercenary agenda while ostensibly fulfilling it. Timon gains nothing materially in this; the old man does and loses his dignity in the process, as evidenced by his shift from high dudgeon to sycophantic obsequiousness in the face of Timon's generosity. However, this episode ends with further evidence that Timon is operating on different principles than the rest of Athens; Lucilius' expression of gratitude, "Never may / That state or fortune fall into my keeping / Which is not owed to you" (153–5), defines his status as one of debtor, perhaps an inevitable reaction, but one which misinterprets his benefactor. Jackson succinctly sums up the situation Shakespeare creates in *Timon's* opening scene when he says, "Timon seeks to give; that he remains trapped in a world of exchange condemns the world, not his efforts."<sup>52</sup>

While Timon operates in a manner removed from the values evident in Athenian society, so too does Apemantus. A negative doppelganger of sorts, he sees nothing but greed in a world that Timon perceives as holding the same values he does. Timon's reactions to Apemantus' cynicism connote a man almost cheerfully oblivious to that which does not conform to his vision. When Apemantus typifies the assembled throngs as "knaves" (1.185), Timon's bantering response, "Why dost thou call them knaves? Thou know'st them not" (186), while naïve, implies a faith in his fellow man that the cynic will never have. Apemantus, unlike Timon, remains outside Athens' exchange economy, and as Paster argues, his "initial refusal to join the banquet that ends the first act [1.207] is not a denial of the symposium as an ideal of fellowship. It is rather a refusal to succumb to the universal cycle of predatory appetite which really underlies the event."<sup>53</sup> His privileging of "plain dealing, which will not cost a man a doit" (214–5) and his condemnation of the merchant for having "traffic" as his god (242) speak to his disdain of cash values; yet he never accuses Timon of being a participant in or a proponent of them. When Apemantus observes that "He that loves to be flattered is worthy o'th' flatterer" (229–30), the exchange system he implies that Timon embraces seems verbal rather than economic. The cynic's claim that he is proud "Of

nothing so much as that [he is] not like Timon" (194) arguably speaks only to Timon's inability to see Athens as it is. The gracious reception and camaraderie that Timon affords Apemantus, an Athenian who cannot be bought, is significant as it establishes that not all of Timon's homosocial ties are economic. Presumably, this is something which Apemantus recognizes as well. Sandra Fischer observes that the cynic "seem[s] to understand the danger of Timon's anachronistic economic action, especially in the Athenian society of opportunists."<sup>54</sup> It is not that the actions of Timon in the opening scene are wrong; his values are merely out of step with the times.

In "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," Marx writes, "That which is for me through the medium of *money*—that for which I can pay (i.e. which money can buy)—that am *I myself*, the possessor of the money. The extent of the power of money is the extent of my power."<sup>55</sup> This is the reality that Timon confronts in Scenes Three and Four;<sup>56</sup> no longer "noble Timon," he is now defined by what he owes—"And late five thousand" (3.1). The Senator's relation of how he knowingly exploits Timon's beneficence, "If I want gold, steal but a beggar's dog / And give it Timon, why, the dog coins gold." (3.5–6), in juxtaposition with his recognition that such largesse is "raging waste" (4) embodies the endemic hypocrisy of Athens. As well, Kahn's observation that "Timon's friends are making 'use' of him, not he of them, as an investment banker"<sup>57</sup> points to the affective distancing of the monetary mindset which enables his isolation. Timon's earlier statement regarding Lucilius, "To build his fortune I will strain a little" (1.147), is now given a chilly counterpart in his creditor's avowal "I love and honour him, / But must not break my back to heal his finger" (3.23–4). Notably, the unction of the first clause, even in Timon's absence, shows how deeply engrained the habit of false flattery is. In fact, the Senator even acknowledges the worthlessness of speech acts in a market economy when he sends his servant to wring cash from Timon, saying, "Immediate are my needs, and my relief / Must not be tossed and turned to me in words" (3.25–6).

Shakespeare makes very clear that the Senator's ingratitude is not a personal failing to be viewed in isolation; rather, it is a part of a chain of economic exigencies. The collection of the loan, as noted earlier, is necessitated by a need to satisfy other creditors. The involvement of a member of the ruling elite in a usurious cycle implies that the practice is an integral part of the Athenian ethos, something which Middleton directly addresses in the Senate's confrontation with Alcibiades. Remarkably compact, *Timon's* third scene makes painfully apparent the difference between the

title character's first-scene use of wealth to effect immediate, selfless ends and the role money actually plays in his society. As argued by Chorost:

. . . Timon has not paid back his *money*, no matter how much the gifts may be worth. It is entirely to the usurers' advantages to believe that money and gifts are of fundamentally different orders. For the usurer, money is neither a store of worldly value nor something which has value by virtue of its metallic substance. It is, rather, a *commodity*—an object which is itself bought and sold for profit (that is, at interest). The usurers' ideology strips money of its concrete use-value and converts it into a pure exchange-value; they live off its exchange rather than its purchasing power.<sup>58</sup>

In turn, while Timon's subsequent incredulous reaction to his creditors' demands indicates the extent of his naïveté, it also confirms that he exists apart from the world Chorost describes. The Senator's metaphoric configuration in this scene of Timon as a "phoenix" (3.32) works on multiple levels, not the least of which is the mythical bird's rarity.

Like a Blakean song of innocence and experience, Timon's question, "How goes the world, that I am thus encountered . . . ?" (4.36) becomes a vitriol born of the knowledge of the answer. The next major scene attributed to Shakespeare is the banquet of stones and water (11) wherein the death of the humanistic Timon is marked by his knowing adoption of the patterns of hypocritical discourse; addressing his tormentors as "gentlemen" (11.26,31) and "worthy friends" (57), Timon's flattery, followed by abuse, mirrors his assembled guests' socio-economic practices. Imitation gives way to inversion, and, as Paster argues, "Timon interrupts the appetitive cycle into which he and Athens were locked with a ceremonious presentation of water that mocks his guests' appetite for his bounty, denies them sustenance, and expresses the insubstantiality of civilization."<sup>59</sup> The grace he delivers prior to the "feast" is a *tour de force* in its all-encompassing indictment of those who brought him to this juncture—no exceptions are admitted, his prayer, "Let no assembly of twenty be without a score of villains" (11.75–6), conveying that all are now as one. Selfless beneficence is acknowledged to be a pipedream; as Nuttall puts it, Timon's grace "offers a knowing tip to the gods to avoid giving, since gifts breed not gratitude, but contempt."<sup>60</sup> In his condemnation of usurious greed, Timon cynically invokes an ideal system based on use-values, i.e. each having enough to provide for his needs: "Lend to each man enough that one need not lend to another; for were your godheads to borrow of men, men would forsake the gods" (72–4). In that exhortation, what was covert and

implicit in *Measure* is thrust into the open in *Timon*. In the former play, Vincentio's invocation of a 'thrifty goddess' linked to credit and use unwittingly betrays how engrained Vienna's monetary values are; in the latter, the fundamental incongruity of a spiritual-fiscal linkage is recognized and exploited in Timon's grace to indict the extent of Athens' materialist ethos. By the end of his mock-prayer, Timon's play-opening beliefs that he had all and that it was possible to give all are replaced by the nihilism of repeated "nothings": "For these my present friends, as they are to me nothing, so in nothing bless them; and to nothing are they welcome" (81–3).

Timon's subsequent invective and his rage outside the walls of Athens make clear that this is not about one man maltreated by ungrateful creditors. The extension of his hatred to envelop "the whole race of mankind, high and low" (12.40) assigns universal culpability in the triumph of monetary values. Accordingly, nothing less than an annihilation of all societal order, human relationships and, evidently, humanity itself can correct the ills of the corrupt world he perceives. Everything is complicit in Timon's eyes; a litany of societal hallmarks—from religion to justice to truth to degree—are exhorted to "decline to [their] confounding contrarities" (12.20). Scenarios that invert social relationships are evoked in a vision of chaos, one which Paster perceptively identifies as "recognizably akin to . . . Middleton city comedy, with its impatient heirs, adventurous wives, and scheming prostitutes."<sup>61</sup> Correlations such as this underline how fundamentally different the approaches taken in *Timon* by its two authors are; while the ascendance of greed and self-interest constitutes ideal fodder for satiric humor in this play and other Middleton works, when taken to the nth degree, as Shakespeare does here, the result is a nightmarish society in which interpersonal bonds are irrevocably perverted and destroyed. Both playwrights perceive a rampant materialism in society that subsumes humanistic values; but whereas Middleton responds with a cynical bemusement, Shakespeare's reaction is much more one of horror. Although the collaborative writing of *Timon* is problematic on several fronts, the contrast of styles, at times, is both striking and effective; in the end, the blending of genres implicitly points to a world laughing on its way to the gallows.

The scene which follows (13) depicts a gathering of Timon's servants in the aftermath of their master's downfall; the only Shakespeare-penned episode that directly concerns Flavius, it would appear to belie the "truths" that Timon has arrived at in its depiction of the persistence of humane values. Yet this episode differs from the sentimentality of the encounter with Flavius in the woods which Middleton wrote, a scene that shows Timon discovering that he may not have been completely right about his perception of

mankind. In the portions of the play that Shakespeare wrote, Timon *is* right about *his* world. The servants in Scene Thirteen constitute an alternative world, one removed from those who have the power to shape societal values. The steward is not a romanticized exception here; he is one of four who share common ideals. Unlike the faulty parallelism of the Alcibiades-Senate scene, the correlation of ideas to the play's overall philosophic position works in this case. What is depicted is a separate, marginalized society of men who have been sideswiped by the economic mores of Athens. Importantly, the steward's sharing of his savings with his fellows lacks any motive of self-interest, thereby reprising the values embodied by Timon in the play's opening scene. The play Shakespeare wrote believes in those values; the point is that they are utterly untenable in a materialist world. That play also believes that proponents of such values exist, but shows them to be powerless and hopelessly outnumbered. This small gem of a scene is unfortunately marred by a Middleton-penned over-the-top soliloquy by Flavius tacked on to its end. Apart from its high-flown rhetorical style that clashes with the scene's atmosphere of quiet humility, the speech's final couplet yokes money and service ("I'll ever serve his mind with my best will. / Whilst I have gold I'll be his steward still" [13.49–50].) in a way that is both needless and inappropriate.

As many have pointed out, Timon's retreat to the woods constitutes a subversion, if not negation, of pastoral tradition. It appears that, to Shakespeare, the prospect of a cleansing Forest of Arden is no longer a possibility, not even for a moment; the extended scene of Timon's exile is barely underway before it becomes apparent that money and its power to shape men's lives are inescapable. Striving to live outside systems of exchange, Timon attempts to exist on a subsistence level; his expenditure of labor to obtain the food he needs implies an attempted circumvention of the great mediator, money. The discovery of gold, rather than food, metaphorically incarnates the supplanting of use and commodity values by cash ones, or as Jowett puts it, "The 'clear heavens' in *Timon* answer the prayer for edible roots by providing money, the root of all evil."<sup>62</sup>

The ensuing speech, which Marx so admired, represents a shift in *Timon's* emphasis from the general to the specific. Whereas the values of mankind at large were the object of vitriol to this point, Timon's invective against gold itself seemingly removes human agency from the equation. Rather than a corrupt value system and those who have bought into it, it is gold that

Will knit and break religions, bless th'accursed,  
Make the hoar leprosy adored, place thieves,

And give them title, knee, and approbation  
With senators on the bench. (14.35–8)

Jackson attempts to reconcile what seems like a puzzling reductionism by venturing that, in light of Timon's use of "the vague repeated pronoun 'this'" in his ranting, "one can . . . read these lines more generally as a critique of the circular economy of exchange."<sup>63</sup> Alternatively, this speech may indicate Timon's continuing naïveté regarding human nature, i.e. while he may hate mankind, he views it as powerless in the face of Mammon. Or, perhaps the play is actually condemning money in and of itself in a way remarkably prescient of nineteenth and twentieth century economic thinking. Eric Spencer, in effect, argues the latter view:

Yet we find installed at the center of our social lives an instrument, money, whose acknowledged function is to *equate* apples and oranges . . . or indeed anything at all. As Shakespeare has Timon of Athens put it, money "will make / Black white, foul fair, wrong right, / Base noble, old young, coward valiant" (4.3.28–30),<sup>64</sup> lines Marx seized on in the 1844 manuscripts to characterize how money dissolves qualitative distinction in the undifferentiated (and, for him as for Timon, morally corrosive) quantitative space of exchange value.<sup>65</sup>

Spencer's emphasis on exchange is apropos, as Timon's later conversation with Apemantus indicates that money only takes on destructive power when it enters circulation:

Timon: Tell them there I have gold. Look, so I have.

Apemantus: Here is no use for gold.

Timon:   The best and truest,  
For here it sleeps and does no hired harm. (14.291–3)

Both men appear to collapse the utilitarian and fiscal senses of the word "use" as if to suggest that money now, unlike in *Timon's* opening scene, has only one purpose. Despite Timon's seeming attribution of agency to money itself, the word "hired" is significant in that it reinforces the idea that money only assumes a force of its own because men both allow and will it to do so.

The arrival of Phrynia and Timandra in the company of Alcibiades provides an obvious physical manifestation of Timon's view of the gold the earth has brought forth as the "common whore of mankind" (14.43). The link between the exchange principles of prostitution and societal values is yet



another example of *Measure's* implicit thematic concerns becoming explicit in *Timon*; here, like everyone else, the whores will “do anything for gold” (150) and admit as much. In this first visitation, Timon’s liberality towards the openly solicitous pair contrasts nicely with his only throwing stones at his penultimate visitors—the poet and the painter. While all four may be cut from the same ethical cloth, at least the prostitutes are honest about it. The significance of Phrynia and Timandra goes further however. In the absence of mothers, wives and daughters in *Timon*, they are the only potentially pro-generative characters in that play, indicating that all the future can hold is the further propagation of the cash nexus they embody. Consequently, Timon’s exhortation that they go out to spread disease and corruption (151–164) becomes a bitter parody of the Biblical imperative of “Go forth and multiply.” Finally, the whores demonstrate that, for all of Timon’s sound and fury, his words are destined to fall on indifferent ears. Their chorus-like response, “More counsel with more money, bounteous Timon,” (167) makes clear that his truth has no worth outside of its monetary equivalency and exchange value. Fly argues that, in the woods, Timon “retains language but attempts to transform it from its discredited function as a medium for fruitful social intercourse into an instrument for the immediate articulation of a personally envisioned truth.”<sup>66</sup> The whores’ willingness to pay court mirrors the earlier sycophancy of the flatterers, and, in so doing, suggests that the shift Fly identifies is meaningless; all is one.

On the surface, the visitation of Alcibiades presents something of a conundrum. On one hand, his offering of gold to Timon (14.100) seems to exemplify a selfless gift: as far as the captain knows, it holds no promise of reciprocation. On the other hand, the suggestion that Timon’s former values still endure is undermined by Alcibiades’ traveling in the company of exchange values personified—Phrynia and Timandra. As evidenced by their conversation about his earlier days of prosperity, Timon recognizes a correlation that Alcibiades may not:

Alcibiades: . . . then was a blessed time.  
 Timon: As thine is now, held with a brace of harlots. (14.78–9)

That Timon views the captain’s gift in the context of a value system whose priorities have become irrelevant is clear in the wording of his refusal: “Keep it. I cannot eat it.” (14.100) In effect, it seems that Alcibiades’ one-line offer and its subsequent rejection are the Shakespearean equivalent of the scene Middleton wrote of the steward’s visit to Timon in the woods. Although hyperbolic, G. Wilson Knight’s interpretation of the Middleton

scene as “Flavius sav[ing] mankind from utter condemnation by one act of faith”<sup>67</sup> is not really that far off the mark, given how it unfolds. The Alcibiades scene by Shakespeare, however, sees a similar gesture made by a morally ambiguous figure only to be spurned out of hand, unrecognized by Timon as proof that humane values might still exist. Experience and knowledge have driven *this* Timon past even momentary belief. What Alcibiades does offer Timon is the opportunity to realize the leveling power of money, its ability to make “black white.” This is powerfully manifested in money being the vehicle of both Timon’s philanthropy and misanthropy. As Chorost notes, “Unlike his earlier self, Timon Misanthrope believes in a money rather than gift economy. . . . now he openly uses money as direct payment for services rendered.”<sup>68</sup> Via the financing of Alcibiades’ campaign, his ineffectual rage can be transformed into a force capable of bringing Athens to its knees, the play once again offering testimony to the truth of Marx’s claim, “The extent of the power of money is the extent of my power.”<sup>69</sup> Moreover, the metaphoric destruction wrought by gold can now be rendered literal.

The subsequent visit of Apemantus only serves to expose the paucity of the cynic’s pose, one which Vickers calls “intellectual cynicism,”<sup>70</sup> and, in this scene, Shakespeare exploits dramatic irony to drive home the point that Apemantus simply doesn’t get it. His implied belief that Timon is no different from other Athenians is belied by Timon’s refusal to rejoin society even though he now possesses the economic means; ignorant of the newfound gold, Apemantus monumentally misjudges the depths of Timon’s disillusion with his taunt “Thou’dst courtier be again / Wert thou not beggar” (14.242–3). In perhaps the play’s most-often quoted line, the cynic-by-trade reduces Timon to a binary that negates the cause-and-effect relationship between the man he knew and the one now before him: “The middle of humanity thou never knewest, but the extremity of both ends” (302–3). In addition, the equivalence he seemingly draws between absolute philanthropy<sup>71</sup> and misanthropy suggests that the former is as distasteful as the latter, a position it is hard to argue that the play itself endorses. Timon’s earlier faith that there is a “bond in men” transcending the economic may not be realistic in this world, but it needs to be taken at face value for his rage upon discovering the truth to have any meaning. Otherwise, we are left only with the tale of a fool turned madman that signifies nothing. Unlike Timon, Apemantus never conveys a belief that mankind is anything but contemptible—his is a one-note tune. Citing Timon’s speech (14.251–60) in which he envisages Apemantus being seduced by the “sugared game” had he been blessed by fortune, Mehl argues that

Timon's dispute with the cynic makes particularly clear that his misanthropic fury comes out of a passionate commitment to humane values and that he has as little in common with Apemantus as with the false flatterers. . . . It is the most eloquent apology for Timon's own use of his wealth because he himself did certainly not follow the 'sugared game,' but thought of all his possessions as an opportunity to be generous to others.<sup>72</sup>

Timon's knowledge of the "common whore of mankind" is born of first-hand experience with her; in contrast, Apemantus resembles a eunuch whose claims of understanding the "sport" are theoretical only.

The repetitive nature of the delegations that Shakespeare depicts arriving thereafter melds thieves, artists and politicians, all bound by the cult of self-interest, into one. The arrival of the banditti validates Timon's view that the world is populated only by their ilk, his instructions to them to "cut throats; / All that you meet are thieves"(14.445–6) allusive to the inherent nature of economic relations between men. But the scope of Timon's indictments expands beyond the merely human:

The sun's a thief, and with his great attraction  
 Robs the vast sea. The moon's an arrant thief,  
 And her pale fire she snatches from the sun.  
 The sea's a thief, whose liquid surge resolves  
 The moon into salt tears. The earth's a thief,  
 That feeds and breeds by a composture stol'n  
 From gen'ral excrement. (14.436–42)

The pervasiveness of the physical world's rapacity infers that mankind's greed is both inherent and unsurprising in that it only imitates the example set by nature. Jackson also observes, "Thievery, like the natural world, does not interrupt the cycle. Taking, like giving, is illusory, embedded in cycles of exchange."<sup>73</sup> The predictability of human avarice is further reinforced by the appearance of the poet and the painter, who reprise their first-scene flattery-for-patronage routine, only this time to no avail. The system of exchange they engaged in before with Timon no longer exists, and they have nothing to sell that can hasten the destruction he desires. The final visitors, the delegation of Athenian Senators, is equally foreseeable, as self-interest, their suffering for "A lack of Timon's aid" (682), fuels their unction and prompts their bribes of position and recompense. Significantly, their offer of "sums of love and wealth" (687) not only ties together values that have been proven in

*Timon* to be utterly antithetical, but also reduces love to an exchange commodity. The cycle of exchange has ended however, as Timon seems a spent force, wanting nothing and owing nothing; the only escape possible to him is complete detachment—as he puts it, “Timon cares not” (706). Anticipating death, his statement, “Nothing brings me all things” (723) embraces oblivion and implies that human fulfillment is only achievable through a renunciation of both the material and the affective.

The final scene of *Timon of Athens*, Alcibiades’ entry into Athens, offers nothing to suggest that the economic issues that have dominated the play will be resolved. While the triumphant captain denounces Athens as a “coward and lascivious town” (17.1) and accuses it of being “licentious” (4) and willful, his failure to address its greed, usury and dependence on economic values suggests that these problems, being too engrained and therefore insurmountable, will be ignored. The Alcibiades Middleton brought to life raged against the Senate’s usury; the one in Shakespeare’s dénouement seems to have forgotten it. Perhaps the only consolation that can be found is that the reins of power are being taken up by a man who potentially embodies the ‘middle of humanity,’ i.e. one who is acquainted with the whores of the world, but still capable of offering the selfless gift. However, in light of *Timon*’s overall nihilism, one might be forgiven for entertaining the possibility that Alcibiades’ offer of gold to Timon was part of a cycle of exchange, i.e. a delayed repayment for past hospitality.

Although *Timon* is often linked to *Merchant* because of their dark portrayals of economic relationships, Fischer observes, “While *The Merchant of Venice*, written eleven years earlier, at least made a pro forma attempt at the standard comedic ending, by 1607, even this was no longer possible.”<sup>74</sup> The other Shakespearean work that has been perceived as thematically relevant in discussions of *Timon* and ingratitude is *King Lear*. Yet these two tragedies differ in ways beyond the obvious. In one of Lear’s pivotal speeches, a vivid point of contrast with *Timon* emerges:

They flattered me like a dog  
and told me I had the white hairs in my beard ere the black ones  
were there. To say ‘ay’ and ‘no’ to everything that I said ‘ay’ and  
‘no’ to was no good divinity. . . . Go to, they are not men o’ their  
words: they told me I was everything; ‘tis a lie, I am not ague-proof.<sup>75</sup>

What Lear has discovered at this late stage of the play is his own humanity. *Timon* begins at a point of embodying a selfless humanity, and his journey away from that inverts the upward progression of Lear. While Lear gains

self-knowledge, what destroys Timon is knowledge of the world. Perhaps Shakespeare had these inversions in mind when writing his portion of *Timon*. In the last play he wrote that dealt directly and, most emphatically, with man's relationship with money and economic values, there are, in the end, no Cordelias to confirm our noblest instincts or Edgars to offer hope for a better future. In a world overwhelmingly based on principles of acquisition, Shakespeare seems to say that redemption is impossible.

## Conclusion

# “What’s aught but as ’tis valued?”

In our present world, one in which the business sections of newspapers are read with the avidity that sports sections used to enjoy, it would seem that economic imperatives are all but impossible to avoid. In this, we would appear to have an affinity with the worlds explored in this dissertation. Over the last few decades especially, western societies have seen their cultural values increasingly being shaped by financial considerations. For example, the ability of governments to effect social policy for the general good has been compromised by the demand for tax cuts that place more wealth in individual pockets. Foreign aid, rather than being viewed as a humanitarian responsibility, now seems to be an unaffordable luxury. The human fallout of massive layoffs is all but ignored by the media, the focus instead turning to their effects on a company’s potential profits. During the writing of this book, I came across an article in *The Globe and Mail* that seemed to encapsulate the present-day obsession with the bottom line. In it, the “worth” of a university degree was discussed in purely financial terms—primarily what kind of payout graduates could expect. In the view of a senior bank economist quoted, “Getting a postsecondary education is a no-brainer when it comes to the payoffs that you’re going to get. Is it worth the money you spend? Absolutely, it’s worth the cost of the investment.”<sup>1</sup> In those words, what had at one time been viewed as a positive societal value, having an educated citizenry, was reduced to its cash value only. Seeing this type of attitude manifest itself in drama written four hundred years ago fascinated me as I delved into Shakespeare’s representations of the impact of monetary thinking on interpersonal and societal relationships, and the thought occurred that the economist quoted in *The Globe* might well have asked, “What’s aught but as ’tis valued?”

The contemporary relevance of Shakespeare’s work was also brought home through Stephen Ouimette’s 2004 production of *Timon of Athens* at

Stratford, Ontario. Its depiction of a morally bankrupt money-oriented society was transposed from ancient Athens to what could easily be mistaken for any large North American city in 2004. That production's rendition of *Timon's* first banquet scene, with its metrosexual men sitting down to a feast of "architectural" food served on fashionable square white plates, might have taken place in any of the trendy and expensive restaurants that dot our downtown cores. What seemed remarkable was how the words and ideas of the play so easily meshed with both a twenty-first century setting and consciousness. While Shakespeare's representations of women may at times be a source of discomfiture for modern-day audiences, his ideas about money and its ability to dehumanize societies seem as relevant today as they presumably were in the changing economic world of the early seventeenth century. That *Timon*, generally considered to be among Shakespeare's most unlikable plays, was one of Stratford's few unqualified successes that season potentially speaks as much to its themes striking a collective chord as it does to the excellent acting and direction it enjoyed.

Throughout this discussion, the objective has been to bring to light, through close reading and historical contextualization, the underlying attitudes of the five plays examined herein towards money and its relationship with the human condition. As precious few of his works directly confront this issue, these plays practically constitute a sub-genre within Shakespeare's oeuvre. Overall, their implicit portrayals of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century nascent capitalism and its attendant value structures are hardly flattering. Moreover, they grow increasingly darker and, in the end, incarnate Marx's view that money is "the confounding and confusing of all natural and human qualities."<sup>2</sup> In *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, farcical elements both mitigate and distract us from the commercialization and commodification of the human relationships depicted therein. Yet, even in the scant years between the writing of those two plays, there is a discernable shift in attitude; while both plays offer a "happy ending," in *Comedy*, the financial elements of the plot are ultimately rendered negligible, unlike *Merry Wives*, in which they refuse to fade into the background. In the latter, Ford's penultimate line that correlates the sale of land and wives<sup>3</sup> only confirms our worst suspicions about the extent to which money underpins Windsor's society and its dubious ethical values. In *The Merchant of Venice*, the standard comedic binary of location that works so well in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *As You Like It* collapses under the realization that the economic values of Venice and Belmont are practically indistinguishable and equally distasteful. By the time we arrive at *Measure for Measure*, a play that rebels against its "comedy" designation at every turn, it is apparent that the

human arena has, in effect, become one with the marketplace. The laughs are few and far between in a world in which lives and hymens are treated like transactional commodities.

Jean Roberts writes that “Comedy . . . is the literary equivalent of the theology of hope. It reinforces our confidence in social forms and asserts that there are orderly and beneficent forces at work in them, however weak, imperfect, and absurd or cruel the individual parts.”<sup>4</sup> While this may apply in a great number of Shakespearean comedies, it is virtually impossible to discern the principles Roberts describes in *Merry Wives*, *Merchant* and *Measure*. The forces at work in those plays are economic, and, while they are arguably orderly, their beneficence is highly questionable. The thematic thread which this book argues runs through these plays almost inevitably moves beyond comedy and culminates in *Timon of Athens* with its vitriolic rejection of economically-based homosocial relations taken to the point that removal from society and death are portrayed as preferable to such manifestly worthless ties. Humanistic values all but disappear in *Measure* and *Timon*, and the narrative arc examining a world in economic and social transition which started with *Comedy* comes to a profoundly dispiriting and tragic end.

While the advent of new economic criticism has led to a number of articles exploring specific aspects of early modern commerce and economics in Shakespeare’s plays, there had not yet been a comprehensive examination of the issues grappled with in this study. This is not to say, however, that others have not brought forth books that in some way deal with the subject matter at hand. Henry Farnham’s 1931 volume *Shakespeare’s Economics*,<sup>5</sup> for example, offers a compendium of economically-related references that seldom moves beyond the level of exposition. More recently, books have emerged that attempt to appropriate Shakespeare and refashion him into a spokesman for what amounts to neo-conservative economic thinking. Taking a high-culture road to the boardroom, *Shakespeare in Charge: The Bard’s Guide to Leading and Succeeding on the Business Stage*<sup>6</sup> extracts ideas and words from Shakespeare’s plays and presents them as easily digestible maxims for modern-day CEOs. Such texts, which typically invoke Henry V’s St. Crispian speech to motivate sales forces, are hard to take too seriously. However, the most provocative volume to appear in recent years, Frederick Turner’s *Shakespeare’s Twenty-First-Century Economics*, is of a far more academic bent and suggests that Shakespeare in fact embraced the new capitalist economic order in which he was living. Typical of the claims to be found in it is the argument that “For Shakespeare economic exchange is the embodiment of human moral relations.”<sup>7</sup> Despite the questionable ordering in that claim, the equivalency Turner draws is valid, insofar as the plays examined above;



however, his positive spin on this contingency ignores extensive contradictory textual evidence, evidence which I have endeavored to bring forth. In light of the arguments advanced throughout this book, the following claim concerning *The Merchant of Venice* is even more problematic:

There exists a third possibility, which I believe that Shakespeare is exploring in this play: that business, as the human continuation of the creative impulse of nature, is essentially a good activity, and that its mechanisms of profit, security, capital formation, interest, debt, and so on are formalizations of fundamental moral relationships among human beings and between humans and the rest of nature.<sup>8</sup>

Not surprisingly, Turner's survey of Shakespeare's work accords but one sentence to *Timon of Athens*, the play whose indictment of the monetary ethos completely undermines theses such as the one advanced above. The case for close reading could hardly be made more eloquently, and a whole other volume could well be devoted to the intellectual gymnastics required to portray Shakespeare as a champion of commercial values in his dramatic works.

Beyond the persistent allusions through metaphor and trope to the world of economics throughout the canon that have been ably explored by other critics,<sup>9</sup> Shakespeare's direct dramatic engagements with fiscal imperatives were few and far between. Money simply doesn't matter in the vast majority of his work; yet when it does surface and the ethos of the marketplace is juxtaposed with themes that predominate his other works, most notably the endless complexity of human behavior and interpersonal relationships, one senses a profound disillusionment in the sort of men incarnated by Antipholus of Ephesus and Vincentio, not to mention almost the entire populations of Athens, Venice, Belmont and Windsor. Through them we can perceive a world in which humanistic values are in decline. For the most part in his comedies and romances, while far from ignoring the vagaries of the world, Shakespeare ultimately adheres to Sir Philip Sidney's dictum regarding the responsibility of the poet, namely, "not labouring to tell you what is, or is not, but what should or should not be."<sup>10</sup> However, in his four economically-oriented comedies and, most emphatically, in *Timon of Athens*, it would appear that his intention was to show what *was*.

# Notes

## NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

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15. Kenneth Muir, *The Singularity of Shakespeare and Other Essays* (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1977) 57.
16. Tom McAlindon, *Shakespeare Minus Theory* (Aldershot UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2004) 6.
17. In order to avoid any possible confusion, it should be noted that, throughout this work, the term “humanistic” will be used in the sense of “humanitarian” (The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English, 9<sup>th</sup> ed., meaning 2).
18. With apologies to Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King and his pre-WWII slogan, “Conscription if necessary, but not necessarily conscription.”
19. Theodore B. Leinwand, *Theatre, Finance and Society in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999) 1. (italics in original text)
20. L.A. Clarkson, *The Pre-Industrial Economy in England 1500–1750* (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1971) 21.
21. Jonathan Hall, *Anxious Pleasures: Shakespearean Comedy and the Nation-State* (Cranbury NJ: Associated UP, 1995) 31.
22. For a full exploration of socio-economic trends in the area of agriculture and their consequences, see: C. G. A. Clay, *Economic Expansion and Social Change: England 1500–1700*, Vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984) pp. 53–233. As well, see: Peter Ramsey, *Tudor Economic Problems* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1963) pp. 19–47 and Clarkson, pp. 45–74.
23. Richard Halpern, *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation: English Renaissance Culture and the Genealogy of Capital* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991) 72.
24. Clay, Vol. I, 83.
25. Clay, Vol. I, 79.
26. See Clay, Vol. I, pp. 1–28 regarding population growth and internal migration.
27. Clay, Vol. I, 220.
28. Douglas Bruster, *Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) 19. Clay’s data on London’s population is as follows: “London had grown continuously and prodigiously from about 60,000 people in the 1520s to at least 200,000 by 1600 [and] had doubled again to 400,000 by the 1650s. . . .” Clay, Vol. I, 20.
29. Peter Ramsey, *The Price Revolution in Sixteenth-Century England* (London: Methuen, 1971) 14–15. For further reading on urban and rural poverty, see D. M. Palliser, *The Age of Elizabeth: England under the Later Tudors, 1547–1603* (London: Longman Group Limited, 1983) pp. 118–29 and Clay, Vol. I, 214–36.
30. Clay, Vol. I, 219.
31. Clay, Vol I, 228–9.
32. C.G.A. Clay, *Economic Expansion and Social Change: England 1500–1700* Vol. II (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984) 260.
33. Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy 1558–1641* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1979) 547. As well, J. A. Sharpe argues, “The old nobility, as frivolous

- as they were feudal, were obviously going to become casualties in an age which . . . witnessed the transition from feudalism to capitalism, and its concomitant, the rise of a capitalist middle class." J. A. Sharpe, *Early Modern England: A Social History 1550–1760* (London: Edward Arnold, 1987) 154.
34. Clarkson, 186. For further reading on the economic practices of James' court, see Linda Levy Peck, *Court Patronage and Corruption in Early Stuart England* (Boston: Unwin Hyman Ltd, 1990) and Coppelia Kahn, "'Magic of bounty': *Timon of Athens*, Jacobean Patronage, and Maternal Power," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 38 (1987) 35–57.
  35. See Clay Vol. II, 103–202 for an examination of the growth of trade. As well, see Palliser, 266–91. For a good overview of the merchant class, its rise and its representation in literature, see Laura Caroline Stevenson, *Praise and Paradox: Merchants and Craftsmen in Elizabethan Popular Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984).
  36. L.C. Knights, *Drama & Society in the Age of Jonson* (1937; London: Chatto & Windus, 1968) 88.
  37. John Maynard Keynes, *A Treatise on Money* Vol. II (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1930), 158.
  38. Clarkson, 136. See also pp. 134–8 and Clay, Vol. II, 226–8. Both Clay and Clarkson point out that, despite their unpopularity, middlemen were an essential element in the growth of England's economy.
  39. Palliser, 104.
  40. Clarkson, 220.
  41. Clay notes that after monopolies changed hands, ". . . patentees were then left to exploit them, either by putting existing producers out of business altogether to their own advantage, or by charging them a license fee for the right to continue production. In either case the result was an increase in prices." Clay, Vol. II, 257.
  42. For a definitive study of the issue, see: Norman Jones, *God and the Moneylenders: Usury and Law in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1989).
  43. Jones, 163.
  44. Clarkson, 167.
  45. Stevenson, 5. One exception to Stevenson's otherwise accurate claim, however, must be the figure of the usurer as there is no reflection of the acceptance of usury outlined above in the imaginative literature of the early modern period.
  46. Stevenson, 15.
  47. Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theatre in Anglo-American Thought, 1550–1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986) 9. (italics in original text)
  48. Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (London: Longman, 1977) II.vii.12.2–3.

49. *Arden of Faversham*, ed. Martin White (London: A & C Black (Publishers) Ltd., 1995) VIII.11–14.
50. Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, ed. James R. Siemon (London: A & C Black (Publishers Limited, 1994) III.v.3–4.
51. Stephen J. Greenblatt, “The Will to Absolute Play,” *Staging the Renaissance: Reinterpretations of Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama*, eds. David Scott Kastan and Peter Stallybrass (New York: Routledge, 1991) 115.
52. Stevenson, 105.
53. Brian Gibbons, *Jacobean City Comedy* 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (London: Methuen, 1980) 118.
54. Theodora A. Jankowski, “Historicizing and Legitimizing Capitalism: Thomas Heywood’s *Edward IV* and *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody*,” *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England: An Annual Gathering of Research, Criticism and Reviews* Vol. 7 (1995) 322.
55. Thomas Heywood, *An Apology for Actors* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1973) B4.
56. Thomas Heywood, *If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody* Part II, eds. Madeline Doran and W.W. Greg (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1935) 1195. As Alexander Leggatt pointed out during a conversation regarding this line, this surely constitutes an early modern example of “trickle-down economics.”
57. Bruster, *Drama*, 3.
58. Sandra K. Fischer, *Econolingua: A Glossary of Coins and Economic Language in Renaissance Drama* (Cranbury NJ: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1985) 29.
59. William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, ed. Alan Brissenden (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993) II.vii.26–8.
60. Sandra K. Fischer, “‘He means to pay’: Value and Metaphor in the Lancastrian Tetralogy,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 40 (1989) 152.
61. William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. R. A. Foakes (London: Thomson Learning, 2001) I.i.51.
62. Laurie E. Maguire, *Studying Shakespeare: A Guide to the Plays* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004) 144/148.
63. Constance Jordan, *Shakespeare’s Monarchies: Ruler and Subject in the Romances* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1997) 78.
64. William Shakespeare, *The Winter’s Tale*, ed. Stephen Orgel (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996) III.ii.91.
65. William Shakespeare, *King John*, ed. A. R. Braunmuller (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989) II.i.574–83.
66. Shakespeare, *King John*, II.i.592–99.
67. Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. Jill L. Levenson (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000) V.i.68–76. Although Levenson, arguing that line 74 is a prayer, uses the Q2 “pray” in line 76, in light of the economic focus of Romeo’s depiction of the world, the Q1 “pay” is arguably preferable.

68. Shakespeare, *Romeo*, V.i.80–3.
69. Maguire, *Studying*, 150.
70. That values as well as economic practices were changing is evident in Alan MacFarlane's claim that ". . . what is clear is that there is believed to have been a shift, in England, between two different socio-economic systems, from communal, limited and conditional ownership, to modern individual and absolute ownership." Alan MacFarlane, *The Origins of English Individualism: The Family, Property and Social Transition* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978) 58. Locating the origins of capitalism in the sixteenth century, Karl Marx argues in *Capital* that "the economic structure of capitalist society has grown out of the economic structure of feudal society. The dissolution of the latter set free the elements of the former." Marx, as quoted in MacFarlane, 38.
71. Paul Delaney's fine article on *King Lear* also outlines a similar theme in that work. Paul Delaney, "King Lear and the Decline of Feudalism," *Materialist Shakespeare*, ed. Ivo Kamps (London: Verso, 1995) 20–38.
72. Lars Engle, *Shakespearean Pragmatism: Market of his Time* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993) 7–8.
73. Palliser, 76.
74. Clarkson, 21.
75. Clarkson, 38.
76. William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, ed. Alan Brissenden (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993) I.i.68–70. All further quotations of *AYLI* are taken from this text and will be cited parenthetically.
77. Delaney, 28.
78. Marx, as quoted in MacFarlane, 44.
79. William Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, ed. Kenneth Muir (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) II.iii.68. All further quotations of *Troilus and Cressida* are taken from this text and will be cited parenthetically.
80. Bruster, *Drama*, 99.
81. Vivian Thomas, *The Moral Universe of Shakespeare's Problem Plays*, (Beckenham, UK: Croom Helm Ltd., 1987) 134.
82. While *Troilus and Cressida* is rife with the language of commerce and allusions to its practices, it is arguably more about the death of honour and ideals in both the personal and public arenas. Others, however, have viewed economics as central to the play, a stance which with, in the end, I have little quarrel. See: Raymond Southall, "Troilus and Cressida and the Spirit of Capitalism," *Shakespeare in a Changing World*, ed. Arnold Kettle (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1964) 217–32.; C. C. Barfoot, "Troilus and Cressida: "Praise us as we are tasted," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39 (1988) 45–57 and Engle, 147–63.
83. Palliser writes, "Parliamentary statutes were continuously in force between 1463 and 1604 prescribing the apparel that might be worn by each social

- group, supplemented between 1516 and 1597 by no fewer than nineteen proclamations. The motive was apparently to uphold the hierarchy of social structure in the face of increased mobility and the increased complexity of that structure.” Palliser, 317. Ulysses’ implied fear in this line did indeed come to pass; as Maguire points out, “In 1604 sumptuary legislation was repealed, having proved unable to stem the tide of capitalist individualism and self-creation.” Maguire, *Studying*, 16.
84. Richard Hillman, *William Shakespeare: The Problem Plays* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993) 23.
  85. For example, Ulysses’ praise of the Agamemnon’s and Nestor’s defeatist speeches is hard to take seriously; Agamemnon is lauded only for *holding* “place and sway,” (I.iii.59), not wielding power effectively, while Nestor is commended for being old (60). Ulysses then proceeds to describe a Greek camp in disarray, implicitly blaming a lack of leadership. As well, his relation of Patroclus’ imitations of his two superiors seems cleverly designed to ridicule his generals, while displacing the criticism he wishes to make into another’s mouth.
  86. Barfoot perceptively argues that, given their near-homophonic quality, the terms “price,” “prize” and “praise” seem almost interchangeable in this scene at both the linguistic and signification levels. 49–51.
  87. Terry Eagleton, *William Shakespeare, Rereading Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995) 59. (Italics in original text)
  88. Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, ed. David Frisby, trans. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby (London: Routledge, 1990) 67.
  89. James Bulman, *The Heroic Idiom of Shakespearean Tragedy* (Cranbury NJ: Associated University Presses, 1985) 96.
  90. Eagleton, *William Shakespeare*, 58.
  91. Francis Bacon, “On the True Greatness of Britain,” *The Works of Francis Bacon* Vol. VII, (Stuttgart: Friedrich Frommann verlag Gunther Holzboog, 1963) 55.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

1. Bruce R. Smith, “A Night of Errors and the Dawn of Empire,” *Shakespeare’s Sweet Thunder: Essays on the Early Comedies*, ed. Michael J. Collins (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1997) 119.
2. William Shakespeare, *The Comedy of Errors*, ed. R. A. Foakes (London: Routledge, 1994) I.ii.33–40. All further quotations are from this text and will be cited parenthetically.
3. Jonathan Hall, *Anxious Pleasures: Shakespearean Comedy and the Nation-State* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated UP, 1995) 42.
4. Charles Whitworth, introduction, *The Comedy of Errors*, by William Shakespeare, ed. Charles Whitworth (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002) 49.

5. Gabriel Egan, *Shakespeare and Marx*, Oxford Shakespeare Topics (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004) 129.
6. Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, ed. David Frisby, trans. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby (London: Routledge, 1990) 79.
7. Plautus, "The Brothers Menaechmus (*Menaechmi*)," trans. Palmer Bovie, *Plautus: The Comedies Volume IV*, eds David R. Slavitt and Palmer Bovie (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) 29–39.
8. Geoffrey Chaucer, "General Prologue," *The Canterbury Tales, The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987) 279.
9. David Williams, *The Canterbury Tales: A Literary Pilgrimage* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1987) 39.
10. "Ther wiste no wight that he was in dette, / So estatly was he of his gouernaunce" Chaucer, 280–1.
11. Sir Walter Raleigh, "A Discourse of the Invention of Ships," *The Works of Sir Walter Raleigh* Vol. 8 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1829) 325.
12. L. C. Knights, *Drama & Society in the Age of Jonson*, (1937; London: Chatto & Windus Ltd., 1968) 51.
13. Laura Caroline Stevenson, *Praise and Paradox: Merchants and Craftsmen in Elizabethan Popular Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984)
14. John Gough Nichols, ed. *Literary Remains of King Edward the Sixth* Vol. 2 (New York: Burt Franklin, 1963) 483.
15. See L. A. Clarkson, *The Pre-Industrial Economy in England 1500–1750* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1972) pp. 130–43.
16. Susan Doran, *England and Europe 1485–1603*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1996) 8.
17. Theodore Rabb, *Enterprise and Empire: Merchant and Gentry Investment in the Expansion of England, 1575–1630* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1967) 44.
18. Rabb, 37.
19. John Wheeler, *A Treatise of Commerce*, ed. George Burton Hotchkiss (New York: Arno Press, 1977) 317.
20. John McVeagh, *Tradefull Merchants: The Portrayal of the Capitalist in Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981) 4.
21. Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, ed. James R. Siemon (London: A & C Black (Publishing) Limited, 1994) l.i.112.
22. David Bevington, "The Comedy of Errors in the Context of the Late 1580s and Early 1590s," *The Comedy of Errors: Critical Essays*, ed. Robert S. Miola (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1997) 341.
23. See, for example: Douglas Lanier, "Stigmatical in Making: The Material Character of *The Comedy of Errors*," *English Literary Renaissance* 23 (1993): 81–112.
24. Although the Ephesian Antipholus and Dromio fail to recognize Egeon in the final scene, he is never taken to be someone who he is not.



25. For a full discussion, see "A Suggestion Regarding Shakespeare's Manuscripts," *Review of English Studies*, XI (1935) pp. 464–5.
26. Anthony Miller, "Matters of State," *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Comedy*, ed. Alexander Leggatt (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002) 199.
27. Alexander Leggatt, *Shakespeare's Comedy of Love* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1974) 7.
28. "My purse, my person, my extremest means / Lie all unlock'd to your occasions." William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. Jay L. Halio (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993) I.i.138–9. Later in the same play, Shylock makes a similar equation, saying, "You take my life / When you do take the means whereby I live" (IV.i.372–3).
29. Lanier, 91.
30. Laurie Maguire, "The Girls from Ephesus," *The Comedy of Errors: Critical Essays*, ed. Robert S. Miola (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997) 363.
31. Charles Haines, "Some Notes on Love and Money in *The Comedy of Errors*," *Critical Dimensions: English, German and Comparative Literature Essays in Honour of Aurelio Zanco*, eds. Mario Curreli and Alberto Martino (Cuneo, Italy: Saste, 1978) 115.
32. The OED offers several definitions of the word; the two referred to here are established with Shakespearean references: "reputation of solvency and probity in business" ("To raise a present sum, therefore go forth / Try what my credit can in Venice do . . ." *Merchant* I.i.179–80) and "a source of commendation or honour" ("This is much credit to you." *Twelfth Night* II.iii.101). William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, eds. Roger Warren and Stanley Wells (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998).
33. Leslie Clarkson, *The Pre-Industrial Economy in England 1500–1750* (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1971) 135.
34. Russ McDonald, "Fear of Farce," "*Bad*" *Shakespeare: Revaluations of the Shakespeare Canon*, ed. Maurice Charney (Cranbury NJ: Associated University Presses, 1988) 84.
35. Barbara Freedman, "Egeon's Debt: Self-Division and Self-Redemption in *The Comedy of Errors*," *English Literary Renaissance* 10 (1980) 369.
36. Clarkson, 37.
37. Stephen Greenblatt, "Psychoanalysis and Renaissance Culture," *Literary Theory/Renaissance Texts*, eds. Patricia Parker and David Quint (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1986) 220.
38. Gail Kern Paster, *The Idea of the City in the Age of Shakespeare* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1985) 188.
39. Douglas Bruster, *Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) 63.
40. Maguire, "Girls," 369.

41. Paster, 192.
42. Smith, 115.
43. Although this could be potentially construed as a validation of the market system in that some do make out all right, the sheer arbitrariness of the situation would seem to preclude such a reading.
44. Robert S. Miola, "Roman Comedy," *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Comedy*, ed. Alexander Leggatt (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002) 22–3. While the gist of what Miola is saying is valid, the Venice/Belmont binary may not be that sustainable, as will be argued in the chapter on *Merchant*.
45. Barbara Freedman, *Staging the Gaze: Postmodernism, Psychoanalysis, and Shakespearean Comedy* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991) 85.
46. While the profession of Antipholus of Syracuse is never directly established, the first words spoken to him in the play by the First Merchant that parallel his situation with that of "Syracusan merchant" (I.ii.3) and his worry that Antipholus' goods will be confiscated (2) certainly contribute to the impression of his being involved in trade.
47. Anna Neill, *British Discovery Literature and the Rise of Global Commerce*, (Houndmills UK: Palgrave, 2002) 23.
48. Hall, 46.
49. Thomas Wilson, *A Discourse upon Usury* (London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd., 1925) 203.
50. Freedman, *Staging*, 85.
51. Grateful acknowledgement is due to Alexander Leggatt for suggesting this line of argument in a May 2004 conversation.
52. John P. Cutts, *The Shattered Glass: A Dramatic Pattern in Shakespeare's Early Plays* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1968) 15.
53. Leggatt, *Love*, 2.
54. John Russell Brown, *Shakespeare and his Comedies* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1957) 55.
55. Hall, 42.
56. Alternatively, and perhaps more charitably, Emilia's remembrance of *her* personal and familial loss of "wealth" at sea years earlier lies behind this comment.
57. Haines, 108, footnote 6.
58. Leggatt, *Love*, 8.
59. Smith, 119.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

1. *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, vol. 44, eds. Eric Hobsbawm et al (New York: International Publishers, 1989) 548.
2. As Laurie Maguire points out, "The French and the Welsh, conventional targets of derision or butts of comedy on the Elizabethan stage, are happily assimilated in Windsor life because of their financial contributions." Laurie

- E. Maguire, *Studying Shakespeare: A Guide to the Plays* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004) 151.
3. For a detailed analysis of *Merry Wives*' geographic references and their actual Windsor corollaries, see Robert Richard Tighe, Esq. and James Edward Davis Esq., *The Annals of Windsor, Being a History of the Castle and Town*, vol. I (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans and Roberts, 1858) pp. 666–705.
  4. Maurice Bond, *The Story of Windsor* (Newbury: Local Heritage Books, 1984) 51.
  5. Bond, 56–7.
  6. Arthur F. Kinney, "Textual Signs in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 23 (1993) 213.
  7. William Shakespeare, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, ed. Giorgio Melchiori (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 2000) III.ii.66. All further quotations are taken from this text and will be cited parenthetically.
  8. Anne Barton, introduction, *The Merry Wives of Windsor, The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974) 322.
  9. Camille Wells Slight, *Shakespeare's Comic Commonwealths* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993) 155.
  10. Although it is unclear whether *Merry Wives* was written prior to or after *Henry IV Part 2*, the point remains that Shakespeare constructed two very different Falstaffs and outcomes for them in the two plays.
  11. Here, Shakespeare is more than likely playing upon audience knowledge of the numbers of penniless noblemen in the late sixteenth century. Citing more illustrious examples of this phenomenon than Falstaff, Christopher Clay writes of "the seventeenth Earl of Oxford and the ninth Earl of Northumberland [who,] in the 1580s, spent so recklessly on clothes, entertaining and gambling, that they seriously undermined their whole economic position and were forced into massive sales of property." C.G.A. Clay, *Economic Expansion and Social Change: England 1500–1700* Vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984) 150.
  12. R. S. White, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Harvester's New Critical Introductions to Shakespeare (Hemel Hempstead, UK: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991) 25.
  13. William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. Jay L. Halio (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993) II.viii.15.
  14. Kinney, "Textual," 214. (italics in original text)
  15. Northrop Frye, "The Argument of Comedy," *Modern Shakespearean Criticism: Essays on Style, Dramaturgy, and the Major Plays*, Ed. Alvin B. Kernan (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1970) 165.
  16. Alexander Leggatt, *Citizen Comedy in the Age of Shakespeare* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973) 4.
  17. See Leggatt, *Citizen*, pp 146–9, in which his discussion of *Merry Wives* centers almost exclusively on the Falstaff-wives storyline.

18. Leo Salinger, *Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1974) 235.
19. White, 20.
20. For an examination of the economic foundations of Elizabethan marriage practices and their dramatic representation, see G.R. Hibbard, "Love, Marriage and Money in Shakespeare's Theatre and Shakespeare's England," *The Elizabethan Theatre VI: Papers given at the Sixth International Conference on Elizabethan Theatre held at the University of Waterloo, Ontario, in July 1975* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1978)
21. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) 5.
22. Simon Reynolds, "The Lawful Name of Marrying: Contracts and Stratagems in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*," *Shakespeare Yearbook* Volume 7, 322.
23. For a full discussion of the economic ramifications of jointure, see Reynolds, esp. pp. 323–8.
24. Reynolds, 323.
25. William Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. Frances Dolan (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1996) II.i.335–7.
26. Shakespeare, *Shrew*, I.ii.70–1.
27. Margaret Lael Mikesell, "Love Wrought These Miracles; Marriage and Genre in *The Taming of the Shrew*," *The Taming of the Shrew; Critical Essays*, Ed. Dana E. Aspinall (New York: Routledge, 2002) 109–10.
28. Slights, *Commonwealths*, 169.
29. William Shakespeare, *Henry IV Part I*, Ed. David Bevington (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987) I.ii.201–3.
30. Peter Erickson, "The Order of the Garter, the cult of Elizabeth, and class-gender tension in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*," *Shakespeare Reproduced; The Text in History and Ideology*, Eds. Jean E. Howard and Marion F. O'Connor (London: Methuen, 1987) 124.
31. George K. Hunter, "Bourgeois comedy: Shakespeare and Dekker," *Shakespeare and his Contemporaries: Essays in Comparison* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1986) 4–5.
32. John Russell Brown, *Shakespeare and his Comedies* (London: Methuen, 1964) 99.
33. Giorgio Melchiori, *Merry Wives*, gloss IV.vi.5, p. 268.
34. Ronald Huebert, "Levels of Parody in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*," *English Studies in Canada* 3 (1977) 147.
35. White, 11.
36. While granting that Caius being Quickly's employer constitutes an economic basis to their relationship, Fenton's twice bribing her seems designed to constitute a pattern of behavior.
37. Huebert, 147.

38. In his chapter entitled "The Prodigal" in *Citizen Comedy*, Leggatt argues that this stock character was far from stable in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century drama. While some prodigals reform, others remain unchanged and unrepentant. Leggatt, *Citizen Comedy*, 33–53.
39. Ruth Nevo, *Comic Transformations in Shakespeare* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1980) 159.
40. Although Fenton claims to have a love letter from Anne in his scene with the Host (IV.vi.12–13), we are never made privy to its contents. Given Fenton's character, it is conceivable that it may be nothing more than a blank-page prop designed to advance his case with the Host.
41. Interestingly, a further common bond between *Merry Wives'* triumvirate of men with the greatest money-oriented agendas is their all sharing "F" names—Fenton, Falstaff and Ford.
42. Erickson, 125.
43. Barton, 323.
44. Marvin Felheim and Phillip Traci, "Realism in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*," *Ball State University Forum* XXII:1 (1981) 57. This reality-inducing quality also manifests itself in *As You Like It*, wherein prose serves to demystify the pastoral.
45. William Bracy, "The Merry Wives of Windsor: The History and Transmission of Shakespeare's Text," *The University of Missouri Studies* XXV:1 (1952) 82.
46. Bracy, 83.
47. W. W. Greg, ed. *Shakespeare's Merry Wives of Windsor 1602* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910) 1281–3. All further quotations are taken from this text and will be cited parenthetically with the designation "Q."
48. See: Kathleen O. Irace, *Reforming the "Bad" Quartos: Performance and Provenance of Six Shakespearean First Editions* (Cranbury NJ: Associated University Presses, 1994) pp. 54–6. Steven Urkowitz, "Five Women Eleven Ways: Changing Images of Shakespearean Characters in the Earliest Texts," *Images of Shakespeare: Proceedings of the Third Congress of the International Shakespeare Association, 1986*, Eds. Werner Habicht, D. J. Palmer and Roger Pringle (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1988) pp. 298–9.
49. Other differences between the Q and F texts that go to Ford's character include the absence in Q of his equation of bed, reputation and coffers (F.II.ii.276–8) and his exhortation to Falstaff, "There is money: spend it, spend it, spend more, spend all I have . . ." (F.II.ii.221–2).
50. For example, in Grace Ioppolo's 1991 study of issues of revision in Shakespeare, her limited discussion of *Merry Wives* centers on Mistress Quickly's Windsor Castle speech. See Grace Ioppolo, *Revising Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991) 118–21.
51. Hardin Craig, *A New Look at Shakespeare's Quartos* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1961) 69.

52. Steven Urkowitz, "Good News about the 'Bad' Quartos," *"Bad" Shakespeare: Revaluations of the Shakespeare Canon*, Ed. Maurice Charney (Cranbury NJ: Associated University Presses, 1988) 190.
53. W. W. Greg, introduction, *Shakespeare's Merry Wives of Windsor 1602*, Ed. W. W. Greg (London: Clarendon Press, 1910) xlii.
54. Greg, introduction, xliii.
55. W. W. Greg, *The Editorial Problem in Shakespeare: A Survey of the Foundations of the Text* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1942) 71.
56. William Green, introduction, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Ed. William Green (New York: New American Library, 1965) 148.
57. Irace, 137.
58. Laurie E. Maguire, *Shakespearean Suspect Texts: The 'Bad' Quartos and their Contexts*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) 78.
59. Maguire, *Suspect*, 286.
60. Irace, 116.
61. Bracy, 97.
62. Bracy, 141.
63. Bracy, 95.
64. Leah S. Marcus, "Leveling Shakespeare: Local Customs and Local Texts," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 42 (1991) 177.
65. Marcus, "Levelling," 177.
66. Kinney, "Textual," 217.
67. Kinney, "Textual," 225.
68. Kinney, "Textual," 227.
69. Kinney, "Textual," 234.
70. Kinney, "Textual," 234.
71. Kinney, "Textual," 225.
72. Kinney, 226.
73. In the case of *MND*, Titania's speech outlining the discord that exists between her and Oberon (II.i.81–117) has, by consensus, been presumed to reference the adverse weather conditions and attendant agricultural problems that prevailed in the mid 1590s. For a full discussion, see Gail Kern Paster, "Bad Weather and Dearth," *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Ed. Gail Kern Paster and Skiles Howard (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999) pp. 267–71. In *AYLI*, Corin's speech regarding the hardships of being "shepherd to another man" (II.iv.71–9), along with the general portrait he draws of his life, undoubtedly reflect on the upheaval in agricultural practices that continued apace in the closing decades of the sixteenth century, particularly the consequences of the twin practices of engrossment and enclosure. According to Geoffrey Clarkson, these practices "caused depopulation, and the dispossessed swelled the number of landless, impoverished and dissatisfied people whose existence threatened the security of the state." Geoffrey Clarkson, *The Pre-Industrial Economy in England 1500–1750* (London: B.

- T. Batsford Ltd., 1971) For a discussion of *AYLI* and agricultural issues, see Michael Hattaway, Introduction, *As You Like It*, Ed. Michael Hattaway (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) pp. 21–5.
74. Marcus, “Levelling,” 169.
  75. Urkowitz, “Good,” 192.
  76. Nevill Coghill, “Revision after Performance,” *Shakespeare’s Professional Skills* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1964) 198.
  77. Michael J. Warren, “Quarto and Folio *King Lear* and Interpretation of Albany and Edgar,” *Shakespeare: Pattern of Excelling Nature*, Ed. David Bevington and Jay L. Halio (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1978) 99.
  78. Ernest A. J. Honigmann, “Shakespeare as a Reviser,” *Textual Criticism and Literary Interpretation*, Ed. Jerome J. McGann (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985) 8.
  79. John Dennis, as quoted in: Introduction, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Ed. G. Melchiori p. 2, fn 1.
  80. Kinney, “Textual,” 233.

### NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

1. William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. Jay L. Halio (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993) I.i.29–36. All further quotations are taken from this text and will be cited parenthetically.
2. John Gillies, *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) 133.
3. Thomas Moisan, ““Which is the merchant here? and which the Jew?”: Subversion and Recuperation in *The Merchant of Venice*,” *Shakespeare Reproduced: The Text in History and Ideology*, eds. Jean E. Howard and Marion F. O’Connor (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1987) 203.
4. For example, Leo Salingar, speaking of *Merchant*, *Much Ado*, *All’s Well* and *Measure for Measure*, notes that “the tone of these comedies is more serious than usual . . . they are sometimes tense or sombre” and uses “problem plays” to typify the four, while acknowledging that *All’s Well* and *Measure* more traditionally bear that designation. Leo Salingar, *Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976) 301–2.
5. Karoline Szatek, “*The Merchant of Venice* and the Politics of Commerce,” *The Merchant of Venice: New Critical Essays*, eds. John W. Mahon and Ellen Macleod Mahon (New York: Routledge, 2002) 326.
6. A. D. Nuttall, *A New Mimesis: Shakespeare and the Representation of Reality* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1983) 121.
7. Walter Cohen, “*The Merchant of Venice* and the Possibilities of Historical Criticism,” *ELH* 49 (1982) 769.
8. Linda Anderson, *A Kind of Wild Justice: Revenge in Shakespeare’s Comedies* (Cranbury NJ: Associated University Presses, 1987) 59.

9. Kiernan Ryan, *Shakespeare*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Houndsmills UK: Palgrave, 2002) 20.
10. Although disregarding the commonality that exists between *Merry Wives* and *Merchant*, Cohen makes a similar argument: “The work (*Merchant*) stands apart from Shakespeare’s other comedies of the 1590s, romantic or not, and, in addition, from most other comedies of the period, both in the gravity of its subject and in its socio-economic emphasis.” Cohen, 781.
11. This claim arises from the premise advanced by critics that Portia actually manipulates the casket test through the music she calls for during Bassanio’s selection, i.e. the rhyme-words of the opening lines rhyming with “lead” and the song’s admonition against trusting physical appearances constitute a tip-off. For example, Moisan refers to “the subliminally helpful hints and ‘mood music’ provided by Portia.” Moisan, 199.
12. Graham Holderness, “Comedy and *The Merchant of Venice*,” *The Merchant of Venice*, New Casebooks, ed. Martin Coyle (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998) 26.
13. For example, Jonathan Miller’s 1970 National Theatre production offered an isolated Jessica at its end while a Jewish *Kaddish* was intoned. More recently, Michael Radford’s 2004 film’s final image is of Jessica looking out alone over the waters with her back to Belmont.
14. “. . . be assured / My purse, my person, my extremest means / Lie all unlock’d to your occasions.” (I.i.137–9)
15. B. J. Sokol and Mary Sokol, *Shakespeare, Law, and Marriage* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 62.
16. John Lyon, *The Merchant of Venice*, Twayne’s New Critical Introductions to Shakespeare (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1988) 67. (italics in original text)
17. Alexander Leggatt, *Shakespeare’s Comedy of Love* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1974) 125.
18. Camille Wells Slight, “In Defense of Jessica: The Runaway Daughter in *The Merchant of Venice*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 31 (1980) 361.
19. Her singularity in this respect is notable; while other Shakespearean cross-dressing heroines take to their disguises with varying degrees of enthusiasm, Jessica’s apparent shame further suggests her status as the “other.” She seems excluded not only from the festive atmosphere in Belmont, as will be argued later, but also from the liberty that donning male clothing offers her literary equivalents.
20. Additionally, as will be argued later, Portia seems not to even hear Jessica’s claim that Shylock cannot be placated financially in the matter of Antonio’s debt.
21. Moisan, 201.
22. Marc Berley, “Jessica’s Belmont Blues: Music and Merriment in *The Merchant of Venice*,” *Opening the Borders: Inclusivity in Early Modern Studies, Essays in Honor of James V. Mirollo*, Ed. Peter C. Herman (Cranbury NJ: Associated University Presses, 1999) 200.



23. Raymond B. Waddington, "Blind Gods: Fortune, Justice and Cupid in *The Merchant of Venice*," *ELH*, 44 (1977) 474–5.
24. Richard Grassby, *Kinship and Capitalism: Marriage, Family, and Business in the English Speaking World, 1580–1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001) 82.
25. G. R. Hibbard, "Love, Marriage and Money in Shakespeare's Theatre and Shakespeare's England," *The Elizabethan Theatre VI: Papers given at the Sixth International Conference on Elizabethan Theatre held at the University of Waterloo, Ontario, in July 1975*, ed. G. R. Hibbard (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1978) 138.
26. Nuttall, *Mimesis*, 122.
27. Sokol and Sokol, 59.
28. Adding to the impression that the "wide world" being cognizant of Portia's "worth" is an economic reference that is connected to her exotic suitors, Jonathan Gil Harris argues that the "inclusion [of the foreign princes] consolidates the play's transnational frame of reference, which corresponds to that of late sixteenth-century European commerce. In beating out Morocco and Aragon for Portia's hand, Bassanio is the winner in a contest against representatives of two of England's major trading adversaries, the Islamic North African states and Spain. Jonathan Gil Harris, *Sick Economies: Drama, Mercantilism, and Disease in Shakespeare's England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004) 10–11.
29. Leggatt, *Love*, 125. (italics in original text)
30. Mark Netzloff, "The Lead Casket: Capital, Mercantilism, and *The Merchant of Venice*," *Money and the Age of Shakespeare: Essays in New Economic Criticism*, Ed. Linda Woodbridge (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) 166.
31. Catherine Belsey, "Love in Venice," *Shakespeare Survey* 44 (1991) 41.
32. Harold C. Goddard, *The Meaning of Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951) 86.
33. John Russell Brown, introduction, *The Merchant of Venice*, by William Shakespeare, ed. John Russell Brown (London: Methuen, 1979) lvi. Brown also points to a similar echoing of the word "advantage" in both Venice and Belmont: Morocco's words concerning the lead casket, "Men that hazard all / Do it hope of fair advantages" are seen by Brown to be "especially pertinent, for in Venice 'advantage' denotes usury: 'Me thoughts you said, you neither lend nor borrow / Upon advantage' (I.iii.64–5)." Brown, lv.
34. While this kind of economic/romantic cross-referencing is not uncommon in Shakespeare (especially in the Sonnets), it tends to take on an added significance in *Merchant*. What is (one hesitates to say "merely") metaphoric elsewhere seems more literal here amid the sea of financial considerations, exigencies and language.

35. Nuttall, *Mimesis*, 123.
36. Despite its decasyllabic structure, it is almost impossible to scan this line as standard iambic pentameter, as it invariably comes out as having six stresses. Again, it appears as if Shakespeare wanted to draw attention to these pointedly economic sentiments of Portia through irregular constructions.
37. Nuttall points out that Portia's statement also links her to *Merchant's* ostensible avatar of greed through Shylock's claim to a pound of Antonio's flesh, "Tis dearly bought, tis mine, and I will have it" (IV.i.99). Nuttall, *Mimesis*, 123.
38. William Shakespeare, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, ed. Michael Neill (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994) I.i.15.
39. Leggatt, *Love*, 137.
40. M. M. Mahood, "Introduction," *The Merchant of Venice*, by William Shakespeare, ed. M. M. Mahood (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 35.
41. W. H. Auden, "Brothers and Others," *The Merchant of Venice: Critical Essays*, Ed. Thomas Wheeler (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991) 72.
42. Alan Sinfield, "How to Read *The Merchant of Venice* without being Heterosexual," *The Merchant of Venice*, New Casebooks, ed. Martin Coyle (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998) 164.
43. Sinfield, 163.
44. Ryan, *Shakespeare*, 23.
45. Elliot Krieger, *A Marxist Study of Shakespeare's Comedies* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1979) 20.
46. William Hazlitt, *A View of the English Stage or A Series of Dramatic Criticisms* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1906) 188.
47. As noted by Theodore Leinwand, "The late sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries . . . witnessed a marked rise in the supply of money available for loan. Not only rich London merchants but lawyers and scribes, . . . were putting their money out at interest." Theodore B. Leinwand, *Theatre, Finance and Society in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999) 83.
48. Cohen, 774.
49. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Trans. David Fernbach, Vol. 3 (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books Ltd., 1981) 372–3.
50. As argued earlier, perhaps Jessica deserves to be included in this group as well.
51. Nuttall, *Mimesis*, 129–30. (italics in original text)
52. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998) 254.
53. Frank Whigham, "Ideology and Class Conduct in *The Merchant of Venice*," *Renaissance Drama: Renaissance Drama as Cultural History: Essays from Renaissance Drama 1977–1987*, ed. Mary Beth Rose (Evanston IL: Northwestern UP, 1990) 488.

54. Gillies, 125.
55. Jonathan Hall, *Anxious Pleasures: Shakespearean Comedy and the Nation-State* (Cranbury NJ Associated University Presses, 1995) 54–5.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

1. John Wheeler, *A Treatise of Commerce*, ed. George Burton Hotchkiss (New York: Arno Press, 1977) 316.
2. Leslie Clarkson, *The Pre-Industrial Economy in England 1500–1750* (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1971) 186.
3. For further details regarding the latter practice and its unpopularity, see: C.G.A. Clay, *Economic Expansion and Social Change: England 1500–1700*, vol. II (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984) p. 237–8.
4. See Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy 1558–1641* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1979) p.416–7.
5. Clay, vol. II, 262.
6. Linda Levy Peck, *Court Patronage and Corruption in Early Stuart England* (Boston: Unwin Hyman Inc., 1990) 11.
7. Geoffrey Chaucer, “General Prologue,” *The Canterbury Tales, The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987) 45–6.
8. Stone, 77.
9. as quoted by Stone, 76.
10. For further exploration of these and other historical correspondences see: Leah Marcus, “London,” *Critical Essays on Shakespeare’s Measure for Measure*, ed. Richard P. Wheeler (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1999) 56–78.
11. Frederick S. Boas, *Shakespeare and his Predecessors* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1896) 345.
12. William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, ed. N. W. Bawcutt (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991) I.i.17. All further quotations are from this text and will be cited parenthetically.
13. Jonathan Dollimore, “Transgression and Surveillance in *Measure for Measure*,” *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism* (Ithaca NY: Cornell UP, 1994) 82.
14. See D. M. Palliser, *The Age of Elizabeth: England Under the Later Tudors 1547–1603* (London: Longman Group Limited, 1983) 134–45.
15. Robert N. Watson, “False Immortality in *Measure for Measure*: Comic Means, Tragic Ends,” *Critical Essays on Shakespeare’s Measure for Measure* (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1999) 103.
16. As observed by Coppelia Kahn, “. . . in Shakespeare’s world ‘use’ always connotes usury.” Coppelia Kahn, “‘Magic of bounty’: *Timon of Athens*, Jacobean Patronage, and Maternal Power,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 38 (1987) 48.

17. Although the word “forfeit” also carried legalistic meanings not necessarily tied to economics, Shakespeare’s previous use of the term supports the reading advanced here. In *Merchant*, Shylock demands settlement of his debt thus: “I crave the law, / The penalty and forfeit of my bond.” (IV. 202–3).
18. While it has been argued that Angelo reads Isabella as offering a bribe of a sexual nature, I find that interpretation unconvincing—she has hardly been carrying on sexual banter in the scene and he shows no other sign of reading her words in an erotic way. The antanaclassis of Angelo’s aside, “She speaks, and ‘tis such sense that my sense breeds with it” (II.ii.144–5) further pulls apart their lexicons into the sexual and non-sexual, with his recognition of this implicit. As well, other Shakespearean usages of “bribe” carry economic meaning, such as *Coriolanus* (I.ix.38) and *Julius Caesar* (IV.iii.3).
19. Terence Eagleton, *Shakespeare and Society: Critical Studies in Shakespearean Drama* (New York: Schocken Books Inc., 1967) 75.
20. Marc Shell, *The End of Kinship: ‘Measure for Measure,’ Incest, and the Ideal of Universal Siblinghood* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1988) 99.
21. Brian Gibbons, introduction, *Measure for Measure*, ed. Brian Gibbons (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991) 36–7.
22. Teresa Lanpher Nugent, “Usury and Counterfeiting in Wilson’s *The Three Ladies of London* and *The Three Lords and Three Ladies of London* and in Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure*,” *Money and the Age of Shakespeare: Essays in New Economic Criticism*, ed. Linda Woodbridge (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) 211.
23. That said, the complexity and contradictions of Isabella’s character must be acknowledged; at the end of this very scene she makes a valuative statement that, while comparative and subjective, speaks as well against the leveling of values in Vienna: “More than our brother is our chastity.” (II. iv.186). Her complicity in the bed trick and her willingness to publicly admit unchaste behavior at the Duke’s behest are further examples of developments in *Measure* that seem out of character for what appears to be a rigid moralist. Yet it seems that Shakespeare was cognizant of such contradictions, as he earlier has Isabella acknowledge this inconsistency herself when pleading Claudio’s case: “. . . it oft falls out /To have what we would have, we speak not what we mean. / I something do excuse the thing I hate /For his advantage that I dearly love.” (II.iv. 118–21) The inconsistencies appear to be built into the character, and, indeed, into the play itself.
24. Gibbons, introduction, 36.
25. J. W. Lever, in the Arden edition of *Measure*, glosses the prisoners enumerated by Pompey being all “now for the Lord’s sake” (IV.iii.18) as redolent of “the cry of poor prisoners begging from the grating of window of

- their prison.” William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, ed. J. W. Lever (Walton-on-Thames, UK: Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd., 1998) 112.
26. Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, ed. David Frisby, trans. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby (London: Routledge, 1990) 442.
  27. For examples of this discussion, see: B. J. Sokol and Mary Sokol, *Shakespeare, Law, and Marriage* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 28–9 and Marcus, “London,” 64–5.
  28. As suggested by the OED’s quoting “this as the earliest example of sense 3, ‘increase, enlargement’ .” Bawcutt, gloss I.ii.148, p.99.
  29. Vivian Thomas, *The Moral Universe of Shakespeare’s Problem Plays* (Beckenham, UK: Croom Helm Ltd, 1987) 189.
  30. William Shakespeare, *All’s Well that Ends Well*, ed. Susan Snyder (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994) V.iii.188.
  31. For a discussion of widow’s rights, see Sokol and Sokol, 175.
  32. Michael D. Friedman, “‘O, let him marry her!’: Matrimony and Recompense in *Measure for Measure*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 46 (1995) 455–6.
  33. Shell, *Kinship*, 152.
  34. Friedman, 462.
  35. Shell, *Kinship*, 152–3.
  36. Dymrna C. Callaghan, Lorraine Helms and Jyotsna Singh, *The Weyward Sisters: Shakespeare and Feminist Politics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994) 45.
  37. I.ii.41–52
  38. William Shakespeare and Thomas Middleton, *Timon of Athens*, ed. John Jowett (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004) 14.150.
  39. Thomas, 199.
  40. Anne M. Haselkorn, *Prostitution in Elizabethan and Jacobean Comedy* (Troy NY: The Whitson Publishing Company, 1983) 13.
  41. Haselkorn, 15.
  42. Dollimore, “Transgression,” 74.
  43. Theodore B. Leinwand, *The City Staged: Jacobean Comedy, 1603–13* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1986) 142.
  44. Dollimore, Jonathan, “Shakespeare Understudies: the Sodomite, the Prostitute, the Transvestite and Their Critics,” *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, eds. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Ithaca NY: Cornell UP, 1994) 136.
  45. E. Pearlman, “Shakespeare, Freud, and the Two Usuries, or, Money’s a Meddler,” *English Literary Renaissance* 2 (1972) 231.
  46. Nugent, 205.
  47. Norman Jones, *God and the Moneylenders: Usury and Law in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1989) 176.
  48. See Lever, xxxii.
  49. Simmel, 79.
  50. Lever, xxxi-ii.

51. E. J. Burford, *Bawds and Lodgings; A History of the London Bankside Brothels c 100–1675* (London: Peter Owen Limited, 1976) 168.
52. Dollimore, “Transgression,” 73.
53. Dollimore, “Transgression,” 84.
54. Alexander Leggatt, “Substitution in *Measure for Measure*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39 (1998) 342.
55. Simmel, 79.
56. Simmel, 80.
57. Andy Mousely, *Renaissance Drama and Contemporary Literary Theory* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000) 193.
58. Shell, *Kinship*, 125.
59. Katherine Eisaman Maus, “Sexual Secrecy in *Measure for Measure*,” *Critical Essays on Shakespeare’s Measure for Measure*, ed. Richard P. Wheeler (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1999) 211.
60. Leggatt, “Substitution,” 347.
61. This premise originates in the fact that, although Vincentio may well be in sympathy with Mariana, this deal is also designed to save Claudio and spare Isabella, their plights predicated entirely by his decision to hand over power to Angelo. In effect, he is running about putting out his own fires.
62. Shell, *Kinship*, 129.
63. Kiernan Ryan, “Marxism before Marx,” *Marxist Shakespeares*, eds. Jean E. Howard and Scott Cutler Shershow (London: Routledge, 2001) 237.
64. Leggatt, “Substitution,” 350.
65. Wheeler, 316.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

1. William Shakespeare, *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, ed. G. R. Hibbard (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990) IV.iii. 165/168.
2. As far back as 1838, Charles Knight, citing metrical and structural evidence, argued that *Timon of Athens* was a rewrite of a Shakespearean tragedy by another playwright; “. . . in particular, the ‘offensive recurrence of the couplet’ confirmed his opinion that an inferior playwright must have been involved.” Karl Klein, introduction, *Timon of Athens*, ed. Karl Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001) 62.
3. Rolf Soellner, *Timon of Athens: Shakespeare’s Pessimistic Tragedy* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1979) 1.
4. One notable exception to this consensus is the most recent New Cambridge edition of *Timon*, published in 2001. In his introduction to that volume, Klein expresses doubts over the Oxford editors’ methodology and conclusions while shying away from endorsing any alternative explanation for the “problems” in *Timon*. Klein, 63–5 For a detailed rebuttal of

- Klein's position on the issue, see: Brian Vickers, *Shakespeare, Co-Author: A Historical Study of Five Collaborative Plays* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002) 288–90.
5. See: Vickers, 244–90 and John Jowett, introduction, *Timon of Athens*, ed. John Jowett, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004) 132–53.
  6. In particular, "Appendix C," *Timon of Athens*, ed. John Jowett (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004) 341–47.
  7. John Jowett, "Middleton and Debt in *Timon of Athens*," *Money and the Age of Shakespeare: Essays in New Economic Criticism*, ed. Linda Woodbridge (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) 219–35.
  8. Jowett, "Middleton," 220.
  9. Dieter Mehl, *Shakespeare's Tragedies: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991) 213.
  10. Jowett, introduction, 55.
  11. Kenneth Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature and Method* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966) 118.
  12. Richard Fly, *Shakespeare's Mediated World* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1976) 123.
  13. E. C. Pettet, "*Timon of Athens*: The Disruption of Feudal Morality," *Review of English Studies* 23 (1947) 329.
  14. Coppelia Kahn, "'Magic of bounty': *Timon of Athens*, Jacobean Patronage, and Maternal Power," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 38 (1987) 42.
  15. Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy 1558–1641* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1979) 528.
  16. William Shakespeare and Thomas Middleton, *Timon of Athens*, ed. John Jowett (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004) 3.19–23. All further quotations are from this text and will be cited parenthetically.
  17. C.G.A. Clay, *Economic Expansion and Social Change: England 1500–1700*, vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984) 150.
  18. Clay, vol. I, 157.
  19. Anne Lancashire, "*Timon of Athens*: Shakespeare's Dr. Faustus," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 21 (1970) 37.
  20. Bulman refers to the play as an "academic comedy probably performed at the Inns of Court around 1602, where Shakespeare could have easily seen it." James C. Bulman, "Shakespeare's Use of the 'Timon' Comedy," *Shakespeare Survey* 29 (1976), 103. As well, Jowett ventures that "the comedy *Timon* probably offered the dramatists further help." Jowett, "Introduction," 19.
  21. *Timon*, eds. J. C. Bulman and J. M. Nosworthy, Malone Society Reprints (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1980) ll. 859–60.
  22. Nicholas Grene, *Shakespeare's Tragic Imagination* (London: Macmillan Academic and Professional Ltd, 1992) 132.
  23. Robert Heilman, "*Timon* in Context," *Shakespeare: The Tragedies: New Perspectives*, ed. Robert B. Heilman (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1984) 228.

24. Soellner, 94.
25. A. D. Nuttall, *Timon of Athens*, Harvester New Critical Introductions to Shakespeare (Hemel Hempstead UK: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989) 68.
26. Gail Kern Paster, *The Idea of the City in the Age of Shakespeare* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1985) 102.
27. Mehl, 208.
28. Victor Kiernan, *Eight Tragedies of Shakespeare: A Marxist Study* (London: Verso, 1996) 143.
29. Soellner, 70.
30. Jowett, introduction, 146.
31. Vickers, 476. Vickers also properly concedes the speculative nature of such claims, saying that “it is impossible to reconstruct the original genesis of *Timon*.” Vickers, 476. For an overview of Fleay’s work, see: Vickers, 257–61.
32. Kahn, “Magic,” 57.
33. Kahn, “Magic,” 48.
34. That offer, in turn, becomes a source of contradiction in the Middleton parts of the play when Ventidius later spurns Timon’s request for help (7.3–7).
35. Ken Jackson, “‘One Wish’ or the Possibility of the Impossible: Derrida, the Gift, and God in *Timon of Athens*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 52 (2001) 52.
36. Jackson, 38.
37. Michael Chorost, “Biological Finance in Shakespeare’s *Timon of Athens*,” *English Literary Renaissance* 21 (1991) 350. (italics in original text)
38. Chorost, 350.
39. Kahn, “Magic,” 39.
40. William Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, ed. Kenneth Muir (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) II.ii.51.
41. Charles Knight, *Studies of Shakespeare* (London: 1849) 74.
42. Vickers, 478.
43. Jowett, introduction, 72.
44. Jowett, introduction, 55.
45. Jackson, 39–40.
46. Jackson, 48.
47. Jackson, 49.
48. Paster, 92.
49. Karen Newman, “Rereading Shakespeare’s *Timon of Athens* at the Fin de Siecle,” *Shakespeare and the Twentieth Century: The Selected Proceedings of the International Shakespeare Association World Congress Los Angeles, 1996* (Cranbury NJ: Associated UP, 1998) 380.
50. William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, ed. N. W. Bawcutt (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991) II.ii.152–3.
51. Soellner, 68.
52. Jackson, 51.



53. Paster, 100.
54. Sandra K. Fischer, "'Cut My Heart in Sums': Shakespeare's Economics and *Timon of Athens*," *Money: Lure, Lore, and Literature*, ed. John Louis DiGaetani (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1994) 189.
55. Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," *Karl Marx Frederick Engels: Collected Works* Volume 3 (New York: International Publishers, 1975) 324. (italics in original text)
56. While Scene Three is attributed entirely to Shakespeare, Scene Four is viewed as having mixed authorship with Shakespeare presumed responsible for 4.1–44 (with the exception of 1–9, lines Jowett notes as being Middletonian [Shakespeare, *Timon*, fn Sc. 4 (2.2), p. 210] ) and 4.84–177. Jowett, "Appendix C" 342–3.
57. Kahn, "Magic," 50.
58. Chorost, 356. (italics in original text)
59. Paster, 102–3.
60. Nuttall, *Timon*, 122.
61. Paster, 104.
62. Jowett in Shakespeare, *Timon*, fn 28, p. 268.
63. Jackson, 59.
64. The equivalent lines in the Oxford edition used throughout this chapter are 14.29–30.
65. Eric Spencer, "Taking Excess, Exceeding Account: Aristotle Meets *The Merchant of Venice*," *Money and the Age of Shakespeare: Essays in New Economic Criticism*, ed. Linda Woodbridge (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) 144–5. (italics in original text)
66. Fly, 135–6.
67. G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire: Interpretations of Shakespearean Tragedy with Three New Essays* (London: Routledge, 1989) 236.
68. Chorost, 366.
69. Marx, 324.
70. Vickers, 479.
71. Despite Apemantus' cynicism regarding Timon, absolute philanthropy and misanthropy are the only viable interpretations of the "extremit[ies]" he refers to.
72. Mehl, 217.
73. Jackson, 62.
74. Fischer, "Cut," 193.
75. William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. R. A. Foakes (London: Thomson Learning, 2001) IV.vi.96–104.

## NOTES TO THE CONCLUSION

1. Caroline Alphonso, "University Well Worth the Cost, Economist Says," *The Globe and Mail* 23 Jan. 2004: A5.
2. Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," *Karl Marx Frederick Engels: Collected Works* Volume 3 (New York: International Publishers, 1975) 326.
3. ". . . Money buys lands, and wives are sold by fate." William Shakespeare, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, ed. Giorgio Melchiori (Walton on Thames, UK: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 2000) V.v.227.
4. Jean Addison Roberts, *Shakespeare's English Comedy: The Merry Wives of Windsor in Context* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979) 83.
5. Henry W. Farnham, *Shakespeare's Economics* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1931).
6. Norman Augustine and Kenneth Adelman, *Shakespeare in Charge: The Bard's Guide to Leading and Succeeding on the Business Stage* (New York: Hyperion, 1999).
7. Frederick Turner, *Shakespeare's Twenty-First-Century Economics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 13.
8. Turner, 72.
9. For examples, see various essays in *Money in the Age of Shakespeare: Essays in New Economic Criticism*, ed. Linda Woodbridge (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) as well as the work of Sandra K. Fischer cited in this study.
10. Sir Philip Sidney, "The Defence of Poesie," *Defence of Poesie, Astorphil and Stella and Other Writings*, ed. Elizabeth Porges Watson (London: J.M. Dent, 1999) 111.



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