

CHAPTER 10

BRUISED WITH ADVERSITY

reading race in The Comedy of Errors

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IN approaching Shakespeare's early comedy *The Comedy of Errors*, critics have sought to contextualize and theorize what G. R. Elliott in 1939 called simply 'the **weirdness the atmosphere created** by the play's central premise of two sets of identical twins, **separated** as young children into two pairs, each consisting of one master, called Antipholus, and **one servant**, called Dromio. Fate brings the **entire foursome** together, landing Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse at Ephesus, the hometown of the other Antipholus and the other **Dromio**. Once the twins come to inhabit the same geographical and social space, **ever** proliferating confusions begin. No one imagines that the source of the **confusion is the** presence of two pairs of people who look alike but are not one and the same until they **come to stand**, at the end of Act 5, side by side. Even then, the potential for further **confusion remains or increases** since, as the Duke of Ephesus remarks with agitation, we know not which is which', and at any rate there **are four** twins and only two names to go round (5.1.365).

For many critics 'the weirdness' has led to the claim that *The Comedy of Errors* is concerned with, is about, identity in some fundamental way. Yet, among the many identities that they have investigated, critics have largely ignored race, since the play does not explicitly stage those practices, institutions, and events commonly associated with race: colour **difference**, encounter, conquest, colonization, or conversion. A broader definition of race **has emerged in recent studies, however, and as we now acknowledge**, 'race' is just **one name** for what was in fact a highly **adaptive and varied** system of social differentiation, the **forms**

"G. R. Elliot, "Weirdness in *The Comedy of Errors*, in *The Comedy of Errors: Critical Essays*, ed. Robert Miola (New York and London: Garland, 1997).

? William Shakespeare, *The Comedy of Errors*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen

Greenblatt et al. (New York: W.W.Norton, 2nd edn, 2008), 717-65.

3 Barbara Freedman, 'Reading Errantly; Misrecognition and the Uncanny in *The Comedy of Errors*', in *The Comedy of Errors: Critical Essays*, ed. Miola; Douglas Lanier, "Stigmatical in Making": 'The Material Character of *The Comedy of Errors*', *English Literary Renaissance* 23:1 (1993), 81–112; Shankar Raman, 'Marking Time: Memory and Market in "The Comedy of Errors"', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 56:2

(2005), 176-205; Martine van Elk, "“This sympathized one day's error”: Genre, Representation, and

· Subjectivity in *The Comedy of Errors*, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 60:1 (2009), 47-72.

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and features of which remained in constant flux throughout the early modern period.⁴ Here, I will examine the role of the body, and of the somatic mark in particular, in the social production of both individual subjects and racial groups.

In *The Comedy of Errors*, two sets of twins experience the benefits as well as the pitfalls of mistaken identity, revealing the ease with which individuals may be grouped with others who merely share the same somatic markers, and the case with which somatic markers may be stigmatized. Thus, I read not for race, precisely, but for the physical and epistemological violence that racial ideology effects. Adriana's lament in Act 2, following a bitter debate with her sister, Luciana, over the double standard that exists for men and women, describes this sort of adversity'. . . .

ADRIANA. A wretched soul, bruised with adversity, We bid be quiet when we hear it cry: But were we burdened with like weight of pain, .

As much or more we should ourselves complain. (2.1.34-7) Articulating an insight about gender relations, Adriana describes the failure of people to perceive the pain of others as common and even casual. Existing, as it does, inside an ideological blind spot, such pain is difficult to see or hear, even more difficult to pity or relieve. The extended metaphor

Taking up the 'bruise' as an object of inquiry, I shift the focus from gender to race to **examine** the ways in which the perceived indelibility of such bodily markers can enable the use and abuse of devastating and sweeping generalizations about large groups of people. To craft an even more precise language, I read for evidence of pain or oppression that is justified in the eyes of a society by the presence of a stigmatized mark, located on the body. The specific characteristics of such marks are arbitrary, but are perceived to be meaningful, and the location of the mark on the body seems to confirm that both the mark and its social **meanings are** indelible and natural's. Moreover, somatic **markers were often understood as** natural and indelible because they were bound up with the processes of reproduction, not only natural but hereditary, not only indelible but endowed at birth. The power of racist ideology then allowed that the meanings associated with somatic marks were also inherited, linking possessors of such marks as related by some biological or blood tie.

5 Collette Guillaumin, *Racism, Sexism, Power and Ideology* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 140.

The structure of *The Comedy of Errors* **isolates the personal experience** of the wealthy brothers Antipholus, and the enslaved brothers Dromio, allowing each group time to contemplate and express the causes and effects of their misfortunes. This structure **offers audiences the opportunity to see social difference in an unusual way** by drawing eyes **away from those external marks** that would seem to indicate a coherent, socially meaningful difference and **back towards the pain** of oppression. This pain is voiced by Dromio of Ephesus and Dromio of Syracuse, who each complain that they are bruised **and beaten** not because they are bad but because they are unfortunate, marked from birth as sub servient and thus defenceless against the abuse of power; and by Antipholus of Ephesus and Antipholus of Syracuse, who experience a sudden reversal of fortune, turning from men of 'reverend reputation' (5.1.5) to 'wretched soul[s], bruised with adversity' (2.1.34) in **a matter** of hours.

The play makes visible the flawed logic of a racialized system of differentiation, illustrating the process by which large numbers of people may be grouped together solely on the basis of shared somatic markers, and made subject to the **sweeping generalizations of** racial prejudice. We can trace this devastating force even in the critical tendency **to refer** to the brothers as 'Antipholi' and 'Dromios'. This is an impulse we **can now recognize as** part of the genealogy of race-concepts: the impulse to reimagine identical twins who share the same name not as distinct individuals who happen to share some resemblances, but **as members** of a larger race. Antipholi, like Anthropophagi, become a race of men who share physical traits and customs, and who come from a particular geographical region. The impulse seems innocuous but is in fact very powerful, as it represents the strangely uncharted **sideways move in** the logic of racialism, the shift from understanding race as a kinship relation to understanding race as a distinction between large populations that share physical traits. In fact, it is the very slipperiness of the concept that makes **oppression** possible.

play by focusing on the materiality of identity, unfolding the ways in which the materiality of theatrical performance, of embodying character in the Elizabethan theatre, overlaps and interacts with the debate over self-presentation in Elizabethan culture. *The Comedy of Errors* presents a 'limit case in which the finite markers of identity could be duplicated exactly, undermining the 'logic of recognition' that governed society. Like Lanier, I am concerned with the materiality of identity and the epistemology or communal work that produces and adjudicates its material signs. I, too, am concerned with both the power of the **communal gaze-which functions to confirm and always in some sense to construct** identity-and the fragility of the social system that depends upon that confirming gaze, **a gaze** that is so easily fooled or faulty.

In this system, self-presentation is a kind of socio-economic currency (for example, you **don't need to carry cash around as long as you look and act like someone who has cash** available). The presented self is a kind of promise of real wealth to follow and thus **earns one** credit. The marks of **difference may then be mutable, as is often** the case with sartorial displays of **class status** (since fanciful hats with long feathers may be **donned or removed at any** time); or they may be indelible. In the case of somatic markers, such as those that indicate sex difference, the bodily sign is received as 'natural' and therefore permanent. While the **meanings of somatic markers were in fact far from stable**, as has been shown in a range of studies devoted to the malleability of identity by means of everything from sartorial to climatological change, such markers were **nevertheless treated** as stable and reliable, used to justify the ossification of great social advantage and disadvantage (thus women's **access to fanciful hats with long feathers was easily circumscribed** by

sumptuary laws that were both class-coded and sex-specific). Antipholus of Syracuse, mistaken for his brother, finds himself the beneficiary of Antipholus of Ephesus's excellent credit with his countrymen. Antipholus of Syracuse is offered everything from tailored silk, to gold chains, to **dinner invitations, to cash in** exchange for nothing but the promise of Antipholus's good opinion and future patronage. When, in confusion, Antipholus of Syracuse accepts a chain commissioned by his brother **he warns** the goldsmith, Angelo, to 'receive the money now, / For fear you ne'er see chain nor money more' (3.2.174-5). Angelo laughs at the very suggestion of demanding payment upon receipt from Antipholus of Ephesus, a man he describes as 'of credit **infinite ... second to none**' and as one whose 'word might bear my wealth at any time' (5.1.6-8). These accidental exchanges, which Antipholus of Syracuse thoroughly enjoys, **illustrate a crucial flaw in a socio-economic network** that must take self-presentation at face value, what Lanier calls an 'an ideological blind spot in the Elizabethan **system of social differentiation** whereby people **assume** that distinct identities are manifest in distinct marks. **However**, I will draw particular attention to the **crucial difference between the carefully selected and displayed 'signs'**, offered by those who aim at presenting themselves as similar to other members of a high social rank, and therefore recognizable as members themselves, and the bodily 'marks' displayed (unwillingly or unwittingly) by the twin brothers of *The Comedy of Errors* that render them 'recognizable' even when that recognition is false. .. Ultimately, it is not the garments, but the body underneath, that must be recognized by family and community as distinct from all other bodies, like a fingerprint or signature.

Lanier, "Stigmatical in Making", 91, 95.

7 Lanier, ""Stigmatical in Making", 92 .

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The play **suggests** that the body is in some way immutable: an identifiable and discreet object that **indicates the presence** of a distinct identity beneath the silk and gold window dressing.

The body can then function as a record of one's honourable and good deeds, the grounds for good credit, and as surety or collateral for the promise of one's self-presentation strategies. It is this logic that leads Antipholus of Ephesus, as a last resort, to call upon the Duke for justice in return for the Service that long since I did thee / When I **bestrid thee in the wars'**, taking deep scars to save thy life (5.1.192-4). He knows he can **display the scars that bear witness to past service, which has earned** him present justice. By the **same** logic, the body of someone accountable for unpaid debts can be arrested, held, and **punished**. **A fellow merchant threatens** Angelo with just such an incarceration if he cannot repay the sum he owes, shouting, 'You know since Pentecost the sum is due', and **warning** Angelo that he must, 'Make present satisfaction, / Or I'll attach you by this officer(4.1.1-6). Reputation (name) cleaves to a single, recognizable, and distinctive body. The **meanings** attached to that one body are the direct result of its owner's specific **actions and choices as** judged by the **greater community**.

Yet, for any one Antipholus's promises, deeds, or debts, there are two bodies that may be made to pay. By multiplying the body as marker, the play makes visible the suffering **the system causes to anyone** for whom meaning has attached to their body without their consent or knowledge, especially to any body that is indistinct **in some way, vulnerable to generalizations**.

Like Adriana, Dromio of Syracuse seems to understand the injustice faced by those who, 'bruised with adversity, cry out in pain and alarm. Knowing oneself to be wronged, hurt, disadvantaged, is no help at all; instead it is what others **know and believe about you that matters**, and that judgment takes place within an existing social hierarchy. Hurt and confused by a beating at the hands of his master, unaware that he is being punished for his brother's mistake, Dromio of **Syracuse asks earnestly**, 'But I pray, sir, why am I beaten?', and Antipholus of Syracuse asks in response, equally earnestly, 'Dost thou not know?' (2.2.39-40). Dromio of Syracuse **answers not the asked** question, which is about *whether* he understands, but a more complex version of the **same question**, which is about *what* he **understands more generally**. He **answers simply** that he knows, 'Nothing, sir, but that I am beaten', expressing his lack of access to both the voluntary display of signs and the communal process of adjudication of those signs (2.2.41).

Self-presentation enables individuals to construct themselves as singular subjects, and to

suggest the ways they might fit (or prefer to fit) into established social categories. Dromio **does not have access to** such strategies and can display only bruises, the very evidence that his subservient position is deserved. What Dromio 'knows' is that what he knows does not **matter**--he will be judged and judged poorly by the bruises he displays continually and **involuntarily**. Dromio presses Adriana's lament one step further, however, not only 'com plaining about the 'pain' of being 'bruised with adversity but naming an **aggressor his own master is the source of the pain and of the very literal bruises on Dromio's body**. **While the bruise**, at first glance, might seem temporary, Dromio of Ephesus and **Dromio** of Syracuse articulate the ways in which this mark is devastatingly permanent. They thus draw attention to the intersection between hereditary servitude—a class **system-and** somatic signs—a racialized system of identification.

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Dromio of Ephesus delivers a key critique of the **prevailing system** of social differentiation by illustrating the arbitrariness of his situation. He makes clear that his 'bruises, the marks of servitude, are not natural despite the fact that he has borne them seemingly since birth, and that they are in fact the reflection of a communal disregard for his equal humanity. He describes this injustice, visible as the bruised marks of servitude, as a kind of burden that he bears 'upon his shoulders' several times over the course of the play. When Antipholus of Syracuse **mistakes Dromio of Ephesus for his own servant**, demanding that Dromio produce a large sum of money entrusted to him upon their arrival in Ephesus, **Dromio of Ephesus** offers a complaint in which he illustrates class difference as a process of appropriation and as a visible mark.

· SYRANT, Where is the thousand marks thou hadst of me? **EPH.DRO. 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. If I should pay your worship those again,** Perchance you will not bear them patiently. (1.2.81-6) In Dromio of Ephesus's complaint, punning turns the thousand 'marks' (in currency) into bruises or other 'marks' from the beatings he **has received on what seems to be a regular basis from** both his mistress, Adriana, and his master, Antipholus of Ephesus. Both kinds of 'marks' can be imagined as 'paid' either as payment in return for goods and services received or as

punishment for mistakes made by a misbehaving servant. **The meanings are even more closely associated in their connotations since, from Dromio's perspective, his service, which has monetary value, includes not only his obedience but also his humiliation and physical vulnerability.** He reminds listeners, with some frustration, that the beatings he has received may seem justifiable to Adriana and Antipholus, but they are in fact arbitrary and difficult to bear. Like Adriana, who imagines what would happen **to our** complacency 'were we burdened with like weight of pain', Dromio of Ephesus suggests **to Antipholus** that, were their roles reversed and were Antipholus of Syracuse **to receive the** undesirable bruise 'mark' instead of the desirable cash 'mark', perchance you will not bear **them patiently. This comment comes close to real** insubordination first by suggesting that a servant might use violence against a master, and second by stating so baldly the privilege enjoyed by wealthy local merchant Antipholus and his wife Adriana.

Later in the play, Dromio of Ephesus uses the sing-song couplets that Shakespeare employs so liberally in *The Comedy of Errors* **to make the even more pointed accusation** that the bruises he **bears are the evidence of an abuse of power and of an epistemic injustice whereby Dromio's** identity is easily overwritten by his master's will

EPH.DRO. Say what you will, sir, but I know what I know -- That you beat me at the mart I have your hand to show. . . If the skin were parchment, and the **blows you gave were ink, . . .**

Your own handwriting would tell you what I think. (3.1.11-14) According to Dromio, he is a man without access **to interiority.** Instead, Dromio is what Antipholus thinks. In this singular passage, Dromio describes the process of appropriation **that produces the stigmatized somatic mark as handwriting on parchment.** His critique is devastating as he reinterprets the mark not as the sign of a natural subservience, **but as evidence** of a violent crime.

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Dromio of Ephesus's easy verses are deceptively deft. He fulfills his role, adding comic relief as the recipient of slapstick violence on stage, but he **also speaks and when he does so** he does more than object. He juggles the accepted understanding of **subservience as natural**, a kind of birth-mark that comes with being born to parents of low rank, and the more revolutionary idea that the mark of subservience is not a natural trait but a mark produced **and maintained** through consistent, life-long ill treatment and disregard.

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EPH.DRO. I have served him from the hour of my nativity to this instant, and have nothing at his hands for my service but blows. When I am cold, he heats me with beating. When I am warm, he cools me with beating. I am waked with it when I sleep, raised with it when I sit, **driven out** of doors with it when I go from home, welcomed home with it when I **return**. Nay, I bear it on my shoulders, as a beggar wont her brat, and I think when he hath lamed me I shall beg with it from door to door. (4.4.28-35)

Dromio of Ephesus **seems to be aware** of the fact that his subservience appeared at the **moment** of his birth, or rather just after it. Constantly bearing the marks of beatings dealt by his master and other social betters, Dromio says of his mark not only that he bears it on his shoulders, but that he bears it on his shoulders 'as a beggar wont her brat' or as a 'Jame' **man bears** his deformity, 'begging] with it from door to door. These analogies **draw on** the body, family, and heredity, coming very close to being simple autobiography and demonstrating again, adeptly, that the natural or hereditary mark is in fact caused or administered **after** the fact.

We can see the logic whereby an arbitrary mark is selected and invested with **meaning** in Egeon's first description of the enslaved twins at the start of the play. There, Egeon illustrates the conflation of subservience **as an inherited social status and subservience as a market relation**, the purchase of service for a finite period or for a lifetime. Having described the birth of **his own twin sons, born free and to wealthy parents**, he then describes another birth of another pair of twins, similar in every way but one: the wealth or status of the parents.

EGEON. That very hour, and in the selfsame inn, **A mean-born woman** was delivered Of such a burden male, twins both alike. 'Those, for their parents were exceeding poor,

I bought, and brought up to attend my sons. (1.1.53-7) Upon their birth Dromio of Ephesus and Dromio of Syracuse are bought like any of the goods exchanged in *The Comedy of Errors*-the chain, the ring, the rope-goods that, perhaps not incidentally, all symbolize bondage in some way. This fact is not apparently voluntary or remediable; everyone in the world of the play, including Dromio of Ephesus and Dromio of Syracuse, seems to assume that they **will remain slaves no matter** what they do, how well they perform, or where they go. Despite this universal complacency, Dromio of Ephesus is verbose and free in his wondering about why his body is beaten, while Dromio of Syracuse is equally voluble, wondering why his body should be so well known, after he finds himself described in intimate detail by a strange kitchen maid in a **strange** town. Both **mysteries** are about recognition of and through the body; both are about a feeling of loss of **control** over one's identity that is related to **a loss of control over the meanings of one's own** body. Dromio of Ephesus is resigned, **referring** to the burden he bears as a bruise-mark, borne 'on his shoulders's Dromio of Syracuse is astounded, referring to the literal 'mark

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of (his) shoulder that Nell describes in order to convince him that he is indeed her fiancé. Through the symmetrical but **differential musings** of Dromio of Ephesus and **Dromio** of Syracuse, we begin **to see that the enslavement** of these identical brothers is not in fact hereditary, caused by their having issued from the same womb, but arbitrary, happening after their birth as a convenience to Egeon and his family. .

This socio-economic relation is underscored by the extent to which other

characters treat Dromio of Ephesus and Dromio of Syracuse not as individuals with their own **unique** qualities, but in relation to the wealthy twins, Antipholus of Ephesus and Antipholus of Syracuse. They are the 'almanac of (the twins'] true date' (1.2.41), the 'calendars of their nativity' (5.1.400), the means of accurately dating the birth of the Antipholus twins. Their **very existence is a service** constituting the identities of others. Dromio of Ephesus **and Dromio** of Syracuse conceptualize this state of affairs in the most evocative language, describing themselves with wonder, disgust, and not a little angst as **'asses, since as everyone knows, and** as Katherine proclaims in *The Taming of the Shrew*, **Asses are made to bear'** (2.1.197). In this exchange with Antipholus of Syracuse, **Dromio of Syracuse suggests** that the difference between 'ass' and 'ape' has to do with knowledge of self and control of **self-presentation**.

SYR.DRO. I am transformed, master, am not I? SYR.ANT. I think thou art in mind, and so am I. SYR.DRO. Nay, master, both in mind and in my shape. SYR.ANT. Thou hast thine own form. SYR.DRO. No, I am an ape. SYR.ANT. If thou art changed to aught, 'tis to an ass. SYR.DRO. 'Tis true she rides me, and I long for grass.
'Tis so, I am an ass; else it could never be but I should know her as well as **she knows me.** (2.2.195-202)

Having just been reprimanded by a complete stranger, a **woman who nevertheless seems to know him** very well, Dromio wonders whether he has transformed somehow, changing his form like a proverbial 'ape'. When Antipholus of Syracuse suggests he is not an ape but an ass, he is being derogatory. Though an ape is not a grand animal, a creature capable of only mimicry, it is still more exalted than an ass, since apes 'know'; **apes are aware enough** to copy others, while he, as an ass, is well known to others but is himself **ignorant**.

The ass thus symbolizes the frightening lack of control felt by those who are treated as socially inferior because they have been deemed naturally less than. Echoing the exchange in which Dromio of **Syracuse calls himself an ass and admits** that he knows 'Nothing... but that I am beaten', Dromio of Ephesus, too, believes that he is 'senseless', or, as

Antipholus of Ephesus puts it, 'sensible in nothing but blows', in this exchange in which the 'ass' is equated with such lack of self-knowledge:

: : **EPH.DRO. I would I were senseless**, sir, that I might **not feel your blows**.

ÉPH.ANT. Thou art sensible in nothing but blows, **and so is an ass**. –

EPH.DRO. I am an ass indeed. You may prove it by my long ears. (4.4.23-8)

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& William Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2nd edn, 2008), 159–228.

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Dromio of Ephesus, like **Dromio of Syracuse**, is careful to maintain that his being subser **vient does not mean** that he does not feel pain or know enough to desire **fairer treatment**. In this vein, even as they compare themselves to a proverbially subservient **creature** beaten, ridden, unlovely, associated with stupidity, stubbornness, and idleness **Dromio of Ephesus also draws out more subversive meanings** attached to the 'ass', reminding listeners of the danger in an ass's 'heels': 'I should kick being kicked, and, beings that pass, / You would keep from my heels, and beware of an ass' (3.1.17-18). . It is when the well-to-do brothers themselves, established local businessman Antipholus of Ephesus and moneyed merchant Antipholus of Syracuse, begin to experience the feeling described by Dromio of Ephesus and Dromio of Syracuse, the feeling that their bodies are not distinct, that the critique voiced in the play comes full circle. No one is really safe **in a system** that uses the body as collateral, as a 'real' self, because at any time identity may be overwritten and the body forfeit. Many critics have identified Antipholus of Syracuse's breaking point, the moment at which he **realizes that the system of identification in which he has found himself is wholly arbitrary and therefore dangerous**. Elliot calls Dromio of Syracuse's narration of his uncanny off-stage encounter with Nell the kitchen maid, his supposed fiancée, 'the last straw for Antipholus'. As he explains, "The fun of the thing **impresses this gentleman less than its weirdness**."

SYR.DRO. To conclude, this drudge or diviner laid claim to me, called me Dromio, swore **I was assured** to her, told me what privy marks I had about me—as the mark of my shoulder, the mole in my neck, the great wart on my left arm—that **I, amazed, ran from her as a witch**. (3.2.137-42)

Nell has listed specific marks—birthmarks—that should identify Dromio by identifying his body. The marks make up a unique pattern like a fingerprint or signature that can authenticate (to be assured' or 'claimed' is to be 'engaged' but also verified'; *OED*) the identity of a single individual. Instead, Nell has listed those marks that identify not the one true Dromio, but all Dromios: shared traits that **may now 'assure' a shared fate.**

Antipholus of Syracuse has been enjoying the benefits of good credit, generous friends, and a devoted wife, benefits he knows he has not earned through his own actions. Gradually, he begins to feel that this may be a dangerous situation, as he realizes that, though pleasant, he is experiencing a loss of control and of understanding or self-knowledge. His expression, 'If everyone knows us, and we know none, / 'Tis time, I think, to trudge, pack, and be gone', echoes Dromio of Syracuse's, that he knows 'nothing but that he is beaten (3.2.150-1). Antipholus recognizes that this situation is undesirable, and it is at this moment that he plans to leave town, sending Dromio of Syracuse to seek out transport on any ship leaving port immediately. He does not understand that this position is not so easy to escape, as Dromio of Ephesus and Dromio of Syracuse have already demonstrated. Just as soon **as he determines** to leave Ephesus, things do become dangerous. Antipholus of Syracuse has enjoyed someone else's benefits and now Antipholus of Ephesus will take someone else's blame.

The good fortune of Antipholus of Syracuse turns to uncomfortable accusations of infidelity, credit default, and finally madness for Antipholus of Ephesus. In quick succession,

2. Elliot, 'Weirdness', 65.

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first, Angelo has him arrested for refusing to pay for the gold chain; next Luciana **reveals** that her brother-in-law has made a pass at her; then, Antipholus of Ephesus's **mistress**, having been rebuffed by Antipholus of Syracuse, approaches Adriana to **demand the return** of a ring; and finally, now believing that her husband must be mad or possessed, Adriana attempts to capture and confine Antipholus in the hopes of

curing him. Antipholus of Ephesus is about to experience a complete loss of individualized identity and become, socially, for all intents and purposes, **the same as another man who merely resembles him. This monstrous turn of events** is prevented only when *The Comedy of Errors* re-solemnizes the bonds of family by re-establishing household and community relations. "The twins' **mother, now revealed**, invites the Duke (**and by extension the audience**) to **join her newly** reconstituted family at a gossips' feast', a gathering that, as critics have established, **allows a family and community** to acknowledge and **celebrate a new birth**, producing that person's **communally** recognized identity (5.1.407).

In *The Comedy of Errors* the result of possessing a recognizable somatic mark is experienced first as windfall and **then as misfortune**. This swift turn is also experienced as arbitrary, owing nothing to the actions or wishes of the marked men. Antipholus of Syracuse **arrives in a strange city**, identified by **name only** (he has concealed his city of origin to avoid the standard punishment meted out to Syracusians found in Ephesus). He is identified and immediately accepted as a well-to-do and well-reputed native because of his bodily resemblance to another man, who happens to be his long-lost twin. Antipholus of Syracuse revels in Antipholus of Ephesus's ready-made self-fashioning, silk cloth, gold **chains, and** well-appointed home. Soon, however, Antipholus of Syracuse's body betrays him since, as *The Comedy of Errors* demonstrates, somatic marks are not subject to the logic of self presentation, the voluntary art of display through ornamentation of body, speech, or **gesture. The meanings** attached to bodily markers, whether those meanings are positive or negative, adhere more permanently. Perceived as 'natural, these **meanings can come to** trump self-presentational strategies.

The stigmatized meanings attached to specific somatic markers appear to be determined a priori, by nature, when in fact they have been attached a fortiori as social constructs. The repercussions of societal prejudice triggered, and in a sense validated, by the 'natural marks of somatic difference constitute material differences in the lived experience of individuals. Indeed, the stigmatized somatic mark can also be understood as the mark of continual appropriation of economic and cultural capital from disadvantaged groups. In the investigation of this type of 'adversity', *The Comedy of Errors* becomes particularly **illustrative, revealing** some of the ways in which the body figures in the framework that undergirds a system of social differentiation and suggesting that race may be understood **as an iteration** of the somatic component of a **system of social differentiation that**

encom passes class as well. In such a system, the body itself functions as a sign of those aspects of identity that are understood as natural and therefore permanent, but are in fact the result of a society adopting different standards for different groups.

The Comedy of Errors **examines** the effect of such grouping, charting the appearance of stigmatized somatic difference, or racial difference, by imagining a world in which a 'recognizable' set of somatic marks are invested with meaning that is then applied to all those who share those 'recognizable marks? The magnitude of the perceived similarity **between two or more** individuals, from perfectly identical bodies to merely sharing a single somatic trait or feature, is immaterial. Racist logic can rationally tie any **somatic mark to any**

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social meaning, even as complex a meaning as identity. Early modern racialism can perhaps then be **understood in this way**, as the belief in the existence and social significance of reproducible somatic signs that indicate indelible differences between groups of people.

The real weirdness of *The Comedy of Errors* is not in the presence and interaction of doppehgänger. While the appearance of twins, especially dressed alike, on the early modern stage may have been spectacular, it is not multiple birth that is uncanny; rather it is the fact that multiple birth is not **necessary for us to conflate** two or more human beings. The production of twins as two separate subjects who share the same physical features, but whose identities are distinct does not rely upon the fact of their confirmed consecutive parturition (the fact of their having issued, one at a time, **from a womb**). Instead, the production of two distinct subjectivities relies upon the general agreement of the larger community that their shared physical features will not share the same meanings, that they will not suffer an indelible mark that would detrimentally circumscribe their social status.

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