

EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



‘Urging helpless patience’: Domesticity, Stoicism, and Setting in *The Comedy of Errors*

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The Comedy of Errors is a play in which violent passions threaten domestic order. Shakespeare adapts his plot from Plautus’s *Menaechmi*, but far from being a mirror image of the source, Shakespeare’s departures from the Roman farce are what reveal his own play’s affective depth. Reducing the role of the Courtesan in favour of focalizing the citizen twin’s previously unnamed wife, Shakespeare expands the farce into a far deeper domestic drama of jealousy and false appearances. The affective register of this play unites Galenic medical theory and Christian Stoicism, an early modern reshaping of the classical philosophy to reinforce Christian values. These ideologies meet in Shakespeare’s Ephesus, relocated from Plautus’s Epidamnium to draw on the setting’s associations with Paul’s *Letter to the Ephesians*. Shakespeare’s original character of the Abbess serves as the play’s voice for Paul’s message of domestic unity through Christian Stoicism, preaching that a wife can overcome feelings of insecurity and isolation through patience and acceptance of her passive social role. By exploring how these points of adaptation gesture towards looking inward to find the means of overcoming violent passions, I uncover a deeper affective register underpinning Shakespeare’s early farce.

Humanism recovered Stoicism for use in early modern England. The classical philosophy conceives of the passions as ‘error’ on account of the affective energy man directs towards ideas or actions that he is powerless to change.¹ In this play, characters ‘err’ by allowing themselves to be overcome by violent passions in the face of adversity. Gilles D. Monsarrat, author of *Light from the Porch: Stoicism and English Renaissance Literature*,

¹ Gilles D. Monsarrat, *Light from the Porch: Stoicism and English Renaissance Literature*. Collection Etudes Anglaises, 86 (Paris: Didier Erudition, 1984), p. 16.

reinforces this spirit of resignation, stating: ‘Stoicism is a philosophy for adversity, or rather for happiness in spite of adversity’.² The philosophy privileges reason over passion, advocating for a discipline in which the man controls the passions, rather than the passions controlling the man. Shakespeare was introduced to Stoicism in grammar school, learning oration and rhetoric while studying Latin sources of this philosophy, including Cicero and Seneca. The school of thought became all the more popular with Flemish humanist Justus Lipsius’s widely-read *On Constancy in Times of Public Calamity*, which was published in Latin in 1584 and translated into English by Sir John Stradling in 1595. Founding the school of ‘Neo-Stoicism’, the tract was popular on account of its synthesis of Stoic morality with Christianity, in which the more pagan aspects of the classical philosophy, such as encouraging empowerment over death through suicide, were reduced.³ Through the humanist retrieval of Stoicism epitomized by Lipsius, Christ’s passion came to signify the ‘supreme instance of his patience’, rendering patient resignation an ‘eminently Christian virtue’.⁴ Rather than stemming from pride over adversity as in the classical philosophy, Neo-Stoicism finds its greatest weapon in faith in Christ’s God-given purpose to endure and overcome suffering.

Problematically, both classical Stoicism and continental Neo-Stoicism were philosophies written by men and addressed to men. In *On Anger*, Seneca reveals this gender bias:

Bad temper achieves nothing imposing or handsome. On the contrary, I think it the mark of a morbid unhappy mind, aware of its own weakness, to be constantly aching, like sore sick bodies which groan at the slightest touch. Anger is thus a particularly feminine and childish failing. ‘But men, too, get it.’ Yes. For men, too, can have feminine and childish characters. (1.20.3)⁵

This philosophy characterizes the “feminine” as easily overwhelmed by violent passions and suggests the male sex’s unique ability to overcome these ostensibly baser human impulses. Neo-Stoicism, too, concerns itself with man’s social and political role, not giving advice to women but rather using women as examples of being dominated by the passions:

² Ibid., p. 3.

³ Isabel Rivers, *Classical and Christian Ideals in English Renaissance Poetry: A students’ guide*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 46.

⁴ Monsarrat, p. 89.

⁵ Seneca, ‘On Anger’, in *Moral and Political Essays: Seneca*, ed. by John M. Cooper and J. F. Procopé (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). pp. 1–116 (p. 39).

He said not that we should weep and lament, but die for our country. For we must so far forth be good commonwealth men, that we also retain the person of good and honest men, which we lose if we take to childish and womanlike lamentations.

(1.11)⁶

In England, however, Neo-Stoic thinkers began to envision how to apply Stoic principles to the domestic environment. In 1600, Mary Sidney published her translation of Philippe De Mornay's *Discourse of Life and Death*, and one of England's most significant Neo-Stoic works was Fulke Greville's tract *Letter to an Honourable Lady*, which was printed in 1633 and explicitly addressed to an ill-treated wife. Yvonne Bruce explores how early modern writers cultivated a trope around Marc Antony's abandoned wife Octavia in order to support the notion of female constancy as a form of Stoicism. More than embodying feminine Stoic ideal, Bruce observes how the Octavia figure represents the vexed relationship between empowerment and patient resignation, and how this trope 'is also used to explore the inadequacies of Christian Stoicism's hybrid morality presented to women, as this hybrid was popularly understood to exist in late Elizabethan England'.⁷

By drawing on Paul's *Letter to the Ephesians* to envision a uniquely domestic form of Christian Stoicism, Shakespeare was involved in this shift towards applying Stoic principles to the unique trials of women. Rather than adopting the terminology of Lipsius's male-centric Neo-Stoic movement, I will use the expression 'Christian Stoicism' to be more inclusive of Paul's ideals that share affective resonances with the Stoic and Neo-Stoic writers, but are directed towards subservient members of the domestic sphere, including women. While it is not worthwhile to lay much store in the 'old myth that Seneca had been converted to Christianity by Paul',⁸ it is necessary to consider how Paul's *Letter* reflects Stoic philosophy through its message of 'spiritual self-sufficiency'⁹ within the 'household of God' (*Ephesians* 2.19).¹⁰ This message makes Stoic values applicable to the suffering of wives and their domestic concerns, depicting domestic unity as a microcosm of divine

⁶ Justus Lipsius. *On Constancy*, trans. by Sir John Stradling, ed. by John Sellars (Bristol: Phoenix Press, 2006), p. 51.

⁷ Yvonne Bruce, "'That which marreth all": Constancy and Gender in *The Virtuous Octavia*', *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England*, 22 (2009), 42–59 (p. 42).

⁸ Runar M. Thorsteinsson, *Roman Christianity and Roman Stoicism: A Comparative Study of Ancient Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 3.

⁹ Marta Straznicky, "'Profane Stoical Paradoxes": *The Tragedie of Mariam* and Sidnean Closet Drama', *English Literary Renaissance*, 24.1 (1994), 104–34 (pp. 109–10).

¹⁰ 'Ye are no more strangers and foreigners: but citizens with the Saints, and of the household of God'. St Paul, 'Letter to the Ephesians', *The Geneva Bible*, A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969). All biblical references are to this edition. Spelling modernised by author.

order. The moments of domestic disunity in this play are centered on a wife who, overcome by an excess of passions, acts in complete opposition to the rules for domestic unity that Paul outlines in his *Letter*. Adriana's hope for domestic harmony stems from the Abbess's example of Christian Stoic self-mastery through patience and passivity.

This study builds on a small but rich body of criticism on *The Comedy of Errors* and is grounded in a departure from Wolfgang Riehle's claim that the play is 'less Christian in tone than is generally assumed'.¹¹ The Christian elements, he states, 'rather than being essential, have the primary function of providing colour and a touch of realism; they make the audience feel that they are in a familiar world'.¹² The 'familiar world' of this play is the domestic sphere thrown out of harmony by Adriana's excess of passionate energy towards a seemingly mundane slight: her husband being late for the family meal. It is necessary to consider the role of the Abbess in providing Adriana with guidance towards overcoming these passions. Patricia Parker advocates for the importance of evaluating Shakespeare's Christianized departures from the Plautine source, arguing that these 'allusive networks' must be evaluated 'beyond the apparently marginal importance of the isolated verbal quibble — and to consider what is being done to as well as through such authoritative structures'.¹³ This study will explore how Shakespeare conveys these 'authoritative structures' within the early modern paradigm of Galenic medical theory.

Whereas classical Stoics had 'a typically Hellenistic contempt for the body', the early modern subject's attention was focused on the body as the place where mind, soul, and physical functions were interconnected.¹⁴ When discussing the passions, I adopt the practice of historical phenomenology to recuperate the distinct way that the early modern subject understood this relation.¹⁵ The pioneering studies of Gail Kern Paster and Michael

¹¹ Wolfgang Riehle, *Shakespeare, Plautus, and the Humanist Tradition* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1990), p. 198.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 198.

¹³ Patricia Parker, 'The Bible and the Marketplace: *The Comedy of Errors*', in *Shakespeare from the Margins: Language, Culture, Context*, by Patricia Parker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 56–82. (p. 82).

¹⁴ William J. Bouwsma, 'The Two Faces of Humanism: Stoicism and Augustinianism in Renaissance Thought', in *Humanism and the Renaissance*, ed. by Zachary S. Schiffman (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002), pp. 92–113 (p. 94).

¹⁵ To apply the term 'emotions' while studying the passions in this play would be anachronistic, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* cites the term's first uses (as a movement of the passions, rather than movement in general), at the beginning of the seventeenth century. This was shortly after *The Comedy of Errors* was written, so it is necessary not to take the term for granted, and to apply the terminology of the passions which was consistent with the paradigm for thinking about affect in the 1590s, when this play was written.

'Emotion, n.' *OED Online*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/61249>> [accessed September 2014]. Historical phenomenology is an

C. Schoenfeldt show how the subject negotiated with their environment to keep the passions in balance within the body. Paster's body of research details how the influential Galenic medical theory understood the body as a porous vessel through which the passions, 'liquid forces of nature',¹⁶ flowed. She provides the groundbreaking argument that early modern texts must be read with an understanding that they 'always presuppose embodiment just as bodily references always assume an affective context or consequence'.¹⁷ In *The Comedy of Errors*, these affective consequences permeate from person to person, through social ties of husband and wife, master and slave, man and commercial community. The play's 'errors' arise not solely on account of mistaken identities, but when a character is unaware of the effect of their own errant passions on fellow members of the domestic unit. Paster argues that the play's social structure privileges a 'humoral right of way and who gets to have it', and this study redirects the focus of Paster's discussion from the master-servant relationship to the dynamic between husband and wife.¹⁸ It explores how Shakespeare's Christian Stoic points of adaptation offer a register for the way that wives are expected to subordinate their passions to those of their husbands, upholding that 'right of way' within the domestic hierarchy in order to prevent violent and contagious passions from disturbing social order.

Overlapping with the Galenic paradigm of bodily permeability is the Christian belief that two people can be more than legally bound through the spiritual rite of marriage. In his *Letter*, Paul endorses this notion of permeability, declaring: 'So ought men to love their wives, as their own bodies: he that loveth his wife, loveth him self' (5.28). In the play, Adriana takes the notion of permeability between spouses very seriously; because of this spiritual connection, she understands their bodies as all the more susceptible to the vicissitudes of each other's passions. The play's best-known passage demonstrates how the early modern subject could feel incomplete when these bonds of permeability are broken:

I to the world am like a drop of water
That in the ocean seeks another drop,
Who, failing there to find his fellow forth,

approach to literary study that was introduced by Bruce R. Smith. It is a topic of focus in *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion*, ed. by Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, Mary Floyd-Wilson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

¹⁶ Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 4.

¹⁷ Gail Kern Paster, 'The Body and Its Passions', *Shakespeare Studies* 29 (2001), 44–50 (p. 45).

¹⁸ Paster, *Humoring the Body*, p. 210.

Unseen, inquisitive, confounds himself.
So I, to find a mother and a brother,
In quest of them unhappy, lose myself. (1.2.35–40)¹⁹

Antipholus of Syracuse makes this claim as he searches for the family members from whom he was separated shortly after his birth. Torn from his family unit, Antipholus expresses his inability to identify as an individual. Adriana shares the twin's yearning when she expresses her feelings of isolation from her husband when he is absent from the family meal. Seeking him out in the streets of Ephesus, Adriana mistakenly accosts the Syracusan twin and beseeches his return:

How comes it now, my husband, O how comes it
That thou art then estrangèd from thyself?
Thy 'self' I call it, being strange to me
That, undividable, incorporate,
Am better than thy dear self's better part.
Ah, do not tear away thyself from me;
For know, my love, as easy mayst thou fall
A drop of water in the breaking gulf,
And take unmingled thence that drop again
Without addition or diminishing,
As take from me thyself, and not me too. (2.2.122–32)

In missing her partner, Adriana feels that she is missing a part of herself.²⁰ Adriana adopts the Syracusan's syntax to describe her own sense of isolation in feeling 'estranged' from the husband with whom she is bound. She equates her husband as 'undividable, incorporate' with her, physically fused with her soul and body in the way that Antipholus of Syracuse felt 'unseen, inquisitive' without a complete family unit with which to identify. Drawing on the 'drop of water' imagery that Antipholus uses to express his fears of futility in searching for lost components of his self, Adriana expresses desperation that a fracture of her marriage bond implies a complete fracture of her own identity.

¹⁹ William Shakespeare, *The Comedy of Errors*, ed. by Charles Whitworth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). All line references are to this edition.

²⁰ Erin Weinberg, "'Not mad, but mated': Trauma, Uncanny Misrecognition, and the Occult Environment in *The Comedy of Errors*", *Pacific Coast Philology* 50.2 (2015), pp. 209–25 (p. 215).

For Adriana, the husband's indifference to the domestic rhythms indicates the insecurity of their bond as husband and wife. Finding Antipholus of Syracuse and thinking him to be Antipholus of Ephesus, Dromio laments the impact of his master's absence on Adriana:

The capon burns, the pig falls from the spit;
The clock hath stricken twelve upon the bell,
My mistress made it one upon my cheek.
She is so hot because the meat is cold,
The meat is cold because you come not home [...]. (1.2.44–48)

By referring to seemingly quotidian details about meal preparation, Dromio communicates a far more significant domestic issue: the husband's abandonment of the domestic unit over which he is master. The pig that 'falls from the spit' on account of the husband's lateness represents Adriana's insecurities that it is not only the pig but also the marriage itself that falls apart on account of his absence. To express the affective consequences of Antipholus's absence, Shakespeare uses the rhetorical device of zeugma to yoke Adriana's choleric or 'hot' humour, altering her interconnected mind and body as a result of the meat becoming both overcooked and 'cold' as she waits for her husband to return.²¹ By describing how the carcasses of the main dishes have broken down as a result of overcooking, Dromio provides insight into Adriana's dramatic alteration and the consequential breakdown of the social body.

Dromio's description of Adriana's response to her husband's absence indicates how this threat extends throughout the household. In Paster's hierarchy of the 'humoral right of way and who gets to have it', Adriana struggles with the inability to have her own way. Feeling powerless because she must yield to her husband's whims while she waits, Adriana fights passivity by exercising power where she can: over Dromio, her subordinate. Dromio's speech demonstrates this notion of permeability by showcasing his own body as a readable surface that demonstrates the effect of the husband's absence on Adriana: her insecurity is evident through the marks she leaves on Dromio's face. Telling the Syracusan that 'The clock hath stricken twelve upon the bell, / My mistress made it one upon my cheek', Dromio beseeches his master to observe the physical implications of his lateness. Because

²¹ For more on alteration, see Timothy Hampton, 'Strange Alteration: Physiology and Psychology from Galen to Rabelais', in *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion*, ed. by Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe and Mary Floyd-Wilson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), pp. 272–94.

his own body suffers ‘strikes’ from each lost hour that fuels Adriana’s insecurities, Dromio yearns for his master to ‘strike you home’ (1.2.67). The servant’s words express how Adriana places the responsibility on her husband to reform his own behaviour in order to prevent further reactions from extending throughout the household.

Adriana’s confidences with her sister exemplify her attitude that her husband has sole responsibility for preserving or destroying domestic harmony. She tells Luciana:

His company must do his minions grace,
Whilst I at home starve for a merry look.
Hath homely age the alluring beauty took
From my poor cheek? Then he hath wasted it. [...]
That’s not my fault: he’s master of my state. (2.1.88–96)

Adriana’s mealtime fast is mirrored by her state of affectionate deprivation from her husband. Establishing a parallel to Dromio’s image of the pig falling from the spit, Adriana laments her husband’s effect on her own ‘wasted’ skin, which deteriorates in accordance with the deterioration of her marriage bond. Overwhelmed by the violence of her own passions, Adriana declares: ‘Since that my beauty cannot please his eye, / I’ll weep what’s left away, and weeping die’ (2.1.115–16), resigning herself to drown in the salty tide of her own ‘weeping’. Embodying the feminine stereotypes of ‘weep[ing]’ and ‘bad temper’ that Stoic thinkers warn against, Adriana expresses feelings of disempowerment without recognizing her potential for mastery over her own insecurities. Whereas Stoic philosophy ‘locates the center of power in the self’, Adriana describes Antipholus as the ‘master of my state’, expressing feelings of powerlessness in the face of his domestic authority, just as the Syracusan feels lost without a twin to anchor him.²² Despite the fact that her responses negatively affect the domestic servants, Adriana does not recognize her own affective capabilities. She perceives that, as ‘master’, her husband is the only person capable of leading the household to follow his humoral ‘right of way’, and thereby locates the fault in him when she reacts negatively towards his absence.

The maiden Luciana attempts to redirect Adriana’s sense of the ‘humoral right of way and who gets to have it’. Unencumbered by a husband but nonetheless privy to the conflicts

²² Straznicki, p. 110.

within the Ephesian household, she advises her sister on the realities of the domestic hierarchy:

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

Although Antipholus is the 'master' of Adriana's 'state', Luciana reminds her sister that he is nonetheless master of himself. She recognises his 'liberty' to come and go according to needs that extend outside the home, outside of the domestic rhythms that are Adriana's purview. Luciana attempts to sway her sister to adopt a Stoic outlook for the sake of her own composure. In Cicero's *On the Ends of Good and Evil*, the philosopher describes how those who embody the standard of Stoic virtue are necessarily happy because 'virtue need not look outside herself for happiness'.²³ Luciana tries to teach Adriana how to find within herself the strength to overcome the jealousy and impatience that she feels as a result of her husband's inattentiveness. By accepting that her husband is indeed the master of his own time, Adriana can begin to 'be patient' and accept what is outside of her control. Luciana advocates for a Stoicism that can be achieved within the nexus of Galenic medical principles. This is what Schoenfeldt calls 'the productive function of discipline'; by disciplining her passions, Luciana shows, Adriana can find within herself the means to re-establish domestic harmony.²⁴

Adriana refuses to abide by her sister's marital advice on account of Luciana's unmarried state; without being bound with another, it seems impossible that Luciana could understand Adriana's feelings of abandonment. The wife defensively retorts:

So thou, that hast no unkind mate to grieve thee,
With urging helpless patience would relieve me.
But if thou live to see like right bereft,
This fool-begged patience in thee will be left. (2.1.38–41)

Adriana rejects her sister's advice because it advocates for 'helpless patience'. Luciana suggests that her sister adopt a more Stoically passive 'patience', but Adriana denies that

²³ Monsarrat, pp. 11–12, quoting Cicero: '*Virtus ad beate vivendum se ipsa contenta est*'.

²⁴ Michael C. Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 13.

her marital troubles will resolve themselves if she accepts her own ‘helplessness’ to change his behaviour, or her power to moderate her own. The wife’s frustration with this contradiction of being empowered through passivity represents what Bruce refers to as the ‘inadequacies of Christian Stoicism’s hybrid morality presented to women’.²⁵ Too impatient to accept passivity, Adriana is depicted as ‘erring’ in continuously searching for more active means to immediately resolve her marital woes.

Monsarrat describes the Stoic persona of man as actor, ‘who performs wisely a part he has not chosen’; here, Adriana rebels against her gendered role as wife by refusing to prioritize her husband’s social needs over her domestic ones.²⁶ In Paul’s *Letter*, the apostle preaches the Stoic message in terms of a God-given ‘vocation’:

I [...] pray you that ye walk worthy of the vocation whereunto ye are called,
With all humbleness of mind, and meekness, with long suffering, supporting one
another through love, Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of
peace. (4.1–3).

Shakespeare’s play capitalizes on the *Letter*’s message that unity with the divine begins with unity in the home. This unity comes from each member accepting his or her prescribed domestic roles; all other activity is ‘error’. Adriana’s restless pursuit of action indicates her efforts to resolve her troubles with means outside of her control. She refuses to recognize her own ‘role’ as an actor, her ‘vocation’ to serve her husband. Rather than adopting ‘humbleness’ and ‘meekness’ in order to ‘suffer’ her husband’s slights for the sake of a unified household, Adriana ‘errs’ by allowing herself to feel overcome by feelings of abandonment. Because Adriana sees the disunity in her home as a product of her husband’s will, she does not conceive of a way that she herself can improve the circumstances.

Adriana’s impatience is so severe because she assumes that her husband’s absence indicates his presence in the home of another woman. She confronts Antipholus of Syracuse regarding this suspicion:

I am possessed with an adulterate blot;
My blood is mingled with the crime of lust.
For if we two be one, and thou play false,

²⁵ Bruce, p. 42.

²⁶ Monsarrat, p. 29.

I do digest the poison of thy flesh,
Being strumpeted by thy contagion. (2.2.143–47)

Adriana's perturbation is the result of her fear that even if her husband denies his infidelity, she will be able to read the dissolution of their bond through an infection that transmits from his body to her own.²⁷ While any disease that rots his body is likely to rot hers through physical contagion, these physical threats gesture towards the spiritual compromise of their bond when her husband chooses to 'be one' with another woman when he is already bound as 'one' with his wife. Overwhelmed by the possibility, Adriana subjects herself to a 'disease', as Monsarrat states: 'as the passions are errors of judgment they can be called diseases of the soul, similar to those of the body'.²⁸ Overcome by letting her mind wander or 'err' to her husband's potential infidelity, Adriana is so taken away by her insecurity that, regardless of her husband's contagion, she exposes her body to the 'disease' of jealousy.

Bewildered by Adriana's certainty in their profound connection, Antipholus of Syracuse consents to go with her. Adriana's insecurity is stronger than her relief; instead of understanding Antipholus's return as a confirmation of her husband's fidelity, she orders the Syracusan Dromio to 'let none enter, lest I break your pate' (2.2.221). This threatened violence arises from Adriana's fear that her husband's return is temporary. The irony is that, in her desperation, Adriana refuses to acknowledge the Syracusan's pleas that he is not her husband and consequently locks her own husband out of the home. The shunned husband responds to this rejection with rage. As master of the house, the Ephesian expects that his wife and home will be available at his demand regardless of the meals he has missed. Dromio revisits the hot/cold food metaphor he used to accost the Syracusan Antipholus, telling his master: 'Your cake here is warm within: you stand here in the cold. / It would make a man mad as a buck to be so bought and sold' (3.1.71–72). He notes that Adriana's insistence to lock Antipholus outside 'in the cold' would heat the master with choleric rage against her, just as the cold meat that signifies his absence also signifies her consequential upset. The servant refers to Antipholus as a mad 'buck', intimating that he is being cuckolded by the wife who is serving another man from inside his home while he is stranded out of doors. In being absent during a ritual that was meaningful to his wife,

²⁷ These concepts were first introduced by the author in a paper titled 'Reading and Misreading the Body in *The Comedy of Errors*'. It was presented at the Symposium on Reading and Health in Early Modern Europe, 1500–1800 (July 5–6, 2013), in conjunction with the Medieval and Early Modern Research Group, Newcastle University, England.

²⁸ Monsarrat, p. 15.

Antipholus had privileged his own priorities without considering his wife's priorities as his own. Ignoring the biblical injunction that 'So ought men to love their wives, as their own bodies: he that loveth his wife, loveth him self', Antipholus refuses to acknowledge that he is locked out on account of his own error.

Antipholus's violently choleric response to this rejection escalates into the threat of physical violence. He repeatedly orders Dromio to retrieve 'a crow' with which he can 'break ope the gate' and force entry into his own home (3.1.74, 81, 85). Antipholus's intended violence towards the door represents the damage he inflicts on the domestic unit by being inconsiderate of its rhythms. Locked out of doors with Antipholus, the merchant Balthazar beseeches him to quell the raging passions that he makes public:

Have patience, Sir. O, let it not be so!
Herein you war against your reputation,
And draw within the compass of suspect
Th'unviolated honour of your wife. (3.1.86–89)

Balthazar discourages Antipholus from publicly venting his anger because the domestic unraveling will reflect poorly on the Ephesian's reputation and will cascade into greater social and economic consequences. Both spouses reject the notion of 'hav[ing] 'patience' as a mode of resolving their domestic dispute. This reveals that Antipholus shares his wife's insecurity; when members of his domestic unit do not act according to their prescribed roles, the security of his own role is called into question. Whereas Adriana reacts to her insecurity with sorrow, 'weeping' away her sense of rejection, Antipholus is moved entirely by rage that his wife does not give way to him as master of the house. This is a far cry from Paul's injunction to 'Be ye courteous to one another, & tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake forgave you' (4.32), and Seneca's declaration on being merciful:

It will make us milder if we think of the help which we may have had from the person with whom we are angry, and allow the good turns to make up for the bad. We should also think of what a recommendation it may be to have a reputation for mercy, of how many valuable friends we have made through forgiveness. (2.34.2).²⁹

²⁹ Seneca, 'On Anger', p. 72.

On the contrary, Antipholus opts to indulge his feelings of rejection through plans of continued offense against his wife. Determined to offend his offender, Antipholus rejects his wife in turn: ‘Since mine own doors refuse to entertain me, / I’ll knock elsewhere’ (3.1.121–22). In her desperate attempts to retrieve her husband, Adriana causes the thing she fears most: her husband’s withdrawal to the attentions of another woman.

The Ephesian’s retreat to another woman’s home is mirrored by the Syracusan Antipholus’s rejection of Adriana’s advances in favour of his infatuation with Luciana. Adriana’s affective disturbance reaches its peak when she believes that her husband is making advances on her sister. To her, this is the gravest conceivable breach of the marriage bond, as he ‘covets’ not just any ‘neighbour’, but her own sibling (*Deuteronomy* 5.21). This moment threatens a complete breakdown of the domestic unit. Adriana uses vitriolic name-calling against her husband to express her sense of betrayal. She calls him:

[...] deformèd, crookèd, old, and sere,
Ill-faced, worse-bodied, shapeless everywhere,
Vicious, ungentle, foolish, blunt, unkind,
Stigmatical in making, worse in mind. (4.2.19–22)

Her feelings are so complicated because she believes that the person who betrays her in this fashion is nonetheless the head of the household that defines her identity. Adriana reflects on her feelings of ambivalence, telling her sister: ‘Far from her nest the lapwing cries away; / My heart prays for him, though my tongue do curse’ (4.2.27–28). This image of outward cursing and inward prayer expresses both Adriana’s feelings of rejection and her yearning for domestic harmony. Joseph Candido observes that Adriana’s ‘acknowledgement of her inner divisions’ and yearning to find a solution for her marital troubles ‘points implicitly to a means of finding concord in discord’.³⁰ This alludes to the message of forgiveness within Paul’s *Letter*; just as the Apostle preached a vision of harmony in which ‘ye are no more strangers & foreigners’ (2.19), so Adriana strives to overcome her feelings of conjugal isolation. She yearns to find a way that she and her husband can ‘support[...] one another through love, Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’.

Far from demonstrating the Christian Stoic patience to allow time to redirect what she

³⁰ Joseph Candido, ‘Dining out in Ephesus: Food in *The Comedy of Errors*’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 30.2 (1990), pp. 217–41 (p. 231).

cannot control, Adriana continues to actively pursue increasingly far-fetched solutions to her family's disharmony. In Act Four, she enlists the witchdoctor Pinch to conjure the imbalance from her home by way of her husband. In seeking the help of this 'mountebank' (5.1.238), she commits the 'error' that Paul warns against in his *Letter*: she is 'carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the deceit of men, and with craftiness, whereby they lay in wait to deceive' (4.14). Although her insecurity misleads her into further 'error', Adriana's enlistment of the conjurer is done in earnest. Far from seeking to punish her husband, her offer to pay 'what [Pinch] will demand', shows how desperate she is for him to 'establish [Antipholus] in his true sense again' (4.4.49–50). When Adriana accosts her actual husband in the streets of Ephesus, Antipholus insists that he was barred from the home. She uses his resistance to support her case for his madness, telling him:

[...] God doth know you dined at home,
Where would you had remained until this time,
Free from these slanders and this open shame. (4.4.66–68)

Adriana is concerned about airing her family grievances outside of the home, yet it is her own intervention that brings the domestic conflict before the community. Antipholus rages against these seeming lies, with Dromio supporting his version of the truth. Adriana questions Pinch: 'Is't good to soothe him in these contraries?', 'contraries' being claims that Adriana considers to be harmful untruths. Pinch responds: 'It is no shame. The fellow finds his vein, / And, yielding to him, humours well his frenzy' (4.4.80–82). Pinch's remedy to purge Antipholus's ill-humour is to 'humour' a continuance of these misunderstandings. However, the consequence of allowing Antipholus to purge is that he channels his rage towards his wife. Far from being sated, this 'vein' is overflowing with choler. Thinking that his wife speaks falsehoods about his indiscretions to support her own falsehood in serving another man, Antipholus threatens to attack Adriana: 'with these nails I'll pluck out those false eyes, / That would behold in me this shameful sport' (4.4.105–06). Pinch does not provide the means for Antipholus to overcome his fury, but instead allows these violent passions to overflow into public violence.

Although her husband is bound and imprisoned by Pinch, the play's errors of mistaken identity lead Adriana to believe that her husband and Dromio, actually the Syracusans, have fled into sanctuary. When Adriana explains that she seeks to 'fetch my poor distracted husband hence [...] that we may bind him fast, / And bear him home for his recovery' (5.1.39–41), the Abbess expresses concern over Adriana's attempts to restrict her husband's

bodily and humoural ‘right of way’. To achieve a better understanding of the extent to which Adriana harangues her husband, the Abbess pretends to agree that the wife ‘should [...] have reprehended him’, and publicly, too (5.1.57). Initially, Adriana intimates that she berates her husband only ‘as roughly as my modesty would let me’ (5.1.59), but the Abbess’s false encouragement leads the wife to divulge her struggles in quick succession:

In bed he slept not for my urging it;
At board he fed not for my urging it.
Alone, it was the subject of my theme;
In company I often glanced at it.
Still did I tell him it was vile and bad. (5.1.63–67)

Adriana admits that she scolds her husband ‘in company’, divulging their marital woes beyond the privacy of their household. The Abbess uses Adriana’s admissions to expose the wife’s active role in infusing every domestic activity with jealous rage. In doing so, she indicates Adriana’s responsibility for the imbalance within the domestic unit.

It is Adriana’s incensed reactions, the Abbess shows, which drive Antipholus into the sanctuary that protects him from her. She tells the wife:

The venom clamours of a jealous woman
Poisons more deadly than a mad dog’s tooth.
It seems his sleeps were hindered by thy railing,
And *thereof* comes it that his head is light.
Thou sayst his meat was sauced with thy upbraidings:
Unquiet meals make ill digestions.
Thereof the raging fire of fever bred,
And what’s a fever but a fit of madness? (5.1.69–76, italics for emphasis)

The Abbess’s confrontational probing is meant to be instructive towards more Stoic behaviour. In *On Anger*, Seneca writes: ‘Tell me, then, is not chastisement sometimes necessary? Of course! But chastisement without anger, and chastisement aided by reason’ (1.6.1).³¹ The Abbess reveals that Antipholus is imbalanced because his wife’s chastisements are influenced by fear and passion, not reason. Demonstrating how the

³¹ Seneca, ‘On Anger’, p. 23.

spiritual can be attended to through the physical, the Abbess characterizes Adriana's meals as 'unquiet' because she serves them with a hefty side dish of reproach.³² Reproach is not empirically observable in the way that one can catalogue the grams or ounces of food one eats, but in observing Adriana's 'unwholesome excess' of passion in admonishing her husband, the Abbess rationally discerns Adriana's responsibility for the domestic imbalance.³³ By describing the family meal as 'sauced' with 'upbraidings', the Abbess diagnoses jealousy and impatience as what disease Adriana, and by extension, her husband. Stating that the 'saucing' of the food is equally important as the husband's presence at the meal, the Abbess indicates Adriana's central role in maintaining domestic harmony.

The Abbess seeks to drive Adriana to approach domestic harmony as a microcosm of the divine order. Her message follows Paul's entreaty to the Ephesians:

But let us follow the truth in love, and in all things grow up into him, which is the head, that is Christ. By whom all the body being coupled and knit together by every joint, for the furniture *thereof* (according to the effectual power, *which is* in the measure of every part) receiveth increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love. (4.15–16)

The Abbess's speech echoes Paul's *Letter* as she repeats the word 'thereof' to describe the cause-and-effect relationship between husband and wife (72, 76); in disciplining themselves to love each other, they can demonstrate their devotion to Christ. To understand how this spiritual cause-and-effect works within Galenic medical theory, it is necessary to reflect on Schoenfeldt's observation that 'one of the more troubling aspects of Galenic medicine is that while it makes the patient the agent rather than the victim of his or her health, it also provides a framework for blaming the patient for the illness that arbitrarily afflicts him or her'.³⁴ Instead of blaming the patient, however, the Abbess focuses her

³² Likewise, Greville beseeches his honourable lady: 'By councell of the wisdom limitt all unquietnesse of desires; least they being unseasonable, adde shame to your other misfortunes'. This notion of 'unquietness' stemming from 'unseasonable' behaviour is analogous to Lipsius's competing faculties of 'reason' (divine and governed by the mind) and 'opinion' (corrupt and governed by the body). Adriana demonstrates government by 'opinion' in her constant and public outbursts against her husband. Lipsius's works gesture to the adoption of Neo-Stoic principles in order to be governed by reason, not opinion. Fulke Greville, 'A letter to an Honourable Lady' in *The Prose of Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke (The Renaissance Imagination 26)*, ed. by Mark Caldwell (New York: Garland Publishing, 1987), pp. 142–87 (p. 166). Geoffrey Miles, *Shakespeare and the Constant Romans*. (Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2011). [Accessed 20 April, 2016].

³³ Lalita Pandit, 'Emotion, Perception, and Anagnorisis in *The Comedy of Errors*: A Cognitive Perspective', *College Literature* 33.1 (2006), pp. 94–126 (p. 106).

³⁴ Schoenfeldt, p. 7.

blame on Adriana for the physical and spiritual imbalance within the household. Repeating Adriana's assertion, 'Thou say'st *his* sports were hindered by *thy* brawls', the Abbess shows Adriana that her own behaviour directly influences her husband's. In overcoming the 'venom clamours of a jealous woman', the Abbess shows, Adriana can overcome the disease within her own passions, the 'bitterness, and anger, and wrath, crying, and evil speaking' (4.31). To do that, she must look inward in order to master her own passions. Alluding to Paul's message to 'let not the sun go down upon your wrath' for fear of 'gi[ving] place to the devil' (4.26–27), the Abbess shows that the dissipation of Adriana's wrath need not be a two-person job. Rather than pursuing highly questionable and public means to restore her husband's sanity, she shows Adriana that the path to domestic harmony is self-mastery. This 'emphasis on the productive function of discipline'³⁵ reveals a form of Stoic thinking that is accessible to women within the domestic sphere. The Abbess's misleading of Adriana is done with the spiritually didactic purpose of showing the wife that, despite her central role in the family's disharmony, she nonetheless has the power to control its resolution. Unlike the classically Stoic notion of *apathiea*, the Abbess's lesson is Lipsian, urging a mastery over the passions rather than ridding oneself of them altogether.

Adriana is so intent on actively retrieving her husband that she refuses to accept the Abbess's message of passive empowerment or 'helpless patience'. Although the wife insists that she will 'attend my husband, be his nurse, / Diet his sickness, for it is my office' (5.1.98–99), the Abbess nonetheless refuses to release him. Recognizing that 'control could be enabling as well as inhibiting', although Adriana insists that her duty as wife is to give her ailing husband *more* attention, the Abbess's denial of his release suggests that Adriana nonetheless intends to give her husband *the wrong kind* of attention.³⁶ The Abbess sends Adriana away in order for her to overcome her own sickness and to refrain from further infecting her husband. William J. Bouwsma notes that 'the Stoics generally left the impression that social existence was a distraction from the good life, which could be satisfactorily pursued only by withdrawal from the world of men'.³⁷ In demanding that Adriana 'be quiet and depart' (5.1.112), she encourages the wife to retreat into the domestic sphere, a place where she can perform the most positive change. While Adriana expresses a sense of futility in this passive approach, the Abbess shows that by 'be[ing] patient' (5.1.103), Adriana has the means to affect change. The Abbess's message shows Adriana

³⁵ Schoenfeldt, p. 13.

³⁶ Schoenfeldt, pp. 11–12.

³⁷ Bouwsma, p. 95.

what she *can* control: overcoming the disease of her own passions in order for her husband to return to a house of calm instead of calamity.

It is worth reiterating that, like the setting of Ephesus itself, the Abbess does not appear in the Plautine source. In *Menaechmi*, it is the Senex, the wife's father, who berates the wife for her negative attentions towards her husband (5.1). Shakespeare's departure has this message communicated by a woman, who is also a representative of the Church. These departures are linked, as the Abbess acts as mouthpiece for the values that Paul preaches in his *Letter to the Ephesians*. Although Riehle argues that the play is 'less Christian in tone than is generally assumed', and Candido, likewise, states that 'The Abbess is, ironically, not nearly as concerned with the theological and religious matters as she is with the practical goings-on inside Adriana's household', it is precisely *because* of the Abbess's domestic concerns that she comes to echo the themes of Paul's *Letter*.³⁸ Calling on the 'larger allusive structure of biblical authority', the Abbess's function is to inculcate Paul's message that 'ye are no more strangers & foreigners: but citizens with the Saints, and of the household of God' (2.19).³⁹ The term 'household' is particularly important, as it shows how domestic obedience and godliness can be synonymous. Fusing moderation of the passions with religious philosophy, the Abbess preaches a uniquely domestic form of Christian Stoicism.

Paul's advice is Stoic because while social unity is the goal, it begins by improving the self and letting the positive results reflect outward. By overcoming her insecurity of spiritual isolation when her husband is physically absent, Adriana has the power to prevent her passions from overwhelming the harmony within her household. The key to the Abbess's Christian Stoic solution is patience and passivity, just as Paul pleads that his followers 'With all humbleness of mind, and meekness, with long suffering, support[...] one another through love'. This passivity in the face of long-suffering is distinctly Christian. Monsarrat notes that 'patience' emerges from the same Latin roots as *patis*, to suffer, as Christ did through his passion.⁴⁰ This link supports patience as spiritual labour in and of itself. Passivity has the capacity for active engagement when one mindfully refuses to allow for a disturbance of the passions. The Abbess's speech shows that this struggle is not reserved strictly for men. Instead, she shows that to 'be patient, and depart' is no less of a struggle

³⁸ Riehle, p. 198, Candido, p. 233.

³⁹ Parker, p. 77.

⁴⁰ Monsarrat, p. 89.

than Adriana's pre-existing impatience, but that suffering through patience will yield more spiritually righteous results.

The domestic form of Stoicism that Shakespeare draws on by alluding to Paul's Ephesus carves a place for women within a male-centric philosophy. It is necessary to recognize that this philosophy does not envision women as equal to men, but rather prescribes official roles for both sexes within a hierarchy. Bruce notes that Greville's vision of Stoic constancy is one that remains faithful and obedient in the face of a husband's ill treatment: 'tyrannical abuses of power displayed by the lady's husband are not general perversions of the man's humanity, but specifically of his natural superiority as a man'.⁴¹ Just as Bruce observes regarding Greville's *Letter*, I propose that Shakespeare's use of Paul's *Letter* is nonetheless participating in a paradigm in which 'both Stoicism and Christianity, universal reason and divine law, share a foundation in male superiority'.⁴² Despite writing 'He that loveth his wife, loveth himself', Paul nonetheless denotes a power structure in which wives are situated beneath their husbands: 'Wives, submit your selves unto your husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the wife's head, even as Christ is the head of the Church' (5.22–23). Paul explicitly positions the 'husband' as 'head' of the 'household', but nonetheless acknowledges the central role of female submission in keeping that social body healthy. The Abbess teaches Adriana that through 'helpless patience', she can overcome her own insecurity. Although Adriana cannot have the 'right of way', the Abbess teaches Adriana how her own submission supports the greater good of domestic harmony.

Despite the soundness of this advice, Adriana does not accept it. Expressing frustration instead of resignation, Adriana refuses to relinquish her active attempts to control her husband's recovery. Seeking out the Duke to provide her with reinforcement, Adriana claims that she will

[...] never rise until my tears and prayers
Have won his grace to come in person hither
And take perforce my husband from the Abbess. (5.1.115–17)

Her intentions act in complete opposition to the patience and passivity that the Abbess advocates, opting instead for a public purgation of her passions. Since Adriana never explicitly states her adoption of the Abbess's method, it seems uncertain that the Abbess's

⁴¹ Bruce, p. 50.

⁴² Ibid.

advice is worthwhile. The Abbess's very existence, I argue, proves that it is. When Shakespeare rewrites the role of the Senex for the Abbess, he writes the delivery of these Stoic lessons as from a woman, to a woman. Unlike Mary Sidney's translations of a man's writing, or Greville's one-directional letter to a woman, Shakespeare imagines a *dialogue* between two wives. Moreover, the woman who delivers this message indeed demonstrates the virtue of patience through practice. By demonstrating the rewards of her patience, he proves that her advice is worthwhile. The Abbess reveals herself as the long-suffering Emilia, who 'Thirty-three years [has] but gone in travail' (5.1.402), waiting for the seemingly impossible chance of being reunited with her long-lost sons and husband. Unlike the other members of the shipwrecked family, Emilia is the only member to escape the event thoroughly isolated from every single member of her family. Yet, through her retreat to a life of Christian service, she indicates how women can adopt Stoicism to overcome personal trials and serve the community. She demonstrates the rewards of passivity in the face of long-suffering: a reunion with her family in the thirty-third year from the fracture of their domestic unit. This timing is inconsistent with the rest of the play's chronology, but is significant because it symbolically ties Emilia's life choices with the auspiciousness of Christ's age upon his own resurrection. By drawing on the suffering of Mary rather than her son Christ, Shakespeare demonstrates the rewards of female patience in the face of hopelessness. The Abbess's final words are 'After so long grief, such felicity!' (5.1.408), proving the value of domestic Christian Stoicism for women: those who overcome suffering with patience and passivity will be rewarded with 'felicity' through a reunion of the fractured family unit.

Ending a play that is dominated by missed meals with a feast shows that society has reintegrated; ending the play with a 'gossips' feast' shows that there is more to it than that (5.1.407). The baptismal celebration serves as a confirmation of the values that the Abbess represents, reuniting the family under circumstances that signal to new beginnings and Godly intentions. Lionel Swain observes that 'for Paul, holiness is not primarily good moral behaviour. It is the state of being in which we are placed at our baptism'.⁴³ In light of this claim, it is worthwhile to understand this group baptism as symbolic of each character's consent to forgiveness, to subordination of the self for the greater social good, and to a re-commitment to Paul's vision of the united household as a microcosm of the 'household of God'. Even if marital reconciliation is not explicitly *shown*, it is nonetheless

⁴³ Lionel Swain, *Ephesians*, New Testament Message: A biblical-theological commentary. Vol. 13 (Wilmington: Michael Glazier Inc., 1980), p. 91.

implied that with the blank slate promised by baptism, the formerly estranged Ephesian couple will share in a fresh start.

One aspect that remains alienating to present-day readers is that Adriana does not get a final say in the resolution. While Paul's *Letter* beseeches the Ephesians to be 'courteous to one another, and tender hearted, forgiving one another', it is uncertain whether Adriana ultimately forgives or condemns her husband for his absence. Alexander Leggatt argues that the tone of forgiveness is not apparent in the text. He writes:

The director may contrive a forgiving embrace, but nothing in the text requires it. [...] For the critic, with only the text before him, the final state of the marriage must remain an open question.⁴⁴

However, I argue that it is necessary to consider Adriana's silence in the text as a step in the direction of Christian Stoicism. Her silence has the potential to represent her commitment to passive submission as her contribution to domestic harmony. By ultimately choosing silence over superfluous words and tears, Adriana demonstrates a drastic change in character in which her *inaction* speaks louder than words.

A conclusion where the wife's voice is silenced is necessarily dissatisfying to present-day readers, especially when the husband makes no apologies of his own. Exploring the domestic hierarchy through the relationship between Galenic bodily intervention and Christian Stoic spiritual intervention recuperates ideas that are disorienting when attempts are made to examine them outside the distinctly early modern context in which this play is situated. Paul's *Letter to the Ephesians* stresses that unity under Christ begins in the domestic sphere, and advocates for the importance of the woman's role in the home. While Paul's *Letter* exhorts husbands to be attentive and courteous to their wives, this play seems selectively concerned with the responsibility of the subservient members of the domestic sphere. This message of subordination has the potential to be disempowering, but by linking it to Stoicism, by painting it as a *mastery* of the passions, these disempowered groups can find empowerment through their roles in the social hierarchy. By rewarding active efforts to remain passive, Shakespeare offers a resolution in which the silent, suffering woman can find empowerment through the mastery of her self.

⁴⁴ Quoted in *Friends and Lovers: The Phenomenology of Desire in Shakespearean Comedy*, by W. Thomas MacCary (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 82.