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SHAKESPEARE'S EXTRAVAGANCY

Margaret TUDEAU-CLAYTON

Taking as my starting point an exchange in *The Merchant of Venice* between the Venetian master Lorenzo and the servant-clown Launcelot Gobbo I consider the symbolic economy of Shakespeare's linguistic "extravagancy", including his use of the word itself, in *Twelfth Night*, where, as a Latinate neologism, it is, like the figure who coins it, a nomadic stranger wandering across national boundaries, exemplifying the economy it names. A non-teleological economy of "language on holiday" (Wittgenstein) Shakespeare's "extravagancy", is self consciously opposed, especially in *The Merchant of Venice* and *Twelfth Night*, to the emergent, protestant, bourgeois linguistic economy of "a plain man in his plain meaning" (Lorenzo) with its attendant ideologies of proper national, as well as individual, identities. To this market economy, in which language is instrumentalised (or, in Shakespeare's lexicon, "propertyed") as a transparent means to the end of proper meaning and exchange, and which requires a stabilisation of values/identities, Shakespeare's "extravagancy", offers the alternative economy of the gift, generating as it does mobile, surplus energy, even as it traverses and undermines proper boundaries. It is, moreover, an economy which, as I show, is assimilated to the economy of what John Calvin calls "la bonté gratuite" of an infinitely extravagant Word.

Prenant comme point du départ un échange ludique, dans The Merchant of Venice, entre le maître vénitien Lorenzo et le serviteur-clown Launcelot Gobbo, j'examine l'économie de ce que j'appelle « Shakespeare's extravagancy » en citant un mot que Shakespeare introduit dans Twelfth Night. En tant que néologisme latin le mot « extravagancy » est, tout comme celui qui le prononce, un étranger nomade qui, en errant, traverse les frontières d'identités nationales et qui illustre l'économie qu'il nomme. Une économie non-téléologique « Shakespeare's extravagancy » s'oppose à l'économie protestante et bourgeoise de « a plain man in his plain meaning » (Lorenzo) avec son idéologie identitaire aussi bien individuelle que nationale. L'économie shakespeareienne est plutôt une économie du don qui produit de l'excès tout en traversant les frontières identitaires. En outre elle est assimilée à l'économie de ce que Jean Calvin appelle « la bonté gratuite » d'une Parole infiniment extravagante.

As *The Merchant of Venice* moves towards the climactic courtroom scene in Act 4 it pauses in Belmont to stage an exchange between the servant-clown Launcelot Gobbo and the temporarily installed Venetian master Lorenzo. Serving no purpose in the plot except to mark the passage of time between Portia's plan to disguise herself as the doctor of law and her arrival at the courtroom, the exchange makes no attempt to conceal or play down its redundancy. On the contrary, it plays it up, notably when the servant-clown insists on swerving from linearity into lateral 'play upon the word' as Lorenzo calls it, until the master, finding himself thwarted even in his immediate practical purpose of having his dinner served,

calls for a stop with, 'I pray thee understand a plain man in his plain meaning'.¹ His barely concealed exasperation has been echoed by critics and editors, who express the same will to the curtailment of Shakespeare's ubiquitous play upon the word, not recognising that they do so because they inhabit the universe of Lorenzo's linguistic ideology, the protestant, bourgeois universe of a plain man in his plain meaning. Destined to prevail by the end of the seventeenth century, as Shakespeare arguably predicts, notably in *Twelfth Night*, the emergence of this universe is consistently opposed by his linguistic practices, especially in the comedies of the 1590s, which exploit precisely the linguistic phenomena which will be singled out by the ideologues at the end of the seventeenth century as the principle obstacles to plainness and transparency — homonymy and synonymy.² Expressed through characteristic linguistic practices, notably neologism and 'mistaking' as well as 'play upon the word', Shakespearean opposition to the emergence of this universe is also staged in emblematic, metalinguistic confrontations, such as that between Lorenzo and Launcelot and, perhaps most strikingly, that between Malvolio and Feste in *Twelfth Night*.

With uncanny prescience Shakespeare creates in Malvolio a figure not only of the emergent linguistic ideology of a plain man in his plain meaning, but also of its attendant interpretative practices, notably in the scene when Malvolio mistakes the authorial origin of the love letter, which has been written by his fellow servant Maria, but which he conjectures is from their mistress Olivia, assuming as he does a transparent relation of written traces to authorial origin: 'these be her very C's her U's and her T's and thus makes she her great P's. It is in

¹ William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. John Russell Brown, repr. (London: Methuen, 1961), III.v.40, 51-52. All citations will be from this edition. What follows is a short version of a full length paper which has been published in *Shakespeare* 1:2 (2005): 136-53 (<http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals>).

² The history of the turn in linguistic ideology from the criterion of 'copia' to the criterion of transparency has of course been documented by linguistic historians such as Manfred Görlach, Silvia Adamson, Norman Blake and Margreta de Grazia, who, however, all stop short of exploring the cultural and socio-political ramifications of this history or of Shakespeare's practices within it.

contempt of question her hand'.³ From our position of superior awareness we are called upon to recognise the perilous naivety of such an assumption — and Malvolio *is* a naive, if wilful, reader — as we are repeatedly by letters, of the epistolary as well as the alphabetical kind, in the Shakespearean corpus. For authorial origin is repeatedly mistaken, or impersonated, as it is by Edmund in *King Lear* as well as by Maria in *Twelfth Night*. The ease with which Gloucester is persuaded by Edmund that the letter 'in his hand' is 'in the hand' of his brother Edgar stands as a salutary reminder of the inevitable drift of the written word from authorial origin, which may, quite simply, be impersonated. And yet, despite such warnings, critics since the eighteenth century have followed Malvolio in his characteristically modern practice of authorial attribution on the unexamined ground of a transparent relation between written forms and authorial origin, nowhere of course more assiduously than in the treatment of the Shakespearean corpus.⁴ Assuming this transparent relation Malvolio proceeds to will the arbitrary opacity of the letters on the page into a transparent 'proper' meaning, that is, a singular essential meaning that belongs to, even as it refers to the singular, private self of Malvolio, the idea of a bounded, closed and singular or 'proper' private self belonging to the ideological universe of a plain man in his plain meaning, as Malvolio's utterance 'Let me enjoy my private' (III.iv.90) signals. Resonant with historical significance this utterance calls for the exclusion of others on which the modern, bourgeois private, 'proper' self is founded.

Exemplifying then the emergent, bourgeois model of the exclusionary private singular self, as well as the linguistic and interpretative practices of a plain man in his plain meaning, the figure of Malvolio has also been taken, more specifically, to caricature

³ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, ed. J. M. Lothian and T. W. Craik, repr. (London: Routledge, 1991), II.v.87-90. All citations will be from this edition.

⁴ For a recent sophisticated example, which recognises 'counterfeiting' without renouncing the project of authorial attribution, or the assumption of transparency between written trace and authorial 'hand', see Brian Vickers, *'Counterfeiting' Shakespeare. Evidence, Authorship and John Ford's Funerall Elegy* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2002).

Shakespeare's principal contemporary critic and rival Ben Jonson.⁵ Promoting throughout his work the linguistic ideology of a plain man in his plain meaning together with the related ideas of a bounded, proper, private self and of proper authorial origin and ownership, Jonson's explicit criticism of Shakespeare consists precisely in an expressed will to curtailment. Glancing perhaps at the figure of Malvolio Jonson records how the actors considered 'malevolent' his response to their praise of Shakespeare's never blotting a line: 'Would he had blotted a thousand'.⁶ He then goes on to reiterate and retrospectively justify this will to curtailment: 'sometimes it was necessary he should be stop'd: ... His wit was in his owne power; would the rule of it had been so too' (p. 584). Clearly Shakespeare was not sufficiently restrained or disciplined for Jonson who, later in these posthumously published notes, generalises the restraint requisite to good writing in terms of money management. At the close of a passage in which he has advised against excessive play or what he calls, significantly enough, 'riot' with figurative language, especially *paronomasies*, or play upon the letter, he sums up with: 'There is a difference between a liberal and a prodigal hand' (p. 623). Sounding rather like Polonius to Laertes Jonson here advocates an economic policy, and policing, of restrained expenditure, which is neatly illustrated by his use of a single metonymy — the hand — for the analogous economies of writing and money management. That Shakespeare's hand tended towards the prodigal for Jonson is more specifically signalled in his portrait of Ovid in *Poetaster*, which alludes to Shakespeare as well as to Marlowe, and which may have provoked, or been provoked by, the caricatural representation of Jonson as Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* (produced, like *Poetaster*, in 1601).⁷ As I have shown elsewhere, *Poetaster* stages an opposition between two economies of text and self fashioning, the economy represented by a

⁵ Principally on account of the allusion to Shakespeare's having given a 'purge' to Jonson, in *The Second Return from Parnassus* (1601-1602); see Ben Jonson, *Poetaster*, ed. Tom King (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 36-38.

⁶ *Ben Jonson*, ed. C. H. Herford, Percy and Evelyn Simpson, 11 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925-52), vol 8, p. 583. Subsequent citations are given in parentheses in the text.

⁷ See Jonson, *Poetaster*, edited by Tom King, 36-38.

'licentious' Ovid standing in contrast and opposition to the economy represented by a 'chaste' Virgil, verbal prodigality being associated, as these epithets indicate, with sexual licence as well as with an open, fluid and protean selfhood.⁸ Sexual, monetary and linguistic economies are indeed mutually implicated throughout Jonson's writing, the privileged shared term being the central, protestant, bourgeois value of temperance, which, in *Poetaster*, is represented by Virgil and his circle.

These mutually implicated economies are also reproduced in Shakespeare's plays. An exchange of play upon the word between Feste and Viola as Cesario in *Twelfth Night*, for instance, is followed by Viola's metalinguistic comment: 'they that dally nicely with words may quickly make them wanton' (III.i.14-15). Play upon the word, technically *equivoque*, is here associated with sexual licence, as it is subsequently associated with the giving of money by Feste, who represents this giving in terms of breeding, as I'll consider shortly. The epithet 'prodigal' is, moreover, explicitly used by Shakespeare of the wit which expresses itself in excessive linguistic display, namely the wit of Berowne in *Love's Labour's Lost*.⁹ An authorial figure, as others have remarked, Berowne's 'reformation' (v.ii.857) to 'honest plain words' (v.ii.747) at the close of the play might suggest authorial self casting as an Elizabethan prodigal¹⁰ and a self addressed call for a change of linguistic policy — a reformation to the protestant, bourgeois, linguistic ideology of a plain man in his plain meaning. More interesting, however, are what we might call pre-reformation or unreformed instances when, as we shall see, the intemperance of linguistic dallying is linked to the biblical paradigm of the prodigal son in order rather to implicate another order or economy — what John Calvin calls 'la bonté gratuite' of an infinitely prodigal divine Word.

Needless to say this has been ignored by critics, who have continued to express a will to curtail Shakespeare's verbal prodigality

⁸ Margaret Tudeau-Clayton, *Jonson, Shakespeare and early modern Virgil* (Cambridge: C.U.P. 1998), 150-76.

⁹ William Shakespeare, *Love's Labour's Lost*, ed. H. R. Woudhuysen (London: Routledge, 1998), v.ii.64. All citations will be from this edition.

¹⁰ Cf. Richard Helgerson, *The Elizabethan Prodigious* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1976).

or intemperance, which they have continued to associate with unbridled sexuality, as in Samuel Johnson's well known lines on the quibble as Shakespeare's fatal Cleopatra for which he sacrificed not only 'reason' and 'truth' but 'propriety', that cardinal, social manifestation of temperance dear to Malvolio.¹¹ This tends to confirm, of course, that what is at stake in such intemperate linguistic practices is precisely resistance to the emergent bourgeois order.¹² Still more revealing perhaps, though not so frequently cited, is Johnson's opening representation of the quibble as to Shakespeare, 'what luminous vapours are to the traveller', 'sure to lead him' 'out of the way,' 'with a malignant power over his mind'. What this figure betrays is an anxiety about the non-rational, non-linear character of linguistic practices which entail a loss of intellectual control, calling as they do for a yielding up of oneself to the arbitrary directions, or distractions, of an autonomous, impersonal immanent symbolic order and the attendant sense of the strange or uncanny. It is, in short, the anxiety of losing one's way and, perhaps, one's mind.

This anxiety is more buried in the still more stringent criticism of Park Honan, who, in his recent biography, takes Shakespeare sternly to task for being 'too attracted by ringing changes on words, by varying, amplifying and patterning' and for being 'enamoured of [...] verbal excesses', especially in what he calls the 'apprentice work', citing one of the very instances, in *The Two Gentleman of Verona*, where digressive verbal play is associated with the biblical narrative paradigm, as I'll discuss in a moment.¹³ Biography is summoned here in order at once to conceal and endorse the will to curtailment; the phrase 'apprentice work', in particular, has an insidiously performative thrust. It is a salutary example of how biographical criticism may be used very effectively to avoid reading, as, Jacques Derrida reminds us, it was

¹¹ *Johnson on Shakespeare*, ed. Arthur Sherbo, 2 vols (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1968), I, 74.

¹² M. M. Mahood opens her now classic study of Shakespeare's word play with the comment that puns 'were repugnant to Johnson because a linguistic revolution as far-reaching in its effects as the Great Rebellion separated his verbal habits from Shakespeare's'. M. M. Mahood, *Shakespeare's Wordplay*, repr. (London: Methuen, 1965), 9-10. The implications of this are not developed further in what follows.

¹³ Park Honan, *Shakespeare. A Life* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1998), 55.

used in the case of Plato's *Phaedrus*, long dismissed as a work either of 'juvenile quality' or of 'senile impotence'.¹⁴ Similarly Honan's category of 'apprentice work' justifies avoiding what Derrida describes as the risk of reading, a risk which systematic, totalising approaches would seem, like biographical criticism, *designed* to avoid.

What then is the risk here? The risk, I want to propose, of Shakespeare's 'extravagancy', which is not, as one might imagine, simply synonymous with prodigality. Let me start with the first dictionary entry to feature the word, Randle Cotgrave's gloss to 'extravagance' in his French-English dictionary published in 1611, a decade, that is, after Shakespeare's self conscious introduction of 'extravagancy' as a Latinate neologism in *Twelfth Night*.¹⁵ Beginning his gloss to 'extravagance' with 'extravagancie' Cotgrave then goes on to give what is effectively a gloss to this relatively new and unfamiliar English word as well as to the French word: 'an idle digression; a giddy, unsteadie, fantastical action'. Competing for semantic territory with 'extravagation' (which Cotgrave also includes) 'extravagancy' will only acquire the sense of 'excessive prodigality or wastefulness in expenditure, household management etc.'¹⁶ in the eighteenth century when it is used interchangeably with 'extravagance', which will then replace it. Itself semantically giddy or unsteady the future semantic direction or sense of 'extravagancy' is indicated in Cotgrave's gloss, notably by the adjective 'idle', which carries the idea of redundancy or waste, as it does when it is used by Samuel Johnson of the 'idle conceit', or quibble, which leads Shakespeare 'out of his way', in the passage I quoted earlier which effectively reproduces Cotgrave's definition of 'extravagancy.' Consider too the gloss to 'extravagantes' in Robert Minsheu's Spanish-English dictionary of 1599 — 'such as not

¹⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson, 2nd ed. (London: The Athlone Press, 1993), 66-67.

¹⁵ 'extravagancy' is included in the list given in Bryan A. Garner, 'Shakespeare's Latinate Neologisms', *Shakespeare Studies* 15 (1982): 149-170 (p.161). For all early modern dictionary citations I have consulted: Early Modern English Dictionaries Database. Comp. Ian Lancashire. Toronto: CHASS, 1996-99. URL: <http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/english/emedd/emedd.html>

¹⁶ *OED* s.v. extravagance 4.

follow common order' — with its suggestion of a violation of shared, normative, 'proper' limits or bounds.

Shakespeare himself stands to be thus categorised when in the linguistic holiday that is *Twelfth Night* he turns aside or swerves from the common order of the vernacular to introduce the neologism 'extravagancy': 'My determinate voyage' declares Viola's twin brother Sebastian to his enamoured companion Antonio, 'is mere extravagancy' (II.i.10-11). An erring or wandering stranger in Illyria Antonio represents his condition with a word which not only signifies but also illustrates this condition, as a foreign neologism without determinate semantic boundaries, wandering or erring in a symbolic order it is bound to alter. This is indeed what the purist Richard Verstegan complains such words will do that are imported from what he describes as languages 'strange and extravagant' to English (*i.e.* Latin and romance languages).¹⁷ Underscoring the self-reflexive character of Shakespeare's neologism, Verstegan's pair of epithets 'strange and extravagant' suggests too how extravagancy might be taken as the defining condition of the stranger. This is underscored by Shakespeare's own use of the epithet 'extravagant', first, of the ghost in *Hamlet*, who is described as 'an extravagant and erring spirit', and later 'as a stranger' who should be given 'welcome', then of the archetypal stranger Othello, who is described as 'an extravagant and wheeling stranger / Of here and everywhere'.¹⁸

In *Twelfth Night* the extravagancy of the stranger Antonio inaugurates a turn or second movement in the plot which will untangle the 'knot' (II.ii.40), as it is called, of the first movement, inaugurated by his twin sister, Viola, likewise an extravagant stranger in Illyria. As Stephen Greenblatt has argued, the shape of the play's plot might best be described as a swerve, a turn from linearity, which, he suggests, produces a release of erotic pleasure.¹⁹ Motivated by the extravagancy

¹⁷ Quoted in J. L. Moore, *Tudor-Stuart Views on the growth status and destiny of the English Language* (Tübingen: Dr. Martin Sändig, 1973), 126.

¹⁸ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins (London and New York: Methuen, 1982), I.i.159, I.v.173; *Othello*, ed. E. A. J. Honigsmann (Walton on Thames: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1997), I.i.134-35.

¹⁹ Stephen Greenblatt, 'Fiction and friction' in *Shakespearean Negotiations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 66-93 (68-73).

of strangers, who generate not only movement but *desire*, the swerves at the level of plot are locally reiterated or re-presented by linguistic practices: on the one hand, the neologism, as in the exemplary instance of 'extravagancy', and, on the other, play upon the word or *equivoque*, as in the instances in the exchange between Viola as Cesario, and Feste, the self styled 'corrupter of words' (III.i.37), who stands in contrast and in opposition to the figure of Malvolio. Not only does the exchange exemplify *equivoque* but, as I pointed out, it represents what it does through Viola's metalinguistic comment: 'they that dally nicely with words may quickly make them wanton' (III.i.14-15). To dally is to play or flirt, and to delay in play, to suspend linearity and closure in an idle digression or extravagancy which in John Hollander's felicitous phrase, causes language 'to heat up erotically'²⁰, an erotic heating up which is likewise generated by Viola as Cesario who, as two strangers in one, might well be described as an extravagant *equivoque*, or equivocal extravagancy.

Where then do these extravagant equivoques and equivocal extravagancies take us? At the very least away from the linguistic economy of a plain man in his plain meaning, an economy in which language is instrumentalised, or, in Shakespeare's lexicon, 'propertied', as a transparent means to the ends of proper, stable meaning and the definition of the proper boundaries of national as well as individual identity. Language, we might say, recalling Wittgenstein, is rather 'on holiday'²¹, which is not merely not working, but doing something else. Wandering across and blurring 'proper' boundaries, whether between English and not-English, or between literal and non-literal senses, the linguistic practices of the neologism and *equivoque* tend to the production of a mobile, impure, strange and extravagant hybrid vernacular, in short, what the purists, in their condemnations of the practice of neologism, call a gallimaufry, hodge-podge or mingle-

²⁰ John Hollander, 'Dallying nicely with words' in Nigel Fabb, Derek Attridge et al (eds), *The linguistics of writing: arguments between language and literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 123-134 (124).

²¹ See Christopher Norris, 'Post-structuralist Shakespeare: text and ideology', in John Drakakis (ed.) *Alternative Shakespeares* (London and New York; Methuen, 1985), 47-66 (citation on p. 50).

mangle, three virtually synonymous figures which are used interchangeably to represent the 'corrupt' hybrid vernacular produced by the practice.²² The figure of the gallimaufry is, in addition, used of generically mixed cultural forms, as in 'a tragye-call comedye or gallymalfreye' (the first instance of the word recorded in the *OED*) – a mixing of 'high' and 'low' generic forms which Philip Sidney famously condemns as 'mingling Kings and Clownes'.²³ As I have shown elsewhere, the figure of the gallimaufry is explicitly invoked in that notorious generic hodge-podge *The Merry Wives of Windsor* where Falstaff, who might be described as an embodiment of extravagancy in both the more and less modern senses of the word, and who is recurrently associated with the figure of the prodigal son, is said to love the gallimaufry.²⁴ Still more relevant here, however, is John Lyly's prologue to *Midas* (1592), in which he represents the ubiquitous practice of generically mixed cultural forms in terms of the culinary base of the figure of the gallimaufry – 'what heretofore hath been served in severall dishes for a feaste, is now minced [...] for a Gallimaufrey' – and then proceeds to represent the instance which is to follow as 'a mingle-mangle', giving as his excuse that 'the whole worlde is become a hodge-podge'.²⁵ Self-consciously illustrating the linguistic mix of English with the three figures used interchangeably to represent it, Lyly invites spectators to recognise this hybrid mix of both linguistic and cultural forms as at once a reflection of, and response to the heterogeneous character of the 'world' as of its epitome London, which he represents as a mix of national as well as class communities – a tendentious as well as topical representation in the early 1590s when hostility towards foreign immigrant communities was running

²² For instances, see Margaret Tudeau-Clayton, 'Richard Carew, William Shakespeare and the politics of translating Virgil in early modern England', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 5:4 (1999), 507-27 (524-26).

²³ Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry* in *Elizabethan Critical Essays* edited by G. G. Smith, 2 vols, repr. (London: O.U.P., 1963), I, 148-207 (199).

²⁴ Tudeau-Clayton, "Richard Carew, William Shakespeare and the politics of translating Virgil", 524-27.

²⁵ 'The Prologue in Paules', *Midas* in *The Complete Works of John Lyly*, ed. R. Warwick Bond, repr. 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), III, 105-162 (115) (u/v i/j spellings normalised).

high.²⁶ Consider too Edmund Spenser's representation of the mixed character of particular nations as of the world in what Ania Loomba has rightly described as 'a remarkable passage' in *A View of the State of Ireland* (written ?1596; published 1633) where the argument is made not only that every nation is 'mingled and compounded with others' but that 'to mingle nations so remote' was actually purposed by God in order to 'make [...] one blood and kindred of all people'.²⁷ What emerges from these overlapping discourses on 'mingling' is that one of the stakes of Shakespeare's linguistic extravagancy, as of his habitual practice of generic mixing, is an idea of community. Against the implied exclusionary nationalism of the protestant, bourgeois linguistic ideology of 'proper' 'plain' English, Shakespeare's linguistic extravagancy, especially his practice of foreign neologisms, implies rather a mobile, accommodating and heterogeneous community of 'strangers' — which is, incidentally, how Philip Sidney describes foreign neologisms²⁸ — a community of extravagant, or nomadic, strangers which traverses national boundaries, like Spenser's idea of the kingdom of God as a unity of heterogeneous multiplicity.

In addition, the extravagancy of play upon the word tends, in its non teleological, lateral movement, to subvert the 'proper' hierarchy of meaning over form, postponing meaning for shared pleasure in the arbitrary play of relations of sound and their relation to the body — a relation foregrounded in the discourse of certain figures such as the tellingly named Sir Toby Belch. For Freud (in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*) pleasure in the play of sounds, and in their relation to the body, is one of the pleasures of childhood repressed with the development into adulthood. From this perspective the extravagancies

²⁶ 'Enquire at Ordinaries, there must be sallets for the Italian; picktooths for the Spaniard; pots for the German; porridge for the Englishman. At our exercises, Souldiers call for Tragedies, [...] Courtiers for Commedies, [...] Countriemen for Pastoralles, [...] Trafficke and travell hath woven the nature of all Nations into ours, and made this land like Arras, full of devise, which was Broade-cloth, full of workemanshippe.'

²⁷ Quoted in Ania Loomba, 'Outsiders in Shakespeare's England' in Margreta de Grazia and Stanley Wells (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 147-166 (163).

²⁸ Sidney condemns the practice of 'far fette words' which 'must seeme straungers to any poor Englishman', Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry* in Smith, *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, I, 202.

of play upon the word — language on holiday — may be viewed as affording occasions for the recovery and release of repressed bodily pleasure as, more generally, Shakespeare's comedies have been viewed, from a psychoanalytic perspective, as affording occasions for the release and management of repressed desires and fears. The neologism too is often arguably symptomatic of a pressure from 'below', which it serves to release. This may be a pressure from affect — as in Othello's 'exsufflicate' (III.iii.185), Orsino's 'rubious' (I.iv.32) and, arguably, Sebastian's 'extravagancy' — or from figures who, in the ideological system of analogical relations, occupy the corresponding place 'below' — figures such as Bottom, Dogberry and Mistress Quickly, although this has been obscured by editors, who have invariably categorised the linguistic innovations of these figures as 'mistakes' (or, anachronistically, malapropisms). An ideologically motivated form of linguistic apartheid, which assigns neologism (or poetic invention) to the high-born (and Shakespeare) and 'mistakes' to the low-born (and not-Shakespeare), this practice has only recently come under scrutiny, notably in the work of the literary linguists Sylvia Adamson and Norman Blake, who has suggested that malapropism may be, finally, 'only a class distinction'.²⁹

Traversing the boundaries of 'proper' English, whether through the introduction of strange and extravagant words of indeterminate value, or through the charging of existing words with an indeterminate, supplementary value, the linguistic extravagancies of neologism, 'mistaking' and play upon the word tend, then, to the release of energy. Mobile and polymorphous, this energy may translate into erotic heat as Greenblatt and Hollander suggest it does. It may too translate into laughter, which Freud of course explains, in terms of his model of psychic economy, as a release of the surplus energy generated by a saving in the work of repression and inhibition — a distinctly bourgeois model, incidentally, in its assumption of surplus as a function of

²⁹ Norman Blake, 'Shakespeare's Language: Past Achievements and Future Directions' in Pérez Guerra, Javier M. Teresa Caneda Cabrera, Marta Dahlgren, Teresa Fernandez-Colmeiro and Edouardo J. Varela (eds), *Proceedings of the XIXth International Conference of AEDEAN*. (Vigo: Universidade de Vigo. 1996), 21-35 (27). See too Sylvia Adamson, 'Literary Language' in *The Cambridge History of the English Language*, ed. Roger Lass, 4 vols (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1999), III, 539-95 (575-76).

saving, rather than of spending, which is, arguably, what Shakespearean extravagancy implies. In the plays themselves the energy generated by this extravagancy is recurrently translated into the tangible form of money as, for instance, in the exchange between Viola as Cesario and Feste, who, when he suggests to Viola that her first gift of a coin might breed with a second, generates by this very figure the surplus energy that it represents as erotic heat and that is then translated into the money for which it appeals. In an earlier instance, Feste responds to Andrew Aguecheek's enquiry as to whether he received the sixpence Aguecheek sent him in payment for his fooling: 'I did impetico thy gratillity' (II.iii.27). For a plain man in his plain meaning 'I did' or simply 'yes' would suffice here. Feste, the corrupter of words, retorts rather with the extravagancy of two coinages, both of which violate the proper order of the vernacular, whether we classify them as neologisms, or as nonsense words, which is what the *OED* and editors have preferred to do, as zealous in their Malvolian will to fix proper linguistic boundaries as Feste is to undo them.

Among the various words that Feste's 'gratillity' summons into its orbit is 'gratuity', a word which invites us to think of the mobile, polymorphous energy generated by these linguistic practices, circulating now as money, now as erotic heat, now as laughter, in terms of the economy of the gift, especially as this was elaborated in the discourses of reformation theology. As Nathalie Zemon Davis has shown, the reciprocity of the Catholic model was replaced in these discourses by an ideal of unstinted giving, an absolute gratuity modelled on what John Calvin calls 'la bonté gratuite' of God.³⁰ This infinite and unconditional goodness of God's mercy, or *caritas*, is illustrated nowhere more strikingly than in the parables of the lost sheep and the prodigal son, the juxtaposed analogous parables from chapter 15 of Luke's gospel, which are invoked respectively at the first appearances of the two linguistically extravagant servant clowns in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Speed and Launce.³¹ On his first

³⁰ Nathalie Zemon Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth Century France* (Oxford: O.U.P., 2000), especially 167-208 (citation from Calvin's *Institution de la Religion Chrestienne*, 191).

³¹ Citations from William Shakespeare, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* ed. Clifford Leech, repr. (London: Methuen, 1984).

appearance in Act II Launce, whose defining verbal trait or 'vice' is said by Speed to be to 'mistake the word' (III.i.280), announces that he has 'received [his] proportion, like the prodigious son', (II.iii.3) performing a verbal wandering or error from the 'proper' linguistic order which mimics the erring or wandering of the figure of the prodigal son, even as it prefigures the wandering of Launce's master, the shape shifter Proteus.³² Similarly, at his entrance in Act I, Speed inaugurates the first of the play's recurrent idle digressions or extravagancies — precisely the one disapprovingly cited by Park Honan — with a lateral, verbal wandering generated by the arbitrary phonetic proximity of ship and sheep. Hearing from Proteus that his master Valentine has left 'to embark for Milan' (I.i.71) he comments, 'Twenty to one, then he is shipp'd already, /And I have play'd the sheep in losing him' (I. 72-73). 'Indeed' replies Proteus 'a sheep doth very often stray, /And if the shepherd be awhile away.' (I. 74-75). This talk of straying sheep has a metalinguistic dimension, a straying or extravagancy being performed at the linguistic level, even as it alludes to the parable of the lost sheep, an allusion which would have been particularly prominent to Elizabethan spectators, habituated as they were to the opening words of the prayer book general confession: 'we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep.' Like Launce performing a verbal wandering which mimics the wandering of the biblical figure to which he alludes, Speed then engages with Proteus, the shape shifter, in an extended extravagancy, in which the proper hierarchy of master over servant is temporarily suspended together with proper linearity and the proper hierarchy of meaning over form. Exchanging *equivoques* each gives voice to the arbitrary relations of the immanent autonomous order of language by which we may say (recalling Samuel Johnson) they are carried away. The allusion at the opening of the exchange, like the allusion to the parable of the prodigal son later, assimilates the energy which is generated by the extravagancy and which is translated into

³² Like the discourse of his near relative Launcelot Gobbo in *Merchant*, the discourse of Launce, including this instance, illustrates the difficulty of drawing the distinction between conscious word play, and unconscious mistaking. Like, and with the distinction between mistaking and neologising discussed above, editorial category decisions may be ideologically motivated.

monetary form at its close, to the infinite, undiminishing energy of an infinitely prodigal divine Word, summoned into expression by turns or extravagancies from the 'proper' order of the law.

For Robert Olivetan, another Protestant (Swiss-based) theologian cited by Davis the gift of the divine Word does not impoverish givers since, as Davis paraphrases, it is endlessly fertile and buoyed by grace, a sacred economy in which, as she comments, there is no property.³³ It is a secular version of this economy of 'unpropertied', freely circulating, undiminishing and generative energy — the economy of grace or *caritas* — that, I want to suggest finally, is invoked by Shakespeare's extravagancy.³⁴ It is an economy in opposition and resistance to the economy of the market, which requires rather a stabilisation of verbal as well as monetary values, and which is an economy, we might say, of *castitas*, or temperance, rather than *caritas*. As I mentioned earlier, temperance is the key shared term in the mutually implied orders or economies of protestant bourgeois ideology. Here it stands in striking contradiction with the theological ideal of 'la bonté gratuite'. Indeed, if the ideal called for unstinted and unhindered giving, the examples of protestant *practice* from Calvin's city of Geneva which Davis mentions, illustrate rather temperance, consisting as they do in the curtailment of giving as of spending.³⁵ Far from circulating freely and unstintingly, wealth, whether verbal or monetary, was rather to be regulated, stabilised, saved and stored — hence the contemporaneous development of banking and lexicography (and, in England at least, the first dictionaries were very largely the work of committed Protestants or Puritans). Shakespeare's extravagancy thus serves to reinstate the theological ideal, the gift economy of *caritas*, in resistance and opposition to the market economy of *castitas*, the economy *practiced* by the temperate, protestant bourgeois classes, whether of Geneva, London or Shakespeare's Venice. As I have shown, these respective economies imply related ideas of community and the self: on the one hand, the

³³ Davis, *The Gift*, 187-88.

³⁴ The occasion of *Twelfth Night* is of course the occasion of gift-giving as well as of epiphany.

³⁵ Davis, *The Gift*, 200-201.

stable, bounded, homogeneous unity of a 'proper' nation, and self, founded on the exclusion or repression of heterogeneity, the stranger within or without; on the other, the mobile and inclusive, heterogeneous mingle-mangle of an open, protean self and a transnational, shifting community of nomadic strangers.

As I mentioned earlier, foreign neologisms are actually described by Philip Sidney as 'strangers' to the Englishman. This is only a more striking instance of the commonplace practice of applying the vocabulary of citizenship to the status of words (as 'aliens', 'denizens' etc). Following the Latins this practice was adopted throughout Renaissance Europe, including England, and continues even today.³⁶ It illustrates not only the mutual implication of myths of linguistic and national purity, but also, more precisely, how the imagined totalities of nation — the English — and the vernacular — English — are homologous, constructed according to a common logic of inclusion/exclusion through the drawing of more or less arbitrarily determined categorial boundaries of the 'pure' and 'proper.' Ultimately it is this logic —and its immediate socio-political as well as cultural implications — that Shakespeare's extravagancy resists and opposes.

While the figure of Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* illustrates, as I have indicated, the exclusionary model of the homogeneous, 'proper' private self, the Christian elite of Venice and Belmont in *The Merchant of Venice* illustrates equally clearly the exclusionary model of community. As such it furnishes at once a reflection of, and critical comment on the pious, protestant and puritan citizens of London, who were as hostile towards foreign immigrant communities as they were towards foreign neologisms, ironically enough, given that these communities were made up of protestant refugees fleeing persecution in France, Italy and the Netherlands.³⁷ In *Merchant* the closed, homogeneous and exclusive Christian elite of bourgeois citizens, who preach the economy of *caritas*, but who practice the economy of

³⁶ See Frederick M. Renner, *Interpretatio: Language and Translation from Cicero to Tytler* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1989), 56-58.

³⁷ I am not alone in seeing *Merchant* as a response to the issue of the 'immigrant' problem in London. See, for one instance, Andrew Tretiak, 'The Merchant of Venice and the "alien" question', *Review of English Studies* 5 (1929): 402-409.

castitas, expel the stranger Shylock as energetically as the advocates of proper, plain English worked to ‘purge’ the vernacular of foreign neologisms.³⁸ This is perhaps one of the reasons that the confrontation between Lorenzo and Launcelot — the confrontation between the universe of a plain man in his plain meaning and the extravagancy of play upon the word — is staged immediately prior to the courtroom scene with its attempt at the coercion of *caritas* and subsequent violent exclusion of the stranger Shylock.

To close I would like to return to the passage from Ben Jonson’s posthumously published notes, which I cited earlier to illustrate his will to the curtailment of Shakespearean linguistic practices, a will to curtailment which I suggested echoes Malvolio’s relation to Feste as well as Lorenzo’s relation to Launcelot and which has in turn been echoed by critics from the eighteenth century on. For, in order, as he writes, to justify his own candour in making his criticism, Jonson proceeds to acknowledge his affection for Shakespeare — ‘I lov’d the man’ — as well as the personal qualities which inspired such affection: ‘Hee was (indeed) honest and of an open and free nature’ (p. 584). Though fully conscious of my own drift towards Malvolian naivety here I am struck by the resonances of the two epithets ‘open’ and ‘free’ with what I have been saying. While ‘open’ is, I hope, self evidently resonant with what I have been saying about the fluid model of selfhood implied by Shakespeare’s linguistic extravagancy, the epithet ‘free’ needs to be understood in its pre-modern sense of a disinterested generosity or largesse, ‘une bonté’ we might say ‘gratuite’, which generates excess by spending and not by saving, as in the bourgeois economy of temperance. The epithet ‘free’ does indeed invoke a universe aristocratic and pre-modern rather than modern and bourgeois. More specifically, as Katherine Duncan-Jones has recently reminded us, Jonson’s description of Shakespeare echoes Iago’s description of Othello as, ‘of a free and open nature / That thinks men honest that but

³⁸ One such ‘purge’ is staged in a spectacularly literal fashion by Ben Jonson in the climactic scene of judgment in *Poetaster*; see Tudeau-Clayton, *Jonson, Shakespeare and early modern Virgil*, 41-42, 175-76.

seem to be so' (1.iii.398-99).³⁹ For Duncan-Jones, however, this suggests merely Jonson's retrospective view of Shakespeare as gullible. She does not explore the implications either of Jonson's retrospective self-casting as Iago or of his casting of Shakespeare as Othello. Setting aside for the moment the admittedly intriguing implications with regard to Jonson's self-perception in his relation to Shakespeare, I want to suggest that his casting of Shakespeare as Othello may bear witness to his recognition of a kinship or, at least, sympathy towards the 'extravagant stranger' on the part of his rival and friend, who, as an internal immigrant and outsider to the community of 'free' citizens of London, himself belonged to the City authorities' administrative category of 'Englishman foreign', unlike Jonson, and indeed unlike so many of his fellow dramatists.⁴⁰ Shakespeare's extravagancy may then be taken to describe not only a mode of linguistic practice but also the historically specific condition of the Englishman foreign in Elizabethan London whose dramas of wandering, estrangement and discovery are doubled by what we might call (following John Hollander) romances of 'extravagant' or 'peregrinate' words, to cite another self-conscious Shakespearean neologism from *Love's Labour's Lost*.⁴¹ It may be taken too to describe the condition of the actor, general as well as specific. For, if the actor always voluntarily casts herself or himself as an extravagant stranger, taking on personae which traverse their own 'proper' boundaries of nation, class and gender, the Elizabethan actor knew himself, specifically, as a vagrant, since it was as vagrants that the actors were officially categorised by the administrative authorities. And 'vagrant' is of course, cognate with one of the root terms of

³⁹ Katherine Duncan-Jones, *Ungentle Shakespeare. Scenes from his Life* (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2001), 244.

⁴⁰ For this administrative category, which was not always consistently used, see Steve Rappaport, *Worlds within Worlds: structures of life in sixteenth century London* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1989), 42. Several scholars have recently noted that Shakespeare belonged to this category of 'foreign' Englishmen, though without considering its implications: see James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 181; Loomba, 'Outsiders', 154.

⁴¹ The word 'peregrinate' is coined by the schoolmaster Holofernes in *Love's Labour's Lost* (v.i.13): addicted to foreign neologisms he is self-described as of a 'foolish, extravagant spirit' (iv.ii.66) (emphasis mine). For the idea of the 'romance' of language see Hollander, 'Dallying nicely with words', 123-24.

extravagancy, deriving as they both do from the Latin verb *vagari* (to wander).

Finally, it is surely no coincidence that this actor-dramatist's extravagancy has produced so much wealth, verbal as well as monetary. His writing undoubtedly carries a generative force which, despite his posthumous status as national poet, tends to break down national boundaries, bringing together communities of more and less extravagant strangers, such as were assembled in Paris. Let us not forget how many of us owe their sixpence a day — the sum hoped for by the artisan actors in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* — to Shakespeare's extravagancy.

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