MONEY TALKS: ECONOMICS, DISCOURSE AND IDENTITY IN THREE RENAISSANCE COMEDIES

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MONEY TALKS: ECONOMICS, DISCOURSE AND IDENTITY IN THREE RENAISSANCE COMEDIES

by

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ABSTRACT

This purpose of this study is to examine how the theatre of the late fifteen hundreds and early sixteen hundreds was used to voice for its audience the rising concerns of locating identity in an economic urban setting. This was increasingly difficult because the traditional markers of social stratification were becoming much more ambiguous. In particular, this study will focus on three Renaissance comedies that highlight the issues of identity in the city; the plays included are William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* and Thomas Middleton's *Michaelmas Term*. The key to understanding the issues of locating identity in the city is language. The use of both the oral and written codes of language in the plays included will be examined in order to shed some light on the overall dramatic discourse of each play. In other words, this study will examine how each individual playwright (in)forms his characters with a specific discourse which is then used to guide the audience to the social discourse that the play produces. The use of language by the playwrights instigates a dialogue with the audience that emphasizes the role that language plays in establishing identity. Furthermore each playwright creates a world of competing discourses that in turn illustrates how identity in the 'real' or actual culture can be discerned. In the plays discussed the

identity of each character is revealed by the discourse they espouse; what each character represents is marked by the relationship of individual discourse to the discourse of the play itself. In each case the discourse that is used to create and establish identity is interconnected to economic activity. The discourses of identity in these plays are based on economics. It is the aim of this study to propose that each playwright sees the ambiguity of identity in the urban setting as one of the central issues with which the audience watching has to contend. Through such an examination, this study will attempt to offer an insight into the larger discourse of identity in the socially and economically fluid culture of sixteenth-century London.

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Yvonne D. Hann

Money Talks: Economics, Discourse and Identity in Three Renaissance Comedies

Introduction

In his opening hymn of praise to his gold, Volpone describes it as "the dumb god, that giv'st all men tongues" (1.1.22). Here as elsewhere, we can mark the difference between early and later modern culture; for us, "money talks". We assume, among other things, that social position is in large part a consequence of economic power; in the Renaissance however, it is not yet quite so, though Mosca's nearly successful climb to social respectability points the way. Capitalism was still in its infancy, so to speak, and the implications of 'new money' and how it affected social hierarchies was an issue of some importance to the English people. Margot Heinemann remarks that

> . . . this was a time of unusually rapid change and tension, involving most social groupings in one way or another. Many of the recurrent themes and situations developed in tragedy and especially in comedy were suggested or given audience appeal by real conflicts in society and its standards of value which were new enough to be newsworthy. England was in a process of change from a society based on rank and status to one based more directly on wealth and property; and this meant a shake-up of social and moral codes. There was an exceptional degree of social mobility, and contemporaries were very conscious of this shifting and changing - above all in London, the melting-pot for the whole kingdom. (3)

The theatre of the time was a particularly appropriate arena for the voicing of these cultural concerns, being a commercial enterprise that used its public stage as a means

of translating cultural concerns of social anxiety into a dramatic context. James H. Forse notes that in the

> . . . last two decades of the sixteenth century, the London theatre . . . reflected the conflicting social and political pressures and uncertainties in England at the end of Elizabeth's reign. The appearance of domestic tragedies and city comedies display the new changing social scene in London, where traditional, rural social relationships no longer answered the concerns of an urban, wage-earning populace faced with the economic pressures of an emerging commercial and capitalist system. (232-233)

The commercial theatre of late sixteenth-century England was a producer as well as a commentator on the shifting socio-economic patterns of England, or more specifically, London.

During the last years of the 1590's and the early years of the 1600's, there was an evolution of dramatic form that corresponded to the social/cultural concerns raised by nascent capitalism; this new genre was city comedy. One of the first critics to attempt to define this genre was Brian Gibbons, who comments that

> we might define the genre City Comedy, then, by the fact that the plays are all satiric and have urban settings; they exclude material appropriate to romance, fairy tale, sentimental legend or patriotic chronicle. In fact the urban settings and characters derive partly from the tradition of popular prose narratives: Jest Books, Coney-Catching pamphlets and comic fantasies like Nashe's *Jack Wilton*. The form of the plays derives from the medieval Morality Plays - more specifically, the Estates Morality - and the Tudor Interlude, and they contain trickery episodes, of 'lazzi', deriving from Italian Popular Comedy. (24-25)

For Gibbons, the plays that fall within this definition of city comedy are those that "do not present in any useful sense 'a keen analysis in economic terms' nor may they be rashly cited as evidence of actual conditions of the time. What they present is a keen analysis in moral terms first and last"(29). While Lawerence Venuti agrees with Gibbons' basic 'defintion' of the plays in the genre, he claims that it

> has long been recognized that this genre constitutes a response to the socioeconomic changes that accompanied the rise of capitalism, specifically as they are manifested in Stuart England. City comedy is undeniably ideological, individual plays "take a stand" in their representation of real social contradictions. . . . (102)

Venuti also contends that the ideologies in early city comedy comprise "an ambivalent response to" these ideological contradictions and that the

> repeated attempt [in the plays] to "solve" them produces a number of discontinuities that ultimately stem from an ideological conflict: the Elizabethan and Jacobean plays exhibit an approving interest in the rise of capitalism by applauding its high energy and calculation, but they still cling to the feudal order and the moral values that uphold it. (112)

Other than allowing for the inclusion of a wider range of plays within the genre of city comedy, Venuti's argument, by locating ideological discontinuities within the plays, allows for a more precise reading of the gaps that in part define them. More specifically, one can read certain elements of theatrical and thematic style to expose these ideologies as well as to explore the methods by which individual playwrights sought to contain the inherent contradictions. It is in this context that this study proposes to examine the use of language and dramatic discourse as a means of reading how dramatists include and contain conflicting socio-economic ideologies within their works.

One of the interesting aspects of sixteenth-century cultural development is the increasing self-consciousness in both the perception and use of language. The production of literature is, as many New Historicist and Cultural Materialist critics have established, an activity that records the ideologies of a particular time and culture as well as an activity that questions those ideologies. Literature supports the ideologies of the power structures as much as it seeks to subvert those ideologies.

This, according to Stephen Greenblatt, is especially the case when dealing with Renaissance literature. As a consequence of this paradoxical function of both supporting and subverting dominant ideology, the use of language as a marker for discontinuities becomes increasingly important as a factor in literary interpretation. For Greenblatt one of the key concepts for studying how Renaissance writers attempted this ideological juggling act is a concept he has termed "self-fashioning". This self-fashioning was no more an autonomous activity than the literary texts that record the process:

> there is considerable empirical evidence that there may well have been less *autonomy* in self-fashioning in the sixteenth century than before, that family, state and religious institutions impose a more rigid and far-reaching discipline upon their middle-class and aristocratic subjects. Autonomy is an issue but not the sole or even central issue: the power to impose a shape upon oneself is an aspect of the more general power to control identity - that of others at least as often as one's own. (Greenblatt 1980 1)

The concept of self-fashioning as a socio-cultural practice is central to this study. Greenblatt claims that Renaissance cultural practice not only permitted but also codified self-fashioning as a tool of creating identity. Of course, the reception of any created identity relies heavily on the perception of others; that is, "what is central is the perception . . . . that there is in the early modern period a change in the intellectual, social, psychological, and aesthetic structures that govern the generation of identities. This change is difficult to characterize in our usual ways because it is not only complex but **resolutely dialectical**" (Greenblatt 1980 1, my bold). For the purposes of this study, the dialectical nature of self-fashioning becomes two-fold as the concept Greenblatt applies to the identities of writers is transferred to the identity of dramatic characters.

Drama, of course, by its nature is dialogical. It is a product of culture in that its thematic content is constituted from the ideologies of the culture from which it springs. At the same time, however, drama uses this 'cultural content' in a very specific way, to fashion a mirror in which the audiences perception of its own cultural assumptions is reflected in order that they may be better understood. This metaphor of the mirror is particularly pertinent in the study of Renaissance drama:

> the theatre achieves its representations by gesture and language, that is, by signifiers that seem to leave the signified completely untouched. Renaissance writers would seem to have endorsed this intangibility by returning again and again to the image of the mirror . . . . [which] is the emblem of instantaneous and accurate reproduction; it takes nothing from what it reflects and adds nothing but self-knowledge. (Greenblatt 1988 7-8)

In other words, Renaissance playwrights used their works to present a reflection of contemporary cultural issues with which they hoped to entertain and educate their audience. In reference to city comedies, this view seems of some importance. In a time of shifting socio-economic patterns, the perception of identity, and its construction, became unstable. The plays included in this study use the construction of dramatic character to problematize the larger process of constructing identity in an increasingly fluid urban society. More specifically, the plays used within this study seek to reflect/refract the way in which the codes of language, written and oral, are used to establish identity in a dramatic context that points to a larger discourse of urban identity.

The theatre of the late 1500's and early 1600's, a commercial institution in a time of socio-economic flux, not surprisingly attempted to gain a mass audience by dealing with topics and issues that were predicated on cultural concerns. One of the facets of

the drama produced during this period was an increasing awareness of the instability of identity in a culture whose hierarchical notion of social position was threatened by the increase of social mobility that a new capitalist economy created. In response to this awareness, language becomes a tool whereby identity can be located. In the plays included in this study, the use of language by the playwrights instigates a dialogue that highlights the role that language plays in establishing identity. In particular, each playwright creates a world of competing dramatic discourses that in turn emphasize how identity in the 'real' or actual culture can be discerned. In the plays discussed the identity of each character is revealed by the discourse they espouse; what each character represents is marked by the relationship of individual discourse to the discourse of the play itself. Other than oral discourse, there is also a concern in the plays (excepting Dekker) with how written language works in establishing identity. In each case, the discourse that is used to create and establish identity is interconnected to economic activity. The discourses of identity in these plays are discourses based on economics. In each play there is a central character whose discourse is either the opposition to or the embodiment of the play's discourse.

The first play to be examined is William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. This chapter will not claim the play is (by any critical definition or standard) a city comedy. However, it will assert that the way in which Shakespeare uses language is central to understanding the play in light of its socio-economic concerns. In particular, the chapter will focus on how the identity of Shylock is shaped by his personal discourse as well as his reading of the other discourses in the play. In this play identity is premised on both the oral and written codes of language. It is those

characters who recognize the duality of language and identity in the play that are included in its comic resolution. Thus, it is by examining how identity is determined by economics and language that the 'discourse of community' in the play's resolution becomes the play's own discourse about existing socio-economic concerns.

The next play to be studied is Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday*. Perhaps the most outstanding feature of this play is its optimistic portrayal of economics in the urban setting. Indeed, this idealism is portrayed in such a way as to highlight some of the darker aspects of urban existence. This chapter will examine this idealism by focussing on the discourse of its most memorable character, Simon Eyre. Specifically, this examination will argue that it is the idealistic festive economic discourse of Simon Eyre that dominates all other discourses in the play. Furthermore it will be argued that Dekker, through making Eyre's discourse dominant within the world of the play, offers his audience an alternative discursive approach for dealing with the shifting socio-economic patterns of sixteenth-century London.

Thomas Middleton's *Michaelmas Term* will be the last play to be examined. Of the three plays involved, this comedy is the only one commonly included in critical discussions of city comedy. Again the issue of how language is used to create competitive discourses of identity is central. The primary issue of identity in this play is that of locating it in an anonymous urban setting where language seems to have lost its ability to demarcate the difference between fiction and reality. As is the case in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, Middleton evaluates the difference between the effect of oral codes of language versus written codes in the construction of identity in an urban setting.

It is the aim of this study to propose that each playwright sees the ambiguity of identity in the urban setting as one of the central issues with which the audience has to contend. This ambiguity is heightened by the changing socio-economic circumstances that were part and parcel of the establishment of a capitalist society in early modern England. The social discourse each play offers will here be traced by an examination of how each playwright uses both the oral and written codes of language in the construction of characters. Through such an examination, this study will attempt to offer an insight into the larger discourse of identity in the socially and economically fluid culture of sixteenth-century London.

CHAPTER ONE

"Much ado to know myself":
The Economics of Identity in *The Merchant of Venice*

Discussing Shylock's entrance in *The Merchant of Venice*, Gail Kern Paster observes that the action of the scene "looks like a proleptic 1590s version of city comedy" (195). While *The Merchant of Venice* is not generally considered by critics as a 'city comedy', I think Paster hits close to the mark in seeing the play as an anticipation of the dramas normally considered at or as the core of this genre. The play's involvement with issues of dividing personal identity from economic commodity and the difference between distinguishing appearance and reality in an urban setting are all elements of the more mature city comedies of playwrights such as Jonson and Middleton. The argument here is not to prove that *The Merchant of Venice* is a city comedy by any sort of critical definition. It is an attempt rather to locate in an earlier text the elements of cultural attitudes that informed the city comedies, attitudes that did not occur simultaneously with the production of the plays defined within the genre. Of particular concern here is the issue of identity and how it is (in)formed by economics and community.

In the opening line of *The Merchant of Venice*, the title character of the play is having what in modern terms could be considered an identity crisis; that is, Antonio claims he has "much ado to know" himself. Having the play open with Antonio's inability to define why he is sad as well as who he is immediately complicates how characters and their identities are viewed in the play. As Avraham Oz remarks:

> the question of identity looms constantly through the major tensions, conflicts, and crises informing *The Merchant of Venice*. On the surface level, the ancient narrative picked up by Shakespeare is populated by effective, well-defined dramatic subjects. Yet on a deeper level all the seemingly stable intersubject boundaries are deliberately effaced, all the safe codes of individuality transgressed by language devices and ceremonial acts, to finally transform what was initially conceived as a life-like, well defined character into a "crystalized monad" of entirely different order. (94-95)

Of specific interest for this study is how the issues of identity raised in *The Merchant of Venice* are interwoven with issues of economics and communal integration. To varying degrees, the identities of all the characters in the play are dependent not only on their economic standing but also on their ability to decipher the socio-economic discourse of the play-world. It is on the basis of this understanding that characters are either included or excluded from the play's resolution as Shylock and Antonio, for example, learn to their cost.

It is in trying to determine a plausible interpretation as to why these two central characters of the play are, to differing degrees, excluded from the romantic resolution of the play that the importance of identity to the thematic content of *The Merchant of Venice* becomes apparent. On one level, Shylock and Antonio are defined as opposites; they are the representatives of polarized and antagonistic economic and moral philosophies which are the basis of the dramatic tension of the play's action. However, a comparison of the characteristics Shylock and Antonio have in common complicates the dramatic status of these characters as simple economic and moral rivals. One of the most interesting qualities these rival characters share is a highly personalized identity that is premised on reiterated and emotionally over-charged self-definition. It is specifically this personal identity which leads to the exclusion (either total or marginal) of Shylock and Antonio from the play's resolution. This is due to the

fact that it is each character's personal identity that precludes the character from deciphering the socio-economic discourse of the play-world, a discourse based on the conflation of economics and person or, more familiarly, money and love. Even more specifically this discourse is based on economics and individual emotion. To understand how issues of personal identity prevent both Shylock and Antonio from being able to understand the socio-economic discourse of *The Merchant of Venice*, it is first necessary to discuss how the socio-economic discourse of the play is constructed.

The socio-economic discourse of *The Merchant of Venice* is complicated by the use of apparently two opposing settings, the urban setting of Venice and the country setting of Belmont. By choosing Venice for the urban setting, Shakespeare chose a setting that was familiar to an early modern audience. Specifically, Venice represented for a contemporary audience a city that embodied the attributes of an urban ideal, being a city recognized for its commercial wealth, racial diversity and a strong and objective justice system. It was Venice as an idea or ideological concept which attracted Shakespeare and other Renaissance playwrights to use the Italian city (or perhaps more precisely, city-state) as a dramatic setting. Leo Salinger notes Renaissance playwrights "concentrate rather on the idea of Venice as an aristocratic republic and cosmopolitan centre of capitalism, with her exceptional freedom for strangers and her exceptional attraction for travellers in search of sophistication" (173) when using the city-state as a setting for their plays. The setting of Belmont would also be familiar to the audience as the typical setting of comedy, that is, the pastoral or green world of courtly love. In using both the urban Venice and the rural Belmont, the playwright seems to be invoking a setting in

which the geographical locations of the play establish an audience/reader expectation of polarized ideologies of the city versus the country. This view of audience/reader expectation is strengthened by one of the main thematic issues of the play, namely, the relation of money and emotion. The use of both an urban and country setting would establish a familiar dialectic between economics and emotion with the city representing finance and the country representing emotion. This expectation, however, is soon complicated by the interrelation of Venice and Belmont within the play-world.

The interrelation of the two settings of the play is constructed through a number of parallels that connect each society to the other. It is on this interrelation of Venice-Belmont that the socio-economic discourse of the play is premised. While it is true that Venice represents economics and Belmont represents emotion, it is also true that neither Venice nor Belmont can exist without the other. Like money and emotion in the play, the settings are mutually co-existent rather than mutually exclusive. The characters who succeed in the play-world are the characters who recognize that identity is based upon the contingent factors of money and emotion and it is those characters who are included fully in the play's final resolution. It is the characters who recognize that in order to succeed in the play-world, one's identity must reflect the identity prescribed by the play's social discourse, an identity which is based as much on economic as on personal worth. Both Shylock, and to some extent, Antonio, are unable to grasp the socio-economic discourse of the play-world because neither is able to understand the interrelation of money and emotion. That is, each is unable to comprehend that success in the play world is dependent on the balancing of economics and emotion. Shylock's

identity is, as will be clear through his language, based upon a dual extremism. The first facet of this duality is Shylock's obsession with money. The second facet is his obsession with his plan to exact revenge on Antonio. Unlike Shylock, Antonio does not seem overly concerned with economics. The extreme facet of Antonio's character is his obsession with love. Because of these obsessions each character is unable to belong fully to the society which surrounds him. Respectively, it is through their obsession with either money and/or emotion that the highly personalized identities of Shylock and Antonio are constructed.

Shakespeare's character of Shylock, the Jew, is one of the most critically contentious literary constructs in British Renaissance drama. In large part, the controversy which surrounds Shylock reflects the cultural 'baggage' which modern audiences and critics bring to their respective reception of the play. Because of the baggage they bring with them to any viewing/reading of *The Merchant of Venice*, modern audiences and critics have difficulty in reconciling Shylock's religion and ethnicity not only with his villainy but also with the punishment he receives at the play's conclusion. But from the play's perspective, how exactly is Shylock identified and who identifies him? Shylock is identified in the first instance by his surrounding society; that is, by the cultural standards which inform the society of the play-world. From a social perspective Shylock is not so much a representation of a person as a type. Indeed, he is a representation of two types, being both a usurer and a Jew. Each of these types bear some consideration in their own right. The type of the usurer, grounded in medieval social thought, was well established in the popular mythology of Renaissance England. Although the 1571 Act Against Usury conditionally legalized the taking of ten per cent interest on loans it

did little to change the existing social opinions. John Gross comments that

> The Act of 1571 was designed to regulate an existing reality. It acknowledged the hard facts [shifting economic bases], and sought to soften them: the maximum permissible rate of interest was fixed at 10 per cent. But the old sentiments persisted, and denunciations of usury went on unabated. . . . For two or three generations after 1571, until well past Shakespeare's time, they continued to condemn the taking of interest per se, in the old medieval manner. And though the term usury was often used loosely, to indicate any kind of extortion or one-sided bargain, the usage itself was significant. For the traditionally minded, moneylending at a profit remained the very *type* of exploitation. (36, my italics)

Ultimately, the stereotypical image of the stage usurers in Renaissance drama was supported by the actual social prejudices against moneylending and moneylenders. These types were generally seen as greedy, miserly old men. As such the characterization of Shylock "conforms to the conventional type" (Gross 37). Shylock's identification as a Jew is, of course, linked to his profession or role as a usurer; a role which Renaissance culture perceived as equally damning. This linkage was partially due to the fact that members of Judaism were allowed by Old Testament scripture to employ usury in certain circumstances whereas no form of usury was acceptable for Christians[1]. As members of the religion who committed the crucifixion of Christ, Jews were generally classed as almost demonic villains. W.H. Auden contends that since very few Elizabethans had ever seen a Jew (there was no true Jewish community in England since their expulsion by Edward I in 1290) the cultural belief of the Jew "as fairy-story bogeys with huge noses and red wings" (64) was quite acceptable. The Jew of the Renaissance stage was informed by previous cultural attitudes, specifically medieval attitudes:

> the Jew of medieval myth was not just a devil in some abstract or generalized sense. His devilishness could take all to specific forms. He was a poisoner, as we have seen, and a sorcerer, he was accused of committing ritual murder, crucifying children and desecrating the Host. (Gross 17)

The Jew of Renaissance England was not an actuality. The Jew instead stood as a symbolic representation of the fears of the populace about not only foreign ideologies but also the ideologies of their own communities/country. In particular, a figure like Shylock came to be representative of the fear surrounding the change in ideology with the widespread acceptance of capitalism, and despite

> being foreign, exotic, or "other", the Jew came to be represented in England as a paradigmatic "Renaissance Man" . . . . At a moment when a culture was usually aware about the strength of innovation and the rapidity of change, anxiety about both phenomena [the Jew as a figure of social energies in action and story] could be figured paradoxically by an ancient stranger who was also an ancestor. (Berek 129)

The figure of the stage Jew, moreover, was a dramatic representation of this cultural fear. One of the specific fears generated by nascent capitalism was the fear of social mobility in a system which was essentially a hierarchy. In other words, it was fear motivated by the idea that those who would have been considered unworthy of power in a feudal system would be able, by sheer force of economic accumulation, to rise to the seats of power displacing any notion of hierarchical descent. There was no place in 'the Great Chain of Being' for yuppies. Dramatists of the time reflected this fear into characters who embodied the 'Other' who was at the same time the 'Self.' Berek concludes that

> the theatre of the 1590s was obsessed by the possibilities that identity might be willed or chosen and social position achieved by deeds, not birth . . . . Marranos, or Iberian Jews claiming to be converted to Christianity, are plausible representations of the idea that identity is not stable and can be created by individuals themselves. Moreover, emerging ideas about the fluidity of personal identity are closely associated with new entrepreneurship and social mobility. The traditional association of Jews with money-lending and other forms of commercial enterprise makes Jews in Elizabethan England, as they have been since, suitable representations of ambivalent feelings about economic innovation and social change. (Berek 130)

Shylock, therefore, as a usurer and a Jew typified the collective nightmare of the Christian social conscience, becoming the almost complete and villainous 'Other' who must be destroyed for the preservation of society. At the same time he also remained a figure that represented the ability of anyone, including Englishman, to reinvent themselves, to redefine their identity, through the means of economics.

On a personal level, Shylock practices self-identification; that is, he goes to some pains to identity himself on his own terms. This self-identification occurs through his economic position, his religious convictions and his use of language. Shylock does not argue against the social identification of his character as a usurer and a Jew. In economic position and religious ethnicity, he sees himself as those around him do but with one important difference. Rather than seeing his profession and religion as inherently evil, Shylock is proud of what he does and who he is. What society sees as his characteristic faults, Shylock sees as his personal strengths. In his profession, Shylock feels he is smarter than Antonio because he does not take any economic risks yet still makes profit. As evidence of this Shylock uses the example of Jacob's sheep (1.3.70ff). Just as Shylock is proud of his profession, he is also proud of his ethnic difference as a Jew. Shylock defines himself just as the Christians do but rather than seeing these attributes as negatives, he sees them as positives. However, it is through his use of language that Shylock most clearly defines himself. This self-definition is based through both the oral and written codes of language. Perhaps the most striking feature of Shylock's speech is its emphasis upon literal meaning; such an emphasis defines both his character and his linguistic limitations in relation to the socio-economic discourse of the play.

This quality is everywhere evident in Shylock's discourse. His dialogue rather than being imbued with the layered courtly language of love is more invested in his primary vocation, that is, economics. While Shylock's statements are quite often ironic, as in his "merry bond," they are not metaphorical like the speeches of the courtly Venetians. As Holderness notes:

> the literal quality of Shylock's speech is a feature often noted. It is as if Shylock finds metaphor dangerously unstable, since it allows for the possibility of multiple meanings. The usurer prefers his professional relations with his clients to be framed within a legalistic precision of phrase. (15)

Shylock's distaste for the Christian music of the festival is carried through the play by the lack of music in his personal utterances. The practical quality of Shylock's language gives him an advantage over the Christians in that they are unable to understand the intentions that underlie his words. The majority of Christians in the play are unable to understand the letter of Shylock's language. By the same token, however, the literal and practical nature of Shylock's language makes him unable to fully comprehend the socio-economic discourse of Venice-Belmont. It is also true, as will become painfully clear to Shylock in the trial scene, that his own literalism will defeat him. Just as the Christian-Venetians do not understand the true meaning[s] which lie beneath Shylock's speech, neither does Shylock. While he identifies his position in relation to the Christians, he never identifies his position in relation to his own desires. Shylock feels the 'words' of his bond are enough. In Derrida's terms, Shylock use of language could be seen as a dramatic representation of *différance*; the literal aspect of Shylock's discourse provides an opposition to the metaphorical use of language predominant in the Christian-Venetian characters. Shylock privileges the literal quality of the written word (the letter of the

law) over the metaphorical quality of the spoken word (the spirit of the law). As a reader, Shylock places his fate in writing (grammè) privileging it over the spoken word (Logos): the "grammè is the written mark, the name of the sign under "sous rature". "Logos" is at the one extreme "law" and at the other "phone" - the voice . . . the grammè would question the authority of the law, deconstruct the privilege of the spoken word" (Spivak l). Shylock's privileging of the written over the spoken word becomes problematic because he is still enmeshed in a society whose discourse is logocentric; a Christian society where the **Word** of God, the voice of Christian ideology determines the meaning of discourse and identity. While it is true that money and emotion are interrelated to each other in the logocentric discourse of the play-world, it is also true that they are not inseparable. Money and emotion, including love and/or hate, are co-existent rather than completely inseparable. For Shylock, however, they are inseparable. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the major action of the play, the pound of flesh bond.

Shakespeare had several choices for the story of the pound of flesh bond including oral folk traditions. The text most often referred to by scholars is Giovanni Fiorentino's *Il Pecorone*, First Story, Fourth Day, (1378, published in 1558)[2] . The pound of flesh bond proposed by Shylock shows his equation of Antonio as person and Antonio as commodity as is revealed by his statement "Antonio is a good man" (1.3.11). When Bassanio misunderstands this statement to be some sort of questioning of Antonio's personal (moral) 'goodness', Shylock explains that he meant that Antonio was "sufficient," that is, good for the money. In fact both meanings of the word 'good' are at play here, the personal 'good' of Antonio as a man and the

economic 'good[s]' of Antonio which make him a 'good' credit risk. Antonio's entrance and Shylock's revelation of why he hates the merchant again shows how Shylock doubles both the personal and the economic,

> I hate him for he is a Christian;
> But more, for that is low simplicity
> He lends out money gratis, and brings down
> The rate of usance here with us in Venice.
> (1.3.41-45)

Like the double meaning placed on Antonio's good, the hatred he inspires in Shylock includes the personal, Antonio's Christianity, and the economic, Antonio's generosity. It is the combined personal and economic hatred of Antonio that wets Shylock's thirst for revenge and the bond he proposes is the means by which to quench it. The pound of flesh that is the forfeiture of Shylock's bond represents the complete integration of personal identity and economic commodity, Antonio's physical person is the replacement to the interest Shylock would normally demand. Shylock, with his bond, literally makes Antonio a commodity.

Another example of Shylock's inability to decipher the difference between person and money is his reaction to the elopement of his daughter Jessica to the Christian, Lorenzo. The first account the audience gets of Shylock's reaction to Jessica's flight is second hand. Solanio tells Salerio of Shylock's "confus'd" passion which he further describes as "So strange, outrageous, and so variable" (2.8.12). Solanio follows this introduction by quoting what Shylock says, "My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter!/ Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats!/ Justice! the law! my ducats, and my daughter!" (2.8.15-17). There is not much of a difference in the first hand account when Shylock talks about the incident himself,

> Why, there, there, there, there! A diamond gone, cost me two thousand ducats in

> Frankford! The curse never fell upon our nation till now, I never felt it till now. Two thousand ducats in that, and other precious, precious jewels. I would my daughter were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear! Would she were hears'd at my foot, and the ducats in her coffin!
> (3.1.82-90)

It is as much Jessica's theft as it is her defection to the Christian camp that enrages Shylock to the point of wishing his daughter dead. Through his emotional outburst concerning Jessica's betrayal and theft and the equal weight he places on his daughter and his ducats, Shylock reveals his inability to perceive consciously the difference between the personal and the economic. The language he uses emphasizes this point. Other than the overall tenor of rage which suffuses the speech, the speech is notable for the equal weight placed on the linguistic terms of economics and person. In fact, the language of economic loss (the references to the jewels and ducats) is intertwined with the personal loss of Jessica. Shylock's commodification of Antonio and Jessica results from his anger towards them. The depth of this anger and the revenge response it engenders in Shylock becomes most clear during the famous "Hath not a Jew eyes?" speech. There are several noteworthy aspects to this speech. The first is the actual tone of the piece. Other than Shylock's anger, this speech also speaks to a modern audience because of the human quality of Shylock's emotions, specifically his seeming despair which arises from the recognition of himself as 'Other" and the prejudice which he must face as the stranger in the Christian controlled environment of Venice. For a post-Holocaust world sensitive of the issue of anti-Semitism and racial inequality, the human quality of this speech causes an uneasiness with the treatment of Shylock in the final act of the play. In modern scholarship this is one of the speeches which fuels the various debates on whether Shylock is

the completely immoral villain or whether his character represents a humanist vision of good turned evil by a hostile environment:

> Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions; fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, heal'd by the same means, warm'd and cool'd by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? (3.1.59-66)

The problem with any debate about whether Shylock is a 'good' person reacting to social pressure or a racist version of Jewish 'evil' is that he is neither and both. On the one hand he is avarice and revenge personified. On the other hand Shylock is a human who has been mistreated by the society around him and who is aware of the degradation of his own humanity. Because of this Shylock defies the normative reception of the audience/reader in that

> instead of merely enjoying the overthrow of an unmitigated villain, we find ourselves pitying him. The conclusion of the play is thus a triumph of ambiguity: Shakespeare has sustained the moral argument which dictates Shylock's undoing while simultaneously compelling us to react on a level that is more compassionate than intellectual. (Cohen 34)

The bigger question remains as to why Shakespeare deliberately chose to give Shylock any human appeal whatsoever and what this may mean in the context of the play.

Once one considers the duality of Shylock as an attribute of the play rather than as a problem, the interpretative value of Shylock's duality becomes less of a moral issue and more an issue of personal identity. This dramatic ambiguity has powerful implications for not only audience/reader reception but also the interdependent societies of urban Venice and courtly Belmont. By letting Shylock appeal to the commonality of his human condition with the Christians of the play, Shakespeare allows for a commonality of the lack of perception on the

part of all of the humans of both the city and the country. In other words, Shylock's humanistic plea allows the audience/reader to see him as a full human being rather than a completely inhuman monster. Shylock, as a human being, is very much like the Christians in the play. By allowing the audience/reader to perceive that Shylock is as human as the other characters in the play world, Shakespeare opens the possibility that the faults which defeat Shylock are not only restricted to the essential 'Other'. Shylock's inability to differentiate between the personal and the economic is not a condition of his status as alien: it is a condition of his status as a human being. This idea is strengthened by examining the Christian character who shares Shylock's inability to distinguish between personal identity and economic identity -- Antonio.

If Shylock is the portrayal of the completely villainous 'Other', Antonio is the portrayal of the completely generous friend. The characters are often linked through their antithetical attitudes concerning commerce. They have another economic link in that neither type can be totally included in the socio-economic dialectic of Venice-Belmont. If Shylock is guilty of not being able to consciously distinguish between person and commodity because of his great hate, Antonio is guilty of the same offence because of his love. For neither is compromise seemingly acceptable and due to this neither can completely be integrated into the world of the play. Within the structure of the play Antonio is depicted as the benevolent, rich, generous merchant. He is the all-loving and all-giving patron of the prodigal Bassanio. He is the picture of the chilvaric friend whose love for Bassanio will lead him to risk everything including his life, "My purse, my person, my extremest means,/ Lie all unlock'd to your occassions" (1.1.138-139). He is even willing to engage himself to Shylock for Bassanio's venture to Belmont even though he

claims "I neither lend nor borrow / By taking nor giving of excess" (1.3.61-62). He is the embodiment of the Christian argument against usury, and it is with Antonio that Shylock debates the premise.

This argument is initiated by Shylock with his reference to Jacob and Laban's sheep (1.3.70ff). The point about this passage is that the biblical example which is commonly used in defending usury is the Deuteronomic injunction[3] to Jews allowing them to practice usury against their enemies but not against their brother (other Jews). The example of Jacob, however, allows for the integration into the debate of the Aristotelian argument against usury, that is, that money is sterile and therefore cannot legitimately produce 'offspring' (interest)[4]. The debate about usury between Antonio and Shylock shows the two as economic opposites. Shylock argues that God sanctions usury and Antonio argues money breeding money is unnatural. The example of Laban's sheep also allows for the foreshadowing of a living being as a commodity motif of the play. Sheep, as an agricultural business, are live beings used as currency. Shylock's reference to sheep as interest is then linked directly to Antonio through his own description of himself at the trial, "I am the tainted wether of the flock,/Meetest for death" (4.1.114-115). Jacob's interest prefigured in the lambs of Laban's flock is then articulated in Antonio's self-description of himself as a "wether". Other than referring back to the argument about usury, this statement by Antonio refers to the best example of self-sacrifice and mercy in Christian mythology, Jesus Christ.

During the trial scene of *The Merchant of Venice*, Antonio is clearly cast as a Christ-figure. However he is not a perfected Christ figure. This is apparent through his reaction to his

impending death. First, rather than forgiving Shylock, the party demanding his life, Antonio rails against Shylock's hard "Jewish heart!" (4.1.80). Antonio does not follow Christ's example by forgiving those 'that know not what they do'. Second, his desire to have Bassanio present to watch Shylock's exacting of the penalty is clearly manipulative. While Antonio's generosity and hatred of usury places him firmly within the Christian model of the self-sacrificing redeemer, his potential death remains firmly rooted in the mundane. As Gross notes:

> however much Antonio attempts to pattern himself on Christ, he remains a mortal man, the same Antonio . . . . It is curious, too, how little his thoughts are turned towards Heaven. We are no doubt meant to admire his fortitude, but there is nothing Christ-like, or even overtly Christian, about the speech with which he resigns himself to what looks like his fate. He is thinking exclusively of Bassanio, and - with a tremor of self-pity - of Bassanio's bride. (79)

It is in his obsession with having Bassanio present at his potential execution where Antonio seems the least Christ-like. It also places a limitation on his self-sacrificing generosity. Antonio would probably never ask Bassanio for a financial reimbursement for his loans. He does, however, request Bassanio to make an emotional payment in watching Antonio's payment of the penalty to a loan taken out for the love of Bassanio. The first indication of the selfless friend's selfishness comes right after Bassanio and Portia have exchanged their 'vows'. Jessica and Lorenzo arrive in Belmont with the news of Antonio's economic losses and Antonio's request of Bassanio:

> Sweet Bassanio, my ships have all miscarried, my creditors grow cruel, my estate is very low, my bond to the Jew is forfeit; and since in paying it, it is impossible I should live, all debts are clear'd between you and I, if I might but see you at my death. Notwithstanding, use your pleasure; if your love do not persuade you to come, let not my letter. (3.2.315-321)

Even though Antonio's request is couched in terms which allow Bassanio to stay in Belmont, "if your love," Antonio also realizes the debt that Bassanio owes him will bring him to Venice immediately. Antonio makes another speech of this sort to Bassanio when it seems Shylock will get his pound of flesh:

> Tell her the process of Antonio's end,
> Say how I lov'd you, speak me fair in death;
> And when the tale is told, bid her be judge
> Whether Bassanio had not once a love.
> Repent but you that you shall lose your friend,
> And he repents not that he pays your debt;
> (4.1.274-279)

Again Antonio emphasizes his willingness to be the sacrificial lamb for Bassanio's happiness but he also makes sure that Bassanio will never forget the price Antonio paid to be that faithful friend, "he repents not that he pays your debt". Antonio's language is the language of the self-proclaimed martyr. In this context, Antonio, no less than Shylock, is trapped within the limitation of his discursive system, unable to keep the necessary separation between emotion and economics. It is this linguistic parallel that establishes a definite link between the two characters. While Shylock reveals his hatred and economic selfishness in his language, Antonio reveals through his generosity a selfish desire to be Bassanio's martyr.

Seen in this light, Antonio's identity as the Christian ideal of friendship is shown as less than ideal. Anne Barton claims that by making these speeches about his willingness to die, Antonio is trying to vie with Portia for Bassanio's love. She claims there "is almost a sense that Antonio welcomes death as an incontrovertible proof that he has done something for Bassanio that Portia can never hope to rival, has elevated his love above hers" (Blakemore et al 252).

Barbara Tovey sees Antonio's need to have Bassanio watch him die as proof of Antonio's selfishness, noting that:

> had Antonio genuinely cared about Bassanio's welfare, he would have done everything in his power to keep Bassanio away from the scene of his death. More, he would have attempted to mitigate Bassanio's sense of guilt by reminding him of the truth, namely, that Bassanio had tried to prevent him from accepting Shylock's terms and had warned him concerning Shylock's intentions. Antonio would have emphasized that it was he who had misjudged Shylock's motives and that the responsibility for signing the bond was his and his alone. He does just the opposite. (226)

Antonio's constant reiteration of the depth of his love and generosity for Bassanio as well as his statement that he can die happily if Bassanio is there to witness his execution cast an obvious shade on Antonio's shining 'goodness'. John Lyon, who calls Antonio's "wether" speech "a public display of self-pity," (235) feels that through his overtly abundant generosity and love Antonio "is forging a social identity for himself out of self-abnegation" (235). Antonio is indeed the "taint'd wether" but his taint comes from his own willingness to be the sacrificial lamb. It is through this desire to become a martyr for the love of Bassanio that Antonio is shown to be most like Shylock in that, like Shylock, his excessive emotion keeps him from completely understanding the socio-economic discourse of the play-world. This results in neither of the two rivals being integrated into the society of Venice-Belmont.

The difference between Shylock and the Venetians (excluding Antonio) is the base on which their equation of person and money rests. For Shylock the conflation of person and commodity is the result of an emotional tendency. His hatred of Antonio and his reaction to Jessica's elopement and her subsequent behaviour is based on personal and economic anger. In both examples Shylock's linkage of person and commodity stems from a seemingly

uncontrollable emotional base, anger. Antonio, although a member of the Christian Venetian community, also conflates the personal and the economic in basically the same way. The difference is that Antonio's conflation is based upon an exaggeration of the emotion of love. While it is also true that many of the Venetian men continually link the personal with the economic (for example the thousand ducat bet Gratiano wishes to make on whether he or Bassanio will be the first to father a son in Act Three, scene two), the difference is that the Venetian characters seem to be constantly aware that they combine the human and the monetary. They are aware that this is the way of the world in Venice-Belmont. As such they are able to recognize the difference between the perception of things and the reality of things. An excellent example of this is the casket test devised by Portia's father.

The parallels between the Shylock-Antonio bond and the casket test to win the marriage bond with Portia are explicit throughout the play's structure as well as the personal and economic implications each bond represents. Structurally the various parts of the casket test are interspersed with the pound of flesh theme. The casket test is introduced to the action of *The Merchant of Venice* immediately after Bassanio's description of Portia and the request for venture capital he makes of Antonio to woo her. Nerissa reveals the purpose for the test:

> Your father was ever virtuous, and holy men at their death have good inspirations; therefore the lott'ry that he hath devis'd in these three chests of gold, silver, and lead, whereof who chooses his meaning chooses you, will no doubt never be chosen by any rightly but one who you shall rightly love. (1.2.26-32)

The casket test therefore is devised to pick the man who is worthy enough to marry Portia. Here the matter of what constitutes worthiness in Belmont is doubled in the same manner as the meaning of Antonio as "a good man" is doubled. To choose the right casket the suitor must

be personally and economically worthy of Portia and the spiritual and worldly wealth she represents.

Within the play's structure the attempts of the various suitors, including their losses and, in Bassanio's case, conditional victory are interspersed with the furtherance of the pound of flesh plot in Venice. Act One, scene two introduces the test along with the first suitor Morroco; the scene containing the pound of flesh bond of Shylock and Antonio follows. The scene including the failed attempt of Morocco is immediately followed by Shylock's discovery of and reaction to the elopement of Jessica and the rumour that Antonio may have lost one of his merchant ships. The loss of Shylock and the rumoured loss of Antonio mirror Morocco's loss. The next suitor is the Prince of Arragon. Arragon, like Morocco, chooses the wrong casket. Yet unlike Morocco, Arragon is not barred from marriage as the scroll in the casket allows him to "Take what wife he will to bed" (2.9.70). Here the loss of Arragon is mitigated somewhat by the note of permission to marry someone else. In direct parallel to the choice of Arragon and its consequences is the next scene in which Shylock bemoans the loss of Jessica and his ducats. Shylock's loss, however, is also somewhat mitigated when he hears from Tubal about the wreckage of Antonio's ships. For both Arragon and Shylock, loss is assuaged by the implication of a gain. The following scene brings the next suitor, Bassanio. Bassanio is the suitor who chooses the casket with the portrait of Portia. Yet even though Bassanio makes the right choice, his victory in winning Portia by playing the casket lottery is complicated by the letter from Venice regarding Antonio's impending forfeiture of Shylock's bond. Bassanio chooses the right casket, but he cannot claim his prize (Portia) until he clears his debts to

Antonio. In other words, the victory of Bassanio, a complete bond in marriage to Portia, depends on the outcome of the Shylock-Antonio bond. Like the parallels between the losses of the first two suitors and the losses of Shylock and Antonio, a scene with Shylock parallels the scene immediately following Bassino's correct choice. Just as it seems Bassino has won, so too does it seem Shylock has won. Shylock legally has Antonio at his mercy and his final victory depends on the legal judgement of the Duke. Both Bassanio and Shylock have to wait on others to see if their separate victories will come to pass.

It is clear from the obvious structural parallels of the pound of flesh bond to the casket test that the outcome of each has significant interpretative value. In order to come to some conclusion about what the choice of Bassanio may mean to the larger issues of the play, it is important to discuss why finally it is Bassanio who is successful. The casket test, as was mentioned previously, is devised by Portia's father so that only the man 'worthy,' one whom Portia can "rightly love," would be able to choose correctly. Shakespeare's source for the casket test, *Gesta Romanorum*, is altered in a significant manner. The caskets in the source are inscribed with phrases which are morally religious with the correct choice (again the lead casket) defined by reference to the spiritual worth rather than inscriptions based on socio-economic discourse. Tovey sees the change as indicative of the thematic value of appearance versus reality since

> the fact that he [Shakespeare] makes an alteration here is an indication that the casket story has an important function in the play. Some people think that the casket choice is a silly way to decide between the suitors. But the very fact that this is so shows that Shakespeare did not go to the trouble of inserting it into the play for its excellence as a practical test of love or virtue or intelligence. Clearly he selected it only because of the ample opportunities it afforded for discourse on the subject of appearance and reality. (216)

The caskets have two attributes meant to guide any potential suitor, their physical appearance and the words inscribed on each.

During Nerissa's speech about the caskets of gold, silver and lead (2.1.26-32), there is no mention of the inscriptions. The fact that the inscriptions exist and what they say is delayed until Morocco attempts the casket trial. Before he makes his choice, Morocco reads each inscription out loud and attempts to link what the casket says with what it contains. The lead casket is inscribed with "Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath" (2.7.16). The silver casket reads "Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves" (2.7.24). The gold casket says "Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire" (2.7.37). Morocco makes his choice because of the combination of the inscription on the casket and the metal of which it is made. The prince decides the desire of the world is Portia (for her beauty and virtues), and he considers the metal of the casket, gold, as the physical embodiment of what he perceives as Portia's personal worth. The scroll in the casket gives the reason for Morocco's failure, "All that glisters is not gold" (2.7.65). Morocco chooses wrongly not only because he cannot distinguish between the appearance of worth and the actuality of worth but also because he does not admit Portia's socio-economic worth is just as desirable as her personal worth.

Arragon also makes the wrong choice. It is noteworthy that again this suitor's choice of the silver casket depends largely on the inscription. Arragon gets "as much as he deserves" because like Morocco, he does not recognize that appearance of worth does not necessarily coincide with the actuality of worth. Arragon does not lose by choosing a casket that represents the symbolic worth of Portia. He fails because he over-rates his own personal

worth. He, like Morocco, does not admit his desire for Portia is based as much on economic concerns as it is on an evaluation of Portia as a person. The speech on merit (deserved versus undeserved) which precedes Arragon's choice gives an indication that he wishes to improve his social status/merit and he picks the silver casket because he feels he "deserves" the wealth (represented by Portia). Arragon's speech on merit is important in understanding why the scroll in the casket negates the rule of forfeiting marriage:

> "Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves."
> And well said too; for who shall go about
> To cozen fortune, and be honorable
> Without the stamp of merit? Let none presume
> To wear an undeserved dignity.
> O that estates, degrees, and offices
> Were not deriv'd corruptly, and that clear honor
> Were purchas'd by the merit of the wearer!
> (2.9.36-43)

Unlike Morocco who never indicates that he has any awareness of the practical (economic) side of human society, Arragon knows that many who have social status have gained their position not because of inner merit but because of other reasons, methods "deriv'd corruptly." In this society having money is one of the best ways to attain and retain social status. One must have the appearance of social status as well as the money that makes such an appearance possible. Arragon chooses wrongly because while he recognizes that not everyone who appears to be honourable has the inner merit to deserve honour, he feels this is the way society should work. As such he gets what he deserves because while practically he recognizes that things other than personal merit can confer social status, he is naive enough to believe in the ideal that honour should derive from personal merit. This belief in the absolute power of

winning through personal merit causes Arragon to lose Portia and her money although he is allowed to marry whatever wife he may merit in the future. He is the "fool" in the casket because he does not realize ideals do not function in real society. Bassanio, who is the last to choose, is unlike the other suitors in two important ways: he does not read the inscriptions and he is Venetian.

It is noticeable that unlike Morocco and Arragon, Bassanio never reads the inscriptions on the caskets. In fact there is no textual evidence that Bassanio even notices the inscriptions are there. His choice of the lead casket is based solely on its appearance:

> So may the outward shows be least themselves -
> The world is still deceiv'd with ornament.
> In law, what plea so tainted and corrupt
> But, being season'd with a gracious voice,
> Obscures the show of evil? In religion,
> What damned error but some sober brow
> Will bless it, and approve it with a text,
> Hiding the grossness with fair ornament?
> There is no vice so simple but assumes
> Some mark of virtue on his outward parts.
> . . . Look on beauty,
> And you shall see 'tis purchas'd by the weight.
> (3.2.73-90)

Through this speech, Bassanio articulates the danger of assigning worth to anything based on appearance since superficial ornamentation, whether verbal, textual or economic in nature, may deceive the perception. In the end he chooses the right casket because he realizes that the appearance of worth and the actuality of worth are separate issues. One of the reasons Bassanio has the ability to figure out that the casket test is a test between appearance and reality is due to his identity as a Venetian. According to Girard,

Venice is a world in which appearances and reality do not match. Of all the pretenders

> to Portia's hand, Bassanio alone makes the right choice between the three caskets because he alone is a Venetian and knows how deceptive a splendid exterior can be. Unlike his foreign competitors who obviously come from countries where things still are more or less what they appear to be, less advanced countries we might say, he [Bassanio] instinctively feels that the priceless treasure he seeks must hide behind the most unlikely appearance. (93)

While I agree with Girard that being a Venetian helps Bassanio to make the right choice of the lead casket, I do not think that is the only reason. Other than his Venetian background, Bassanio is guided through the casket test by his refusal to rely on the written word (the three inscriptions) and his self-realization of the discrepancy between his own apparent worth and his actual worth. As Graham Holderness remarks:

> Bassanio's ritual meditation before making his choice establishes a correct system of relationship between the apparent and the real, show and substance, physical beauty and moral worth, and his final selection . . . . enfolds the romantic idealism of Belmont with the personal and economic risk-taking of Christian Venice. At this point Venice and Belmont cease to look like two separate worlds, appearing rather as linked departments of the same enterprise, united by a common morality. (11)

But what might Bassanio's victory imply for the larger economic and identity issues of *The Merchant of Venice*?

One of the points brought up earlier is the tendency of the Venetians to collapse personal identity and money into a single entity and their conscious awareness that they do so. This tendency to see people as commodities allows Bassanio to recognize the ultimate nature of the casket test. Morrocco makes the wrong choice primarily because he thinks the caskets refer only to Portia. His choice, based on the appearance of the gold casket and its inscription, represent his inability to recoginize and articulate his own identity in relation to Portia. Arragon, who seems to realize the casket test refers to the suitors and not Portia, still chooses

wrongly. This is due to the fact that rather than making his choice based on the appearance of the caskets he makes his choice based primarily on the inscriptions. The casket test is not solely a test of appearance versus reality; it is also a test of the suitor's ability to recognize and articulate his own desires. It tests one's social reading skills. The man who will become Portia's husband, and therefore lord, needs to understand not only the language of emotion but also the language of economics. Because of the interdependent relationship between Venice and Belmont, the man who will take the dead father's place must be a man who understands the socio-economic relation established between the urban and the rural. The man who will choose correctly will realize that future success necessarily relies on both economic (urban) and personal (country) concerns. Therefore the right man is the man who is consciously aware of the fact that he is wooing Portia as much for her money as he is for her personal virtues. In his speech describing Portia to Antonio (1.1.161-172), Bassanio makes the audience very aware that he wishes to court "fair" Portia as much for her personal worth as for her riches. Because of his own economic lack, Bassanio is the only suitor who recognizes the lead casket for what it is, the value of the suitor's worth as compared to Portia's worth. Bassanio's own actual worth is matched by the lead casket even though he may appear to be like the gold and/or the silver. He chooses the lead because he realizes that it matches his actual worth.

Both princes, Morocco and Arragon, are aliens to the Venetian-Belmont culture. As outsiders they are unable to understand that personal virtues such as birth and reasoning are not the means by which to solve the puzzle. Looked at individually each of the alien suitors appear to be more worthy than Bassanio. Each suitor is a prince and occupies a traditionally (in

the courtly world) higher social class than Bassanio (or Portia for that matter). They are each also shown to possess some level of intellectuality since each is shown trying to deduce the right casket by reasoning out which inscription compares to their separate evaluations of personal worth, either Portia's worth in Morocco's case or self-worth in Arragon's case. These men take what the caskets say as statements of what the caskets contain. Since the winning casket contains a picture of Portia, they think the inscriptions refer to her. In fact they refer to the metal out of which the caskets are made. They rely on the written word of the inscriptions in a society where words and the actuality they represent can be very slippery indeed. As such their essential identities as alien preclude them from assuming the identity prescribed by the socio-economic discourse of the play-world. Bassanio wins because he fashions his identity to this socio-economic discourse. As Oz notes:

> whereas Bassanio wins sexual and economic gratification by endorsing a ready-made identity, his rivals, cut off from the fulfilment of love and procreation, are doomed to total insularity, which precludes identity, as the gloomy tokens of death and folly that will qualify them from now on will attest. Thus, Morroco and Arragon, those two potential alter-egos of Bassanio, are convicted to eternal otherness, a lot not incompatiable with that awaiting both Shylock and Antonio by the end of the play. (97)

As such, in the society represented in *The Merchant of Venice*, dependence on the validity of the written word negates the individual's ability to be consciously aware of what that individual really desires. Bassanio as a bankrupt Venetian does not rely on any ornamentation to help him choose including verbal ornamentation. He chooses the lead casket simply because it is the best representation of his own economic worth and his ability, as a Venetian, to realize that appearance and reality very seldom are the same in a society which consciously equates

personal and economic worth.

The final link of the casket test and the pound of flesh plot is the defeat of Shylock during the trial scene. Shylock is comparable to the two suitors who fail the casket test[5]. Like Morocco and Arragon during the casket test, Shylock relies on the written word to champion his revenge against Antonio. Also like the two princes, Shylock does not consciously articulate the desire which lies behind the words he relies on. Both Morocco and Arragon rely heavily on the inscriptions of the caskets to guide their individual choices and each is deceived because the words do not articulate what they think they do. In addition to this both princes actually desire Portia for the same reason Bassanio does, her personal virtues and her economic wealth. Yet neither consciously admits this. Their collective inability to see past the words to the meaning of the casket test and their seeming unwillingness to articulate their actual desires stems from their status as alien and their exclusion to the person-money dialectic of Venice-Belmont society. Shylock, the alien within this society, also loses what he desires because of his reliance on the written word, his bond with Antonio, his inability to consciously state what he actually desires, the death of Antonio, and his inadequate understanding of the "word" and hence his inadequate status as "reader".

The dramatic power of the trial scene in *The Merchant of Venice* centres around the question of how far the conflation of person and money can be taken in the Venetian-Belmont society. The focus of this debate is, of course, the pound of flesh bond between Shylock and Antonio. Often the critical discussion about this scene is based on its depiction of the difference between the letter versus the spirit of the law. Portia's 'Quality of Mercy' speech is the pivot

which turns the trial scene from a contention between two men to an debate between the principals of Law and its practice. It is through this speech and Portia's subsequent legal arguments that Shylock is defeated. It is my argument, however, that Portia's victory over Shylock depends not only on her reading of the law but her ability to exploit Shylock's own weaknesses, the same weaknesses which caused the defeat of Morocco and Arragon during the casket test. In his literalism, Shylock is unaware of what may be called the 'presence' of his true desires. What Shylock literally desires is revenge against Antonio, but he never articulates this desire clearly. The literal effect of the bond would mean the death of Antonio even though the literal words of the bond do not state 'I want Antonio dead.' In fact, it is the meaning of the 'absences' in the bond that Portia utilizes to undo Shylock; she uses, that is, the fact that Shylock has not made any literal reference to blood nor has he provided a doctor to take care of Antonio once the pound of flesh is taken. It is through pushing Shylock's literalism to its logical conclusion that Portia is victorious. Therefore it is because of Shylock's status as alien, his over-reliance on the validity of language and his inability to consciously admit his own desires that the usurer-Jew is defeated.

While the 'Quality of Mercy' speech is often interpreted as the introduction into the play of the higher, courtly virtue of Christian mercy as represented by the lady of Belmont, Portia, it is can also be interpreted as a qualified invitation to join the society of Venice-Belmont. The 'Quality of Mercy' speech is Portia's response to Shylock's question as to why he should be merciful:

> The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
> It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
> Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:

It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest, it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown.
His spectre shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
But mercy is above this sceptred sway,
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute of God himself;
And earthly power doth then show likest God's
When mercy seasons justice. Therefore, Jew,
Though justice be thy plea, consider this,
That in the course of justice, *none of us*
Should see salvation. We do pray for mercy,
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy.
(4.1.184-202, my italics)

The emphasis on the divine aspect of mercy and how it relates to community in this speech is interesting. In the first three-quarters of her speech, Portia relates mercy to community through its distribution from heaven to earth. This virtue which "droppeth as a gentle rain from heaven" is integrated into the social hierarchy by its incorporation into the recognized head of the community, the "thron'd monarch". It is through being "enthron'd in the hearts of kings" that mercy is then included within the "temporal power" of earthly law represented by the monarch's sceptre. Here the speech establishes mercy as an integral part of the Christian community of the play. It is the last part that Portia indicates that Shylock through practicing mercy may become a part of that community. Her repeated use of "us" and "we" allows Shylock to join the society of Venice-Belmont by the communal act of practising mercy. This invitation depends upon whether or not Shylock shows Antonio mercy and negates the pound of flesh bond voluntarily. Other than introducing the issue of mercy versus justice to the play,

Portia's speech opens a door by which Shylock may join a community from which he feels excluded, by acknowledging the mutual dependency of himself and that community. This invitation is important in that while Shylock is a member of the community of Venice, he is so because of his economic standing. In the world of Venice, Shylock, a usurer, and those of his profession, are necessary because of the capital they can supply to the merchants for business ventures without which the economic engine of the city would stall. They are necessary to the Venetians, but they are also detested by them. Shylock as a member of this community is needed as much as he is hated. Equally, Christian Venice is necessary to Shylock, however much he despises it. It is a community of adversaries. Shylock's use of the law, which comes very near to succeeding, is an attempt to break through the bonds in which this community places him. Rather than acknowledging his place as a hated, hating, but necessary member of the community, Shylock attempts to displace the power structures by using the law to empower himself. He has no desire to change his identity to become a member of the Christian community, but he does have a desire to change the power relations of the community of adversaries. It is in Shylock's adamant refusal, "My deeds upon my head! I crave the law,/ The penalty and forfeit of my bond" (4.1.206-207) that the faults he shares with the other aliens become apparent and eventually defeat him.

Shylock's response to Portia's speech, denying the invitation to use mercy and in some sense join the community, locates the three major faults which will eventually lead to his defeat. First is the denial itself. It is Shylock's definition of himself as alien and the refusal to move from the position of 'Other' to a member of the community that allows Portia to debate with

him on his own chosen ground, the level of words, that is, the letter of the law, "My deeds upon my head!". Second, his insistence for the letter of the law is based upon the mistaken belief that the written words of the bond will assure his victory, "I crave the law!", in a context which he himself chooses but without understanding the significance of the words. And, third, it is his inability to distinguish between person and commodity and his refusal to articulate his real desire, "The penalty and forfeit of my bond".

There is no doubt that Shylock is intensely aware of his place as 'Other' within the society of Venice-Belmont. A major part of Shylock's need for revenge is rooted in the treatment he has received as the 'Other'. The insults and slurs of Antonio (as the representative Venetian) have fuelled the growing anger and hatred of Shylock, leading him to think of the flesh bond which will "feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him" (1.3.47). Shylock is quite plain about the type of abuse he suffers at the hands of Antonio, " You call me misbeliever, cut-throat dog,/ and spit upon my Jewish garberdine,/ And all for the use of that which is mine own" (1.3.111-113). The abuse which Shylock complains about is brought by his position as outsider, a Jew and a usurer. While Shylock recognizes that the treatment stems from his identity as 'Other', he refuses even at this early stage to join in any sort of communal activity. An example of this is his response to Bassanio's dinner invitation, "I will buy with you, sell with you, talk/ with you, walk with you, and so following; but I/ will not eat with you, drink with you, nor pray with you" (1.3.35-37) and his refusal to participate in the festivities of the masques (2.5.27). Both his refusal to eat with Bassanio and his diatribe against the masque and its music show Shylock's inability to accept any invitation to join the society, in its practical and

symbolic sense, of the Christian Venetians. Part of Shylock's self-identification is that while he recognizes his position as outsider he does not want to change it.

This position of Shylock as alien or 'Other', as was discussed, is parallel to the position of Morocco and Arragon as alien or 'Others' during the casket test. The position of being an outsider to the Venetian-Belmont society for the two failed suitors is that they fail the casket test. This failure is partially a result of their inability to understand to what the inscriptions semantically refer. Morocco and Arragon both rely on the written words of the inscriptions to win Portia. Like the two princes, Shylock relies heavily on the written word signified by the physical (written) bond between himself and Antonio, and like the two princes, it is his reliance on the written word which fails him. Leonard Tennenhouse suggests the importance of the political power of writing in Venice-Belmont society. He notes that if

> . . . there is one Shakespearean drama more than any other that declares the political importance of writing, it is *The Merchant of Venice*. For all their differences, the two arenas of dramatic action, Venice and Belmont, have this in common: writing determines what reality is and therefore the role an individual can play. Because contracts underwrite the economic life of Venice, that type of writing is so powerful not even the duke can modify it. In Belmont, similarly, her father's will constrains Portia's behaviour, specifies the conditions of her marriage, and determines who shall control the father's patrimony. While these two places oppose one another in terms of where the authority of writing originates - in economic arrangements or in a father's will - they concur on the fundamental point that authority resides in and operates through writing. (53)

I agree that writing constitutes authority in the play but would add that it can only function as a tool of absolute power for those who understand the socio-economic discourse of the play-world and, more specifically, the reading practices appropriate to it. Due to Shylock's inadequacies in this later respect, the letter(s) of the law fail him by the same principal that the

inscriptions fail Morocco and Arragon. In both cases the words are taken to represent one thing while in fact they represent something else. Shylock believes he will win his revenge because of the written power of his legal contract. He hopes to outwit the Christian-Venetians on the grounds of literalism and he "believes that such an intervention can be mounted on a platform of judgement, law, and contract, and finds to his great cost that there are powerful 'non-discursive' forces that control language, and that it is these that yoke signifier to signified, not some freely available and transparent rationality" (Woods 4). The inscriptions of the casket test refer not to Portia but to the caskets (and, hence, the suitors). The bond refers not to the forfeiture to be paid for Shylock's material loss (the three thousand ducats); rather it truly represents the forfeiture for the treatment of Shylock by the Christians, especially Antonio. Shylock does not want material gain, he wants revenge. Under Portia's scrutiny the words of the bond undo Shylock. While he is allowed to take his forfeiture, the pound of flesh, strict adherence to the words of the bond, advocated by Shylock himself, means he is allowed "no jot of blood" (4.1.306). Another reference to blood which is important in understanding Shylock's participation in his own defeat is Portia's question as to whether Shylock has hired a surgeon "To stop his [Antonio's] wounds lest he should bleed to death" (4.1.258). Again Shylock sticks to the letter and replies he has not because it was not in the bond. By tacitly admitting that he does not care if Antonio bleeds to death, Shylock condemns himself to Portia's upcoming murder conviction. It is at this point that the inadequacy of Shylock's reading of the literal comes into sharp focus. Portia defeats Shylock simply by being a better reader of the 'letter'. She articulates the meaning behind the literalism of the contract. As is the

case in many city comedies which follow, Shylock, the witty, is out-witted. Shylock's mastery of literal language is outdone by Portia. Portia illustrates, to some extent, by her victory Derrida's hymenal fable[6] (the opposition to phallogocentricism) as, like language, the,

> hymen is the always folded (therefore never single or simple [or literal] space in which the pen writes its dissemination. "Metaphorically" it means the consummation of marriage. "Literally" its presence signifies the absence of consummation. This and/or structure bodies forth the play of presence and absence. The hymen undoes oppositions because it acts as it suffers. This fabulous hymen, anagram of *hymme*, "always intact as it is always ravished, a screen, a tissue," undoes "the assurance of mastery." (Spivak lxvi)

Portia disabuses Shylock of his mastery by 'out-mastering' him and forces Shylock to admit his real desire. It is not the pound of flesh, it is Antonio's death. Benston recognizes Portia's role in forcing Shylock to publicly admit his own subconscious desires:

> more is happening here than an exposition of the literal aspects of Shylock's notion of the law. By the time of the trial everyone assumes that Shylock wants Antonio's life, the pound of flesh being but a metaphor for his intent. What Portia does it to force Shylock to state this hidden meaning of the bond openly. She shows that Shylock is not acting out of usurious, profit making motives. Rather, she reveals him to be a man filled with hate caused by hate. (177-178)

As well as defeating Shylock's plan of revenge, this adherence to words results in the Venetians' making Shylock do literally that which he has refused to do metaphorically, become a 'member' of the Christian society of Venice-Belmont.

Shylock's position as 'Other' and his reliance on words are the practical attributes of his identity which lead to his defeat at the trial. Portia also uses Shylock's strict adherence to law to make him aware of how his conflation of person and money has defeated him and forces him to admit the reality of his desire (death) behind the appearance of his desire (pound of flesh). Once Shylock realizes that the forfeiture which he wants (the pound of flesh) is no longer

available, he attempts to take Bassanio's previous offer of nine thousand ducats. Portia intervenes to insist that Shylock must take the pound of flesh or nothing at all. Again Shylock knocks down his price and asks for the three thousand ducat principal. Again Portia insists that the only forfeiture he can claim is the one of the bond. It is in this haggling session between Shylock and Portia in which the disastrous effects of literally making a person into a commodity become apparent. Once Shylock has literally turned Antonio into a commodity through using Antonio's flesh as collateral for the bond, he is not allowed to divide Antonio back into a person alone and substitute money for his body. Had Shylock not been blind to the importance of money in establishing the identity of a person, he could have defeated Antonio legally by demanding all his worldly goods as the forfeiture of the loan. Had Shylock been true to his profession, usury, he could have defeated Antonio in the courts of Venice. His emotional decision to make Antonio's body a commodity has cost him his revenge but more than this it has cost him his identity.

The last blow to Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* is Portia's public articulation of Shylock's real desire, the death of Antonio. When asked by the Duke at the beginning of the trial scene why Shylock would wish to take the pound of flesh from Antonio, he first answers that "it is my humor" (4.1.43). He elaborates this further on by stating "So can I give no reason, nor I will not,/ More than a lodg'd hate and certain loathing/ I bear Antonio" (4.1.59-61). While it is clear to the court on stage (and the audience watching) that exacting the forfeiture will almost certainly claim Antonio's life, Shylock never publicly admits that he wants Antonio dead. It is up to Portia to speak the actual desire out loud, and once it has been

articulated the full implications of Shylock's equalization of Antonio's body to money is revealed. Not only does he lose his forfeiture and the principal, but he may also lose his life. Instead of making the "alien" Shylock pay the death penalty for seeking "the life of any citizen" (4.1.351), the Duke claims to show mercy and instead takes away all his wealth. Shylock well understands the implications of being money-less in this society: "you take my life/ When you take the means by where I live" (4.1.376-377). In fact, it is here that Shylock shows some recognition of how the socio-economic discourse works in the play-world. In Venice, people have no identity without money, as Gratiano suggests immediately following Shylock's 'conviction' on the charge of attempted murder, "And yet thy wealth being forfeit to the state,/ Thou has not left the value of a cord" (4.1.365-366). This phrase has two implications. The obvious one is that with all his money forfeit to the state Shylock can't even afford the rope with which to commit suicide. The other implication is that without his money, Shylock as a person is not as valuable as a piece of cord. It is only by Antonio's intercession that Shylock is allowed to retain any of his money and the price for that is his identification of himself. In order to keep half of his money and retain any identity, Shylock must forfeit one identity to take on another chosen for him by Antonio. He must forget his Jewish identity to become a Christian. This is Antonio's and Venice's idea of mercy. Rather than kill the outsider, the outsider is changed (by forceful coercion) to become a member of society. By forcing Shylock to become a Christian, Antonio eliminates the threat the 'Other' may present to society. While Shylock is a nominal member of Venetian society, he will never be included in the society of Belmont. But then again neither will his victim turned 'saviour,' Antonio.

Once Portia has saved Antonio from Shylock's hateful knife, the play moves towards the comic resolution of reunited lovers. The scene for the reunion is, of course, the pastoral setting of Belmont. It is here that Antonio's difference from the other Christian-Venetians in the play-world becomes distinct. As the place for the reunion of lovers and the renewal of vows of love, Antonio as the single man is excluded from fully participating in the social renewal which love facilitates. His contribution to Belmont lies in his final release of Bassanio articulated through the resolution of the ring plot designed by Portia.

Before Bassanio leaves Belmont for Venice to help Antonio, Portia gives him a ring which symbolizes not only her only person but also everything that goes with it including her wealth, "This house, these servants, and this same myself/ Are yours - my lord's ! - I give them with this ring" (3.2.170-171). This gift is then copied by Nerissa to Gratiano. Through this action the rings come to signify the vows of love as well as the bodily persons and possessions of the women. To give away the rings is to give away everything for which they stand. After Portia, as the young doctor Balthazar, saves Antonio, Bassanio and Antonio attempt to give her a gift of appreciation. The choice she makes are the gloves of Antonio and the ring which she herself has given to Bassanio. Bassanio refuses to give her the ring because of what it represents and Portia/Balthazar leaves. After her exit, Antonio asks Bassanio to send Gratiano with the ring as a gift, and Bassanio immediately relents due to the debts he owes the merchant as well as the recent experience of what Antonio would give for Bassanio. The implication of this is that the bond Bassanio shares with Antonio takes precedence over the bond he has made with Portia. The resolution of the ring test in Belmont is the device by which Portia replaces

the primacy of Antonio's bond of friendship with her and Bassanio's bond of marriage, a substitution which has begun with Portia's intercession as the young Doctor Balthazar.

Since Antonio's request of Bassanio to part with the ring causes the dispute, he must be the one who acts to resolve the problem. He resolves this by once again putting himself up as collateral:

> I once did lend my body for his wealth,
> Which but for him that had your husband's ring
> Had quite miscarried. I dare be bound again,
> My soul upon the forfeit, that your lord
> Will never more break faith advisedly.
> (V.i.249-253)

Like Shylock who accepted Antonio's body for collateral, Portia accepts Antonio's soul as the "surety" for Bassanio's fidelity. Once this new bond is accepted, the marriage bond can proceed, and it is Antonio's duty to act as the presiding 'minister'. As Barton comments, Portia's "returning of the ring to Bassanio through the hands of Antonio . . . does not cancel out friendship" but it "regulates it nonetheless to a subordinate place" (253). Antonio is to an extent included in the love atmosphere of Belmont but his inclusion cannot be complete as the single man in a world of couples; therefore,

> . . . Antonio remains as firmly de-centred from the final resolution as he was from the initial romantic action: a bystander, a witness, even in some senses a victim. This marginalization of the central character can be viewed in the theoretical context of sexuality and economics . . . . in economic terms, Antonio the trader stands outside the significant socio-economic alliance, which is that between the impoverished gentry (Bassanio) and the landed aristocracy (Portia). The merchant is regarded as useful, but by no means an indispensable, adjunct to that alliance. (Holderness 71)

The happy conclusion of the ring business also clarifies the economic distinctions between the conflation of person and money in Venice-Belmont society. While the rings symbolize the

persons/possessions of Portia and Nerissa, they are not truly Portia and Nerissa. The conscious awareness of this conflation enables the renewal of the bonds which have been broken. The pair of lovers are consciously aware that although the rings are symbolic of person/money, they are not the actuality of person/money. By separating the appearance of value with the reality of value, the rings can be restored and the action can end with the happy couples leaving the stage.

The interplay in *The Merchant of Venice* between the relationship of personal identity and economic commodity displays the problem of consciously differentiating between person and money in an urban setting. The consequences of those who cannot is that they are in some form excluded from the wealth of love and/or money within that society. The inability to distinguish consciously between money and person is based upon, as in the cases of Shylock and Antonio, excessive emotion which engages the character in irrational behaviour as well as creating an highly personalized identity which cannot be included in the socio-economic discourse of the play-world. Shylock is defeated through his hate and anger which makes him unable to be consciously aware that the conflation of person and money in Venice-Belmont can only be taken so far. In Venice-Belmont the conflation of person and money does not allow for an exchange between person and money, and it is by attempting to replace Antonio's financial being with his physical being that Shylock is beaten and excluded from society. Antonio is also excluded but because of his excessive love. It is his own inability to distinguish between his body and his money when it comes to Bassanio that places him in mortal danger. It is because of this intensity of emotion that Shylock and Antonio can never be completely integrated into

the society of Venice-Belmont since neither is able to separate person and money. Those included in this society, such as Bassanio and Portia, realize that while money is important in establishing personal identity, money and personal identity are not inseparable. As was the case in the ring test, a commodity (the rings) which symbolizes the conflation of person and money is just that, a symbol. The commodity symbol is never the actual person.

The use of social types, the exploration of human commodification in the urban setting, and the ambiguity of comic resolution are all conventions employed in the more mature city comedies. All of these elements are present to some extent in *The Merchant of Venice*. Shylock is an obvious social type but he also, through his humanity, represents the follies to which all members of an urban society may fall prey. Antonio, as the type of the true friend, is another example of this. The inability of each character to distinguish between money and person springs from the intensity of their emotions which prevent them from being able to separate appearance and reality. The overall tone of the resolution, and indeed the entire play, can be disturbing for the same reason as most of the mature city comedies: it, like them, confuses and conflates conventional issues of moral and immoral behaviour by creating an environment in which such terms are constantly shifting meaning. The result for the audience/reader lies in the difficulty of making a definite distinction between which characters represent total immorality and which characters represent total morality. The characters in *The Merchant of Venice* represent the beginning of the duality of interpretation which will be found in the exaggerated social types of Jonson and Middleton. Taking for its subject interpreting and regulating urban economics, the play thereby becomes a precursor to the city comedies of the

Jacobean Age. It also provides a useful perspective from which to consider Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, another urban comedy not usually included in the genre of city comedy, but one which deals with issues central to the development of it.

1. One reason for this is that "European Jews had been forced to adopt moneylending as their principal source of support in the early Middle Ages, as trade and other occupations became closed to them" (Gross 42). Another reason was the Old Testament injunction (Deuteronomy XXII: 20-21) which allowed Jews to take usury from anyone but their 'brothers'.

[2] Christopher Spencer, besides mentioning the oral folk tradition, lists seven possible sources which he believes could be the basis of the pound of flesh plot, the casket or love test, and the ring ploy. Spencer's list includes: *Dolopathos*(c.1200), Johannes de Alta Silva; *Cursor Mundi* (c.1290); *Gesta Romanorum* (c.1450); The Three Ladies of London (c.1581, printed 1584), R[obert] W[ilson]; *Germutus* (c.1567-80, printed 1610); *Zelauto or the Fountaine of Fame* (1580), Anthony Munday; and *The Orator, Discourse 95* (1596), L[azarus] P[ilot](10-11). In my own reading, the three sources most often mentioned besides *Il Pecorone* from Spencer's list are the *Gesta Romanorum* and *Germutus*.

3. The actual text of the Deuteronmic injunction is as follows:
XXII:19. Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of anything that is lent upon usury:
XXIII:20. Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury, that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all that thou settest thine hand to in the land whither thou goest to possess it. (Nelson xx-xxi)

4. Henry Farnem in *Shakespeare's Economics* states the use of the story of Laban "suggests the argument which modern economists use against the Aristotelian doctrine of the sterility of money" because if "money cannot buy money, it may buy those things which do reproduce themselves [like sheep] or can be used in the productive processes to add to the wealth of the possessor" (6).

5. The failure of the princes and Shylock's defeat are the points at which James Shapiro feels *The Merchant of Venice* "is revealed as problematic" especially "when nobility (as Morocco and Arragon ruefully discover) is contingent on venture capital and when communal harmony is achieved by the exclusion of the alien (and Marlovian) Morocco, Arragon, and Shylock" (274).

[6] There are two reasons why I feel Derrida's theory of the hymenal is appropriate here. One is that it negates the possibility that even the 'literal' can be taken literally, that is, it suggests the meaning of all language is pluralistic. The second reason is the association of the hymen with Porita as a female and the play as a comedy.

CHAPTER TWO

"Take all in good worth that is well intended": Socio-economics and Discourse in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*

First staged in 1599, Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday*[1] is one of the first English Renaissance plays set entirely in the city of London and its environs whose action and characterisation revolve around the lives and concerns of ordinary citizens. The status of the play, however, as an example of the genre conventionally labelled "city comedy" is disputed. Depending on the limitations used to define the genre Dekker's play is either included or rejected. Mary Leland Hunt thinks that in the play "we have the most attractive picture of citizen life presented on the Elizabethan stage, and perhaps it is the truest" (58). Anthony Parr calls the play "one of the earliest examples of what is known as citizen comedy" (xx). Brian Gibbons, on the other hand, considers Dekker's work as an example of an "earlier tradition of non-satiric, popular, often sentimental London comedies" (15), which lies in opposition with what he sees as the more aggressive satire of mature city comedy playwrights such as Ben Jonson and Thomas Middleton. For Gibbons, as well as other critics, the idealistic tone of *The Shoemaker's Holiday* makes the play a problematic text to include in a dramatic genre distinguished by its moral scepticism and satire. This chapter will assert, however, that it is exactly the prevailing idealistic tone of the play that defines its particular nature as a city comedy. More precisely, most city comedy dramatists encourage their audience to view with a morally sceptical eye the

emerging socio-economic fluidity of early sixteenth century London (including scepticism about the audiences' own perceptions of urban life); Dekker does no less. He does, however, also suggest within this play the possibility of viewing change on social and economic levels in a more positive light than do most city comedies.

The first issue to be considered in this context might well be Dekker's own statement in the Epistle to the play, "Take all in good worth that is well intended, for nothing is purposed but mirth" (Epistle, 16-17). For some, this suggests a play too bland to be a true city comedy. Considering the intrusion of darker themes into the idealistic world of the merry shoemakers (such as poverty, social inequality and emotional and physical suffering) this statement of 'nothing' being 'purposed but mirth' seems somewhat disingenuous. As Anthony Parr notes:

> when Dekker insists in the Epistle, then, that in his play 'nothing is purposed but mirth,' he may seem to be doing less than justice to the emotional and tonal range of the comedy. But the disclaimer needs to be seen in the light of contemporary theatrical practice. (xiv)

The contemporary theatre practice to which Parr is alluding is the 'playful' inductions of the city comedy playwrights where the audience is not only given an outline of the major action of the play but are also instructed as to how it should approach the interpretation of the play they are watching. One example of this is the induction to *Bartholmew Fair* written by Ben Jonson. Jonson's induction to this play not only introduces the matter of the play, the escapades of several citizens at the fair, but also sets downs rules of what may be called theatrical etiquette for the audience. Using a character named the Scrivener and legal language, Jonson writes "Articles of Agreement" (Induction, 62) between

himself as playwright and the audience. Since the audience has already entered into the contract by paying money to see the play, Jonson promises to provide the audience,

> . . . with a new sufficient play called *Bartholmew Fair*, merry, and as full of noise as sport, made to delight all, and to offend none - provided they have either the wit or the honesty to think well of themselves. (Induction, 79-81)

Jonson's claim that the play will "delight all" and "offend none" suggests that the play is intended for one purpose only, entertainment. The qualification to this statement, "provided they either have the wit or the honesty to think well of themselves," however, makes the audience aware of their own responsibility in watching and interpreting the moral commentary of the play. In other words, the statement that the play will "delight all" and "offend none" depends on how the audience interprets the action on stage. The audience can watch the play as a simple exercise of comedic wit or they can watch the play as willing participants of the discourse it presents, namely a discourse of urban morality. Considering the link Jonson makes between the subject matter of the Induction and the subject matter of the play, to take seriously his claim that the play is only a comedic entertainment would be naïve. To take Dekker at his word that in *The Shoemaker's Holiday* "nothing is purposed but mirth" would be no less naïve since Dekker goes out of his way to stress the darker elements of his play by his idealization of urban life. It is through this contradiction between the ideal and the real that Dekker makes his own moral commentary on urban morals and economics. Like Jonson, Dekker insistently shapes our judgement of the play's characters as well as our sense of the moral perspective of the play as a whole, most commonly through his control of language which

highlights key patterns of discourse presented by the play's characters.

Language is, indeed, the key to the play. Who each character, or more explicitly what each character represents, is carefully defined by the way he/she presents themselves linguistically. Stephen Greenblatt's remarks in reference to self-fashioning in sixteenth-century literary works seem of some importance here:

> language, like other sign systems, is a collective construction; our interpretative task must be to grasp more sensitively the consequences of this fact by investigating both the social presence to the world of the literary text and the social presence of the world in the literary text. (1980 5)

In this context, the writer creates characters whose dialogue is invested in the linguistic community which the author is a part of, yet the dialogue of the character is simultaneously the site of an invented discourse which comments on the society from which the literary text springs. Thus in a play such as *The Shoemaker's Holiday* it is necessary to see the discourse of characters as both representative of social dialectics and a commentary on ideologies subsumed within that social discourse.

The best example of this phenomenon is, perhaps, Simon Eyre, the madcap Lord Mayor of London. Eyre's dialogue is, of course, highly idiomatic for only Eyre possesses the ability (within the text) of the dualistic dialogue of exuberant festivity and serious business. The individuality of Eyre's language sets him apart from all the other characters in the play; it also makes him a reference point for the meaning of all other discourses in the play. As Joel Kaplan observes, the character of Simon Eyre "stands at the centre of a charmed circle, exercising within its boundaries a magical power to animate or rejuvenate through language alone" (108). In other words, it is by understanding how the language of

Simon Eyre operates within the play that the audience is able to decipher how to judge what the other characters represent through their language. By defining how each character uses language in relation to Eyre we open the possibility of seeing how the play makes its own moral comment on the shifting socio-economic patterns of sixteenth century urban life.

To deal with the various representations of social discourse within *The Shoemaker's Holiday* it is first necessary to examine in detail the most complicated and captivating discourse within the play, the discourse of Simon Eyre. Throughout the entire play, the shoemaker's character, and presence, is firmly entrenched in the minds of the audience by his use of language. But how does Eyre use language and what makes his language so individualistic? The first aspect of Eyre's idiomatic linguistic pattern is the chaotic fluidity with which his speeches are infused. From the very beginning of the play Eyre's language is imbued with a tone of festive eloquence which captivates the listener and automatically focuses the spotlight on the shoemaker. Even from Eyre's first entrance, the tone of his language is set: "Leave whining, leave whining: away with this whimpering, this puling, these blubbering tears, and these wet eyes. I'll get thy husband discharged, I warrant thee, sweet Jane -go to!" (1.117-120). This particular speech, while slight in content, gives the first example of Eyre's use of repetition and somewhat abusive joviality. It also shows the confidence Eyre has in his own power to get Ralph released from serving in the wars in France. Specifically it shows Eyre's confidence in the power to affect social change through the means of language and business. The speech he gives to Lacy and Askew (1.124-135) to keep Ralph in England fails to secure Ralph's freedom despite his

confidence. However, this incident as a failure is important in the larger context of the play. One reason is it displays the one and only time in which Eyre's language is not powerful enough to get the shoemaker what he wants, namely Ralph's freedom. It also gives the audience a foreshadowing of the one discourse which will always be more powerful than the shoemaker's and that is the discourse of royalty or the discourse of authoritative power. Later in the play, Eyre is able to influence this discourse (as it is represented by the King) but he is never able to circumvent it. Eyre must let Ralph go because the impressment of citizens into battle is carried out under the discourse of royal authority.[2] In order to save face and comfort his shoemakers, however, Eyre again uses language. The speech following the adamant refusal of Lacy to release Ralph from service is a good example of how Eyre uses language to his advantage:

> Tawsoone, my fine Firk, tawsoone! Peace, scoundrels. See you this man, captains? You will not release him? Well, let him go. He's a proper shot: let him vanish! Peace, Jane, dry up thy tears, they'll make his powder dankish. Take him, brave men. Hector of Troy was a hackney to him, Hercules and Termagant scoundrels. Prince Arthur's Round Table, by the Lord of Ludgate, ne'er fed such a tall, such a dapper swordman. By the life of Pharaoh, a brave, resolute swordman. Peace, Jane; I say no more, mad knaves. (1.163-171)

Instead of arguing fruitlessly against Lacy and Askew to keep Ralph in London, Eyre uses language to turn the melancholy departure into a festive farewell as he turns Ralph from a humble shoemaker into a martial hero. Eyre has also changed the attitudes his household members. Under the linguistic influence of Eyre, Ralph's fellow journeymen Hodge and Firk switch from the firm conviction that Ralph should be allowed to stay in England to the firm conviction that Ralph should go to France to fight for the honour and glory of all

shoemakers. In fact, Eyre's speech is so effective in changing their minds that the other men claim that Ralph will be "a gull, by my stirrup, if thou dost not go!"(1.184). The manner in which Eyre uses language here to completely change the mental perspectives of his shoemakers is a foreshadowing of how, as his social power grows, he will be able to change the overall social perspectives of the city and society at large. It is through his obviously overblown comparison of Ralph to the greatest military men of record that Eyre is enabled to give what emotional support he can to Ralph as well as to extricate himself from the appearance of being powerless.

The next entrance of Eyre, in front of his shop, combines his loquacious verbal banter with a more concrete view of his business sense. First there is the jovial and full-throated abuse of the working members of his household:

> Where be these boys, these girls, these drabs, these scoundrels? They wallow in the fat brewis of my bounty, and lick up the crumbs of my table, yet will not rise to see my walks cleansed. Come out, you powder-beef queans! What, Nan! What, Madge Mumblecrust! Come out, you fat midriff-swag-belly whores, and sweep me these kennels, that the noisome stench offend not the nose of my neighbours. What, Firk, I say! What, Hodge! Open my shop windows! What, Firk, I say! (4.1-9)

The humorous invective used by Eyre here to awaken his workers and begin the day productively is highlighted by the quasi-abusive language directed to the women (something Eyre uses to great effect in the male-dominated household) and the stirring of Firk and Hodge. Rather than being offended by Eyre's tirade, however, his workers take the verbal torrent in stride with only the teasing comment from Firk about the possibility of Eyre being drunk (4.10-13). Eyre's language here is the key that sets the engine of his shop into motion. The workers of Eyre seem to thrive on the shoemaker's linguistic tom-

foolery. Eyre uses his language to win the love and, consequently the hard, honest labour of his workers; his personal language is a production incentive. This work-a-day motion continues until the entrance of Lacy disguised as Hans (4.39ff). When Firk first suggests that Eyre should hire Hans because it will "make us work the faster"(4.48), Eyre's response is that of the sound businessman, "A hard world; let him pass, let him vanish. We have journeymen enough"(4.50-51). Both Hodge and Firk, however, insist that they will quit unless Hans is hired (4.55-67) and Eyre relents and hires the supposedly Dutch shoemaker. This scene gives the first concrete indication of the business sense Simon Eyre possesses. First, his rousing of his workers with a catalogue of jovial abusive epitaphs shows that Eyre is well aware of how to get his household economically productive while keeping alive a spirit of camaraderie. Secondly, his compromise with Firk and Hodge saves the loss of business in the long run by keeping his two most prominent workers happy and within his own establishment. For all his verbal buffoonery, Eyre is well aware of the bottom line economically.

Another example of the business side of Eyre occurs in scene seven when again Firk and Hodge are on the verge of walking out of the shop. Margery has usurped the place of her husband by trying to get the shoemakers to work. To settle the subsequent argument between his wife and workers Eyre again uses his idiomatic invective. The result is the verbal abuse of his wife in front of his men:

> Stay, my fine knaves, you arms of my trade, you pillars of my profession. What, shall a tittle-tattle's words make you forsake Simon Eyre? Avaunt, kitchen-stuff! Rip, you brown-bread tannikin, out of my sight! Move me not. Have I not ta'en you from selling tripes in Eastcheap, and set you in my shop, and made you hail-fellow with Simon Eyre the shoemaker? And now do you deal thus with my journeymen? Look, you powder-beef quean,

on the face of Hodge: here's a face for a lord. (7.61-69)

After verbally consoling his men by lambasting his wife, Eyre then offers a more materialistic reward: he orders "a dozen cans of beer"(7.72) for his journeymen. Of course, his business sense is also presented here as he makes sure to let his servant know that if the "knave [inn-keeper] fills any more than two he pays for them" (7.74-75). Here Eyre can be seen in his true dualistic sense. One side is as the father figure to his journeymen whom he wishes to console. The other side is the keen businessman well aware that too much beer will cost him not only the original price of the beer but also the working capability of his shop (since Firk and Hodge would be too drunk to work efficiently). Perhaps it was this scene, in particular, which led Harry Levin to call Simon Eyre "a Shylock masquerading as Falstaff" (quoted in Barish, 281-282). While some critics of the play have considered this characterisation of the shoemaker as unfair, it seems to hold at heart a partial truth. Certainly like Shylock, Eyre is very concerned with the bottom line, with his economic success. This does not mean, however, that his Falstaff side is entirely self-interested masquerade; he is indeed a 'wild ruffian' full of humour and merriment. But unlike the two Shakespearean characters that are portraits of opposite extremes, Dekker's shoemaker is a combination of two opposites tempered with moderation. Indeed, this scene shows the dual aspects of the discourse that Eyre represents, namely, the discourse of festive economics. While on the one hand it is true that Eyre uses his language as a means to increase the economic production of his business, he also, on the other hand, uses language to produce an atmosphere of community in his shop. The humour and familiar manner of his speech is indicative of a

close and supportive brotherhood. Hodge and Firk are more than workers to Eyre, they are family. After all it is Hodge who 'inherits' the shop once Eyre is named to office.

This familial atmosphere of Eyre's shop, that is, the atmosphere of brotherhood, is important to Dekker's discursive strategy. In creating the festive ambience of the workplace as holiday, Dekker is idealizing the medieval concept of the guild. In Eyre's shop, the master and his journeymen work together to increase the overall economic gain of not only the shop but also its individual members. As Kastan points out, this idealization of the guild system is directly opposed to the reality of Dekker's London in which

> . . . the guild structure that once served to unite craftsmen in a fraternity devoted to the welfare and security of its membership became increasingly hierarchical and entrepreneurial, converting work from a system of solidarity to a system of exchange. In *The Seven Deadly Sins of London* (1606), Dekker complains that the guilds "that were ordained to be communities, has lost their first privilege, and were now turned monopolies," structures no longer of communal association but of commercial advantage. (326-327)

That Dekker presents such a glowing picture of community linked with business in the shop of Simon Eyre, a member of the cordwainers/shoemakers guild, highlights the disparity between the reality Dekker knew and his dramatic representation. This disparity could be interpreted as Dekker's own vision of what could be achieved in the urban economic landscape if the guilds were true to their 'mythical' roots, that is, if they were truly the fraternal communities they were meant to be. Dekker, by exaggerating the sense of fraternity in Eyre's shop, comments on how far from the ideal of fraternal community guilds in London had fallen. Other than depicting the familial ambience of the shop and the

shoemakers guild, this scene also includes incidents that help to place the character of Simon Eyre who is clearly more calculating than his seemingly clownish rhetoric would previously admit.

First there is the emphasis upon the degree to which Eyre participates in the endemic class prejudices dramatized in the play. When Firk announces, in response to Eyre's questioning, that he is working on a pair of shoes for Rose's maid Sybil, Eyre takes immediate exception: "Sybil? Fie, defile not thy fine, workmanly fingers with the feet of kitchen-stuff and basting ladies" (7.86-87). Instead he insists that Firk leave such "gross work to Hans" (7.89). It is apparent from this exchange that Eyre feels Firk is better on a professional, and hence social, level than a mere serving maid. Eyre's prejudice against Sybil is not the only statement that clearly alludes to his views on class affiliation. In scene eleven, Oatley, the current Lord Mayor of London, gives a dinner for Eyre to honour the shoemaker's recent appointment to Sheriff. Oatley in his attempt to convince his daughter to marry the wealthy citizen Hammon, enlists the aid of Eyre in his argument against marrying a courtier. Eyre unambiguously endorses Oatley's point of view,

> Thou'rt ripe for a man: marry not with a boy that has no more hair on his face than thou hast on thy cheeks. A courtier? –wash, go by ! Stand not upon pishery-pashery. Those silken fellows are but painted images – outsides, outsides, Rose; their inner linings are torn. (11.37-41)

In both incidents it is apparent that while Eyre is a man who stands apart from the rest of the characters in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, he also shares some of the attitudes of social division defined most clearly in the antagonistic relationship of Lincoln and Oatley. Dekker, however, is careful not to allow Eyre's social attitudes to reflect too negatively

on the merry shoemaker. The device Dekker uses to deflect the negative feeling that may be generated towards Eyre because of his speech on the uselessness of courtiers is the disguise of Lacy as Hans. The audience is aware, while Eyre is not, that the shoemaker Hans is the aristocrat Lacy and their knowledge that Eyre has welcomed Hans (albeit at first reluctantly) into his shop and brotherhood of shoemakers suggests a basic humanity that is capable of embracing the 'foreignness', and hence, 'otherness' of Hans. So while it may be true that Eyre may at first judge a book by its cover, once he knows a man's 'inner linings' social position no longer matters to him. Micheal Manheim feels the irony of this particular speech sets the tone for the entire play. He adds that the

> qualities celebrated are not exterior but interior qualities. What seems at first to be a class play becomes a play about a man's "inner linings," his inherent moral strength – joined with a good nature and willingness to drink deep. Good will and honest industry link the true cobbler and the true courtier. (316)

This quality of inner judgement is apparent when Eyre as Lord Mayor knowingly helps the courtier Lacy marry Rose against the wishes of both families in spite of his initial agreement with Oatley.

The disturbing effect of Eyre's particularly negative statements on social position is additionally negated by the comic inversions that occur because of Hans/Lacy disguise. First, when criticising Firk for working on shoes for 'Kitchen-stuff' Sybil, he insists that Hans do the menial work. By doing this Eyre is in fact insisting that the dirty work be assigned, so to speak, to Firk's social superior, Lacy the courtier. Eyre's order means that an aristocrat will be working for, in that he will be making shoes for, Sybil, a servant. This inversion of the normative social hierarchy would be absurd, and hence laughable, to an

audience well aware of the danger economic fluidity posed to a belief in the solid base of social position. The comic irony implicit in Eyre's speech about courtiers is also highlighted shortly after the speech is made. Specifically it is Margery who emphasises this irony in her compliment to Rose for drinking to Hans/Lacy, "I see, Mistress Rose, you do not want judgement. You have drunk to the properest man I keep" (11.62-63). For the audience, who have just witnessed Rose's recognition of Lacy in his Hans disguise, Margery's statement that Rose has drunk to 'the properest man' is more truthful than Eyre's wife knows. The regard in which Lacy is held as Hans in Eyre's shop proves that this is one courtier who is not only a 'silken fellow' but a man who has proven that his 'inner linings' are worthy of praise.

Eyre's attitude in scene seven towards Hans is doubly surprising and ironic since it is also in this scene that the audience is made aware of the intimate involvement of Hans in the economic success of Simon Eyre. It is only through both the social and financial help of Hans that Eyre is able to secure the cargo and reach the office of Lord Mayor so quickly. This, his greatest economic triumph, is shrouded by a pervasive ambiguity that helps to make the play far more complex than it first appears. The scene is made disturbing not merely by the social prejudice shown here by Eyre but by the action of the sale of the cargo itself.

The main source for Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* was Thomas Deloney's *The Gentle Craft, Part I*. Dekker made a few notable changes in the story of Eyre, which comprises chapters ten to fifteen of Deloney's work. One of the changes was the vitality of Eyre's speech and personality (hardly surprising when translating a prose character onto

the stage). The other noticeable change is the incident that includes the purchase of the ship's cargo. In Deloney Eyre's purchase of the cargo is clearly defined as being deceptive. Specifically Deloney makes no effort to hide the fact that Simon Eyre consciously disguises himself as an alderman to fool the captain of the ship (who is Greek rather than Dutch) into selling Eyre the entire cargo (113-115). In Dekker, however, the truth of the transaction between Eyre and the captain is somewhat ambiguous. First there is the issue of Eyre dressing in the Alderman's gown and accoutrements (7.105-125) before the Dutch captain arrives. Critics are split on exactly what the vagueness of the action indicates. Lawerence Venuti notes that the morally ambiguous purchase of the cargo in *The Shoemaker's Holiday* is representative of certain ideological discontinuities of late Elizabethan and Jacobean city comedy. He notes that:

> even in the glowing portrait of the bourgeoisie in Dekker's *The Shoemakers' Holiday* (1599) is not without its darker side. Simon Eyre accomplishes his meteoric rise from master shoemaker to Lord Mayor of London by committing two crimes: he deals with a Dutch skipper who seems to be evading the custom duties, and he impersonates an alderman to impress this foreigner with his "countenance in the city"(II.iii.138). (108)

Alexander Leggatt sees the incident as less disturbing:

> The only trace of this [Deloney's original] that survives in Dekker's play is the scene in which Eyre dons an alderman's gown before going to see the skipper. But there is no hint in the play that the gown is in anyway a disguise, or that it has not been come by honestly. (18)

Leggatt also suggests that Eyre does not attempt to cheat the captain based on the evidence that it is the captain himself who inaugurates the transaction (18). Perhaps a more detailed look at how Dekker's version differs from the original will help illuminate a bit of the vagueness. First there is the obvious ambiguity involved in Eyre dressing as an

alderman. There is no indication that the shoemaker is an alderman but on the other hand there is no indication that Eyre is not an alderman. As Julia Gasper points out:

> before becoming Lord Mayor, a man has to have been both a sheriff and alderman, but a sheriff does not necessarily have to be an alderman already. So when exactly does Simon Eyre become an alderman? We are never told, and the result is a crucial ambiguity. (31)

While Dekker carefully erases the clear indication of Eyre's conscious deception of the skipper from his play, Deloney's work was popular enough that it is quite plausible to suggest that the audience was aware of the original story and would interpret Eyre's alderman's gown as a disguise. In a play about the moral issues of disguise and social transgression, this is only one such example. But even without the audience drawing this conclusion there are other substantial changes from Deloney's work to Dekker's play which would cast Eyre's action in a suspicious light. In Deloney the reason for the skipper's wish to sell his cargo is clearly defined:

> it chanced that a ship of the Ile of Candy was driuen vpon our Coast, laden with all kind of Lawns and Cambricks, and other linnen cloth: which commodities at that time were in London very scant, and exceeding dear: and by reason of a great leak the ship had got at Sea, being vnable to sail any further, he would make what profit he could of his goods here. (111.16-21)

Deloney's skipper has to sell his cargo to make repairs on his ship that has been damaged on the coast of England. With Dekker, however, there is no definable reason as to why the skipper is so willing to get rid of his cargo,

> The truth is, Firk, that the merchant owner of the ship dares not show his head, therefore this skipper, that deals for him, for the love he bears to Hans offers my master Eyre a bargain in the commodities. He shall have a reasonable day of payment; he may sell the wares by that time, and be a huge gainer himself. (7.16-21)

Dekker gives no discernible reason as to why this 'merchant owner' is unable to come to England to sell the goods himself, or why the skipper is so eager (as the owner's representative) to get rid of the cargo as soon as possible. Paul Seaver sees no legal implications to the cargo scene. In fact, he interprets the entire scene as dramatic licence since historically

> there was nothing illegal about Simon's sudden launching as a merchant. One of the peculiarities of the freedom of London, which would have been known to Dekker's audience, was the right of any freeman of the City, regardless of his company affiliation, to engage in any trade . . . . Dekker's Simon, then, had the right to set up as merchant, and the real difficulty, recognised in the play by both Eyre and Hans, was not the legalities of the situation but the difficulty that a mere shoemaker had in acquiring the necessary capital, a problem solved ingeniously by a combination of the captain's necessity, Han's purse, and Eyre's appearing to negotiate the transaction dressed in aldermanic robes. Such events do not happen in real life. (93)

Seaver also notes that the purchase of the cargo of luxury goods would have "required not only fast talking and deception, but on the part of the audience a certain suspension of disbelief, accomplished in part by Eyre's constant creation of a kind of holiday . . ." (93). Gasper remarks that the general social perception of the English people towards foreigners, especially the Dutch and the French, was one of a confrontational nature. In particular, she feels that the resolution of the love plot involving Haunce, John and Nicholas in Deloney's *Gentle Craft* is a prime example of the tangible hostility of certain portions of the English public towards immigrants[3]. Specifically the story is negatively slanted against the Dutch and the French, in other words those nationalities,

> of the Protestant refugee communities who had fled to London from religious persecution on the Continent. These 'strangers' were granted asylum and religious freedom by the government, but they were resented by many English people: those who cared less about Protestant solidarity than

> about trade rivalry . . . . guilds in London and elsewhere sought to exclude the strangers from employment, and there were complaints to the government about their numbers and status. (18)

Of course, Gasper argues that the Dutch characters in Dekker are not there to show the animosity of Eyre against foreigners but to show a vision of Anglo-Dutch 'Protestant solidarity' of which she believes Dekker to be an adherent. Her arguments that the good fortune of Eyre in being able to purchase the cargo is due to his Protestant generosity to the supposedly Dutch Hans (19-20) is somewhat faulty since the audience is well aware that the Dutch shoemaker is an English aristocrat. Also, it is important to note the name given to the captain by Dekker, "Skellum Skanderbag," that is, 'foreign thief,' is a name that could hardly be considered a name given in religious friendship. Added to the ambiguity of the reason why the skipper is so eager to sell Eyre his cargo (notwithstanding the relationship to Hans) is the peculiar question Eyre poses in the actual meeting with the skipper; "Hans, have you made him [captain] drink?"(7.138). In the notes to *The New Mermaids* edition of the text, Anthony Parr makes this comment about Eyre's unusual query, "A courteous enquiry rather than a stealthy aside to Hans, though it is obviously in Eyre's interest to have the skipper well-oiled" (Note 138, 40). Although to give Eyre credit he does offer his protection or "countenance in the city" to the skipper in the next line.

The result of Dekker's changes are some what baffling if one considers *The Shoemaker's Holiday* as a simple celebration of the urban work ethic as a method by which to secure financial and social success. The rise of Simon Eyre, as is shown through the purchase of the cargo, is not one completely justifiable in terms of the holiday/working

world of the play. As Kastan notes the obvious concerns that mercantile activity, especially in regards to importation of commodities, had for England's economy in the late 1500's is reconciled in *The Shoemaker's Holiday* by the fact that Dekker

> . . . offers us a rich merchant and a rich kingdom, joyfully dispelling whatever fears might attach themselves to Eyre's speculation . . . . [a]nd the improbably "good copen" (II.iii.5), the extraordinary bargain that Eyre achieves, minimizes the expenditure of "readie monie" that the mercantilists feared. Dekker's audience is left free to enjoy Eyre's success, untroubled by the anxieties that actual speculation in 1599 might be expected to arouse in a society increasingly aware of its economic instability and its heterogeneous elements and interests. (328)

In addition to this, it is possible to suggest that the somewhat shady ambiguity which Dekker allows to permeate the scene that sets the stage for Eyre's ultimate socio-economic triumph reveals a business ethic more in line with a philosophy of the end justifying the means. If the actions of Eyre can be seen in a sceptical light, that is, as sharp business practice, the discomfort of any impropriety can only be alleviated by the final result of Eyre's success: the reordering of the urban world as socio-economic festival. It is by purchasing the cargo that Eyre gains enough money and prestige to become Lord Mayor and with the advantage of that position he can bring about the happy resolution of the Lacy-Rose love plot. Also Eyre's tenure as Lord Mayor has economic advantages, the securing of Leaden Hall for two market days a week in which the shoemakers can buy and sell leather (21-156-161).

The last obvious change Dekker makes to the story is the way in which Eyre finances his purchase of the cargo. In Deloney the funds for the cargo are forwarded by Eyre alone. In Dekker the funds used to finance the transaction are the left-over portagues

given to Lacy by his uncle for personal use in the wars in France from which he has abstained. This particular change is significant yet very apt in light of the overall tone of the play. Lacy, disguised as Hans, is given work in Eyre's shop. In gratitude, as well as a little self-interest, Lacy as Hans lends Eyre the capital he needs to secure the purchase of the ship's cargo. When the time comes for the elopement of Lacy and Rose, Lacy can appeal to Eyre for help on a personal as well as financial level. Since he owes his business and personal success to Lacy/Hans, Eyre is more than willing to use what influence he has on behalf of Lacy. Here the socio-economic message is clear. Rather than the usual class antagonisms shown in most city comedy, Dekker unites the aristocrat and the middle-class businessman in a mutually beneficial partnership. By working together, Lacy, the aristocrat, and Eyre, the businessman, are able to change on a personal level the previous class schisms seen in the confrontational relationship between Lincoln and Oatley.

The personal and economic alliance between the aristocrat and the shoemaker prepares the way for the elimination of general class antagonisms in the play's resolution. Specifically, the business success of Eyre is linked to Eyre's idiomatic dialogue to influence the one person whose judgement will directly affect the ideology of festive economics, the King. The entrance of the King and an unnamed nobleman in scene nineteen gives the most succinct appraisal of the character of Simon Eyre in the text. When the King asks the nobleman if what he hears about the personality of the Lord Mayor is true, the nobleman replies,

> One of the merriest madcaps in your land.
> Your Grace will think, when you behold the man,
> He's rather a wild ruffian than a Mayor.
> Yet thus much I'll ensure your Majesty:

In all his actions that concern his state
He is as serious, provident and wise,
As full of gravity amongst the grave
As any Mayor hath been these many years.
(19.2-9)

Within this speech the character of Simon Eyre, up until this point drawn through his dialogue and actions, is encapsulated by Dekker for the audience. Eyre is the "wild ruffian" who entertains as well as the serious businessman who is "provident and wise". The dualism of Eyre's dialogue as both festive rhetoric and economic sense is the dualism of his character. He is the personification of the festive clown melded with that of the sober economist. It is this dualism which the King wishes to view, so much so, in fact he sends "someone to give him notice 'tis our pleasure/ That he put on his wonted merriment" (19.14-15). It is also interesting to note that the King seems to be an impartial judge of the social energies that Eyre represents since he seems to be the only one unaffected by the deflective language that the Lord Mayor uses. This is shown through the speech about Simon's age (21.19-26). When the King asks Eyre how old he is, the shoemaker tries to dodge the question by answering the King with his usual rambunctious, colloquial speech, in particular with a speech about his beard. The King, unlike Eyre's shoemakers, however, is not satisfied with the Mayor's comic attempt to avoid answering as is evident in his reply to Eyre's speech, "But all this while I do not know your age" (21.26). Eyre does the only thing he can do in light of the King's ability to see through his smokescreen; he gives the King a straight answer, "My liege, I am six-and-fifty year old"(21.27). The ability of the King, however, to see through Eyre's linguistic obfuscation does not mean that the social power of the shoemaker has been completely negated.

Indeed, the depth of Eyre's social power is emphasized by the King's linguistic objectivity. Rather than being carried away by the Lord Mayor's comic rhetoric, the King approves Eyre's discourse, that of festive economics, by his own free choice. Further proof of the King's approval is the pardon of Lacy even though he has defected from the wars in France. The complicity of Eyre in the matter of Lacy's pardon is confirmed by the King himself as he tells Rose to "thank my Lord Mayor/ For your young bridegroom here"(21.4-5). Hence, while Eyre's entreaties on behalf of Lacy to the King and the granting of the pardon itself have been completed off-stage, the part Eyre has played is made evident. The granting of the pardon for Lacy also illustrates the social power that Eyre now has at his disposal. Unlike the attempt to keep Ralph from serving in the wars, Eyre is successful in his attempt to keep Lacy from facing charges of treason. While at the beginning of the play Eyre is unable to keep social forces from separating Ralph and Jane, by the end of the play he does have the power to ensure the union of Lacy and Rose. The strength of Eyre's influence is directly tested with the arrival of Lincoln and Oatley, the characters that most clearly represent the class antagonism usually depicted within city comedy.

The arrival of Lincoln and Oatley signals the final confrontation of the old order of class enmity and the new order of social festivity as embodied by Simon Eyre. Their plea to the King to annul the marriage of Lacy and Rose is a plea to annul the festive atmosphere that Simon Eyre has created. The King is given the final power in the play to decide between which discourse will dominate the world of *The Shoemaker's Holiday*. At first the choice of the King seems to favour the social forces represented by Lincoln and

Oatley as he divorces the newly married Lacy and Rose, "Then, upon the life,/ I charge thee not to call this woman wife" (21.80-81). The victory of Lincoln and Oatley is short-lived as the King immediately knights Lacy and remarries the two lovers (21.92-97). To Lincoln's protest that Rose's "blood is too base" comes the pronouncement of the King on love and interclass marriage, "Dost thou not know that love respects no blood,/ Cares not for difference of birth or state?" (21.104-105). The reinstatement of the marriage between Lacy and Rose is the reaffirmation of the new social energy that is part and parcel of Simon Eyre. In other words, the marriage of Lacy, as aristocrat, and Rose, as middle-class virtue, is the romantic equivalent of Simon Eyre's own dualistic discourse and nature. The King's blessing on the couple is the royal benefaction on the new socio-economic ideology represented in the festive economic personality of Simon Eyre.

The dualistic nature and language of Simon Eyre, as was mentioned before, is a highly idiomatic formation of generous frivolity and sound economics. Because of this the 'wild ruffian' Lord Mayor is able to reform the society of the play into an idealistic world of holiday-workplace. As such the success and failure of the other characters of *The Shoemaker's Holiday* can be said to rely on the relationship of the other characters to Simon Eyre. One aspect of this is linguistic. The other characters in the play can be divided into two general groups: those who attempt to emulate Eyre's language and those who use language in a manner antithetical to Eyre. The first group includes the characters of Lacy and Firk whose emulation of Eyre results in the eventual happy resolution of the romantic plots. The second group includes the characters of Lincoln, Oatley and Hammon, characters unwilling or unable to emulate the festive economic discourse predominant in

the language of Eyre which results in their alienation at the end of the play. How each character uses language in relation to Eyre is important in determining the moral commentary on contemporary London life that Dekker makes within the text.

Next to Simon Eyre, the most successful character in *The Shoemaker's Holiday* is Roland Lacy. Like Eyre, Lacy uses his linguistic skills to not only to ensure the success of his romantic interests, but also to ensure his political/social position. The story of Lacy in *The Shoemaker's Holiday* is again based on a story found in Deloney's *The Gentle Craft, Part 1*. In particular the Lacy subplot is taken from the story of Crispine and Crispianus, the two noble brothers who disguise themselves as shoemakers to avoid execution. Their story is detailed in chapters five to nine of Deloney's work, and as was the case in the story of Simon Eyre, Dekker makes several notable changes to the source material. In using the Crispine story for Lacy, Dekker changes the reason for the disguise, the time frame of the love plot, the social position of the lovers and the nationality of the shoemaker disguise. In Deloney, Crispine (like his brother Crispianus) disguises himself as a shoemaker to save his life. Specifically, both princes fear that the Emperor Maximinius, who "sought in cruell sort to bereaue this Land [England] of all her noble youth or youth of noble blood" (5.7-8), would kill them or send them into slavery, so they disguise themselves by becoming apprentice shoemakers (5.28-35). Lacy, on the other hand, uses the disguise to hide the fact that he has not gone to the wars in France. Another change is that Crispine meets and falls in love with Ursula, the emperor's daughter after he puts on the disguise of a shoemaker; whereas the love of Lacy and Rose has been established before the play starts, as is clear from the initial dialogue of Lincoln and Oatley (1.5-44).

Both the change in the reason for the disguise and the collapsed time frame of the love story can be explained as theatrical changes since each can be considered helpful to the presentation of the story on stage. The two most important changes, however, are the change of the social status of the lovers and the nationality of the shoemaker.

In Deloney, Crispine, a prince, and Ursula, a princess, are social equals. In Dekker, Lacy is an aristocrat and Rose is the daughter of a citizen. Dekker also makes a change in the nationality of the disguise of the shoemaker. In Deloney, Crispine does not change his nationality once he becomes a shoemaker; that is, while he is disguised as a shoemaker he remains English. Lacy, however, changes his nationality as he changes his social position turning from an English nobleman to a Dutch shoemaker. The reasons for these changes are not only theatrical; they are thematic. The difference in the social status of the lovers allows Dekker the freedom to explore to a small extent the issue of class antagonism and the fear of social mobility which arose in sixteenth-century London as a result of the increase in economic activity. The change of the shoemaker disguise from English to Dutch fulfils several functions. First it means that the disguise of Lacy is not only physical but linguistic; that is, Lacy as Hans speaks Dutch. The most obvious reason for changing the language as well as the physical appearance of the disguised aristocrat is that it makes the disguise complete. On a theatrical level, the manner in which Lacy speaks as Hans may be considered as humorous as are the dialect speeches Shakespeare used in *Henry V*. On a plot level the Dutch disguise gets Lacy hired as a shoemaker in Eyre's shop and it allows him to secure the purchase of the Dutch captain's cargo for Simon Eyre, who returns this favour by helping Lacy marry Rose and get the King's forgiveness. But in a text in which

language plays such a crucial role in determining who is a part of or who is excluded from the world of festive economics, the change in Lacy's language may be indicative of a change in Lacy's moral character. To examine whether the change in language is part of a larger moral change in Lacy's character, it is important to discuss how Lacy uses language both as himself and as Hans.

The distinction between Lacy's speech patterns as an aristocrat and as a shoemaker is clearly defined by Dekker. The speeches of Lacy, the courtier, besides being spoken in English, are also spoken in verse. The speeches of Hans, the Dutch shoemaker, are spoken in prose. But what does this mean for the overall tenor of the play? The first interesting thing to note about Lacy's switch from verse to prose is that all the members of the Eyre household speak in prose rather than verse. This is noteworthy since all the characters outside of the shoemaker's shop, with the exception of Rose's maid, Sybil, speak in verse. Here the style of spoken language defines who lives in the world of Simon Eyre and who does not. When Lacy joins this world his style of speech changes accordingly. But does the moral attitude behind the speech also change? To examine this it is necessary to show the characterisation of Lacy as it is displayed before his arrival in the shoemaker's household.

One of the first speeches Lacy gives is directed towards his uncle, Lincoln. It is an answer to Lincoln's stern warning to Lacy about his love for Rose which is also concerned with reminding Lacy of the material and emotional concerns which rely on his good behaviour in France (1.75-85). Lincoln tells Lacy to make sure his behaviour is to Lincoln's liking because even though the Earl has "no heir but thee- / And yet not thee, if

with a wayward spirit / Thou start from the true bias of my love" (1.83-85). Lacy answers that he will fight for honour and glory in France "not desire / Of land or livings, or to be your heir" but rather to "add glory to the Lacys' name" (1.86-89). As soon as Lincoln leaves, however, Lacy confides to his cousin Askew that he intends to "o'er-reach his [Lincoln's] policies" and stay in England to see to "some serious business" (1.99-100) which he must deal with personally. Once Lacy has convinced Askew to take his place in France, Simon Eyre enters with the workers from his shop to try and get Ralph from serving in the war. Although Lacy has just excused himself from participating in the upcoming battles, he claims it is not in his power to let Ralph stay in England (1.146-149) adding "that he must go:/ His country's quarrel says it shall be so" (1.182-183). Although it seems from this confrontation that Lacy has some sympathy for Ralph and Jane, he is not willing to bend the rules for Ralph as he has just bent them for himself.

Another speech which highlights Lacy's moral attitudes is the speech he gives just before he dons the disguise of Hans the shoemaker and enters Simon Eyre's household:

> How many shapes have gods and kings devised
> Thereby to compass their desired loves!
> It is no shame for Roland Lacy then
> To clothe his cunning with the Gentle Craft,
> That thus disguised I may unknown possess
> The only happy presence of my Rose.
> For her have I forsook my charge in France,
> Incurred the King's displeasure, and stirred up
> Rough hatred in mine uncle Lincoln's breast.
> *O love, how powerful art thou, that canst change*
> *High birth to bareness, and a noble mind*
> *To the mean semblance of a shoemaker!*
> (3.1-14, my italics).

Other than list the reason for the disguise, the love of Rose, and the accumulating

problems which this love may bring to him, including treason charges, Lacy gives within this speech some idea of his opinion of how his disguise will affect his social position. Namely, Lacy feels that by disguising himself as a shoemaker he will be moving down the social ladder. Rather than seeing himself as "noble mind," Lacy, once disguised will have "the mean semblance of a shoemaker." Just like Simon Eyre, Lacy is shown to have prejudicial social views. He believes that he is lowering himself to work as a shoemaker although he does also claim "The Gentle Craft is living for a man!" (3. 24). This idea that Lacy has been one of the 'silken fellows' to which Simon Eyre refers in his speech on courtiers is emphasised by Sybil's account of his actions in the previous scene. When asked by her mistress, Rose Oatley, whether Lacy has sent "kind greetings to his love?" (2.24), Rose responds with a colourful description of Lacy's behaviour:

> O yes, out of cry. By my troth, I scant knew him - here 'a wore a scarf, and here a scarf, here a bunch of feathers, and here precious stones and jewels, and a pair of garters - O monstrous! -like one of our yellow silk curtains at home here in Old Ford House, here in Master Bellymount's chamber. (2.25-29)

Here the description of Lacy identifies him more along the lines of a foppish gallant rather than the moral aristocrat. Added to Lacy's apparently lavish dress is his unbecoming behaviour. When Sybil calls out to him, Lacy ignores her (2.30-34). In fact, Lacy's treatment of Sybil makes her tell Rose to "Let him [Lacy] go snick up" (2.51), in other words, Sybil tells Rose to end her courtship with the young noble. Rose will not forsake her love for Lacy, and in Lacy's defence, when bribed with clothes by Rose, Sybil is more than willing to attempt to contact Lacy again despite his previous ill treatment. Like Eyre's speech attacking courtiers, Sybil's attack on Lacy is two-sided. Anthony Parr notes

that

> Dekker may have felt tempted to appeal to middle-class priorities in showing Lacy as initially flashy and unreliable, an aristocratic prodigal who must earn the right to win his love; but he also seeks to demonstrate the poverty of judgement based on class. (Introduction, xv)

The character of Lacy, before he enters Eyre's shop, is not shown in an overly positive light by Dekker. The aristocrat's actions and attitudes before his entrance into the immediate world of Simon Eyre are seen to be treasonous, flashy, snobbish, prejudicial, and his moral agenda is self-serving. How Lacy changes is evidenced in the way Dekker links Lacy to the rise of Simon Eyre and the resolution of the play.

Once Lacy enters the shop of Simon Eyre disguised as Hans, the environment, both social and linguistic, of the aristocrat changes. Rather than the somewhat insincere speech Lacy gives Lincoln, the hidden excuses he gives Askew and the self-centred soliloquy of what he risks in his romantic pursuit of Rose, Hans speaks Dutch in prose with the same sense of holiday most clearly displayed in the speeches of Simon Eyre. Actually, Hans enters the scene singing a somewhat vulgar drinking song (7.39-44). It is the sound of his language which gets Hans a place in the shoemaker's shop since Firk wants the foreigner hired so he can "learn some gibble-gabble" (7.48). In fact, once Lacy has been hired in the shop, his strange language (at least strange for the residents of the shop) increases in two substantial ways the economic value of Simon Eyre. First his language is comedic to the other workers and the laughter it provokes helps the shoemakers' productivity. According to Firk, Hans will " make me laugh so that I shall work more in mirth than I can in earnest" (4.84-85). As was seen before, Simon Eyre

often uses a comical style of language to achieve that which he wishes whether it is getting his workers productive or procuring the use of Leaden Hall for the economic advantage of all shoemakers. Through his use of language, Eyre creates the ideology of festive economics that is predominant at the end of the play. In a similar vein, the absurd sounding Dutch that Lacy speaks as Hans lightens the mood of his fellow shoemakers, increasing their productivity and economic gain. In return for the work he does and the humour he injects into their lives, the other shoemakers invite Lacy/Hans into their friendship, that is, into the fraternal community of the shop. Another way in which the Dutch speaking Hans aids the financial prospects of Simon Eyre is with the Dutch skipper. Because of his ability to speak Dutch as Hans, Lacy is able to negotiate the purchase of the ship's cargo for the shoemaker. Besides being able to speak to the skipper on behalf of Eyre, Lacy also lends Eyre the down payment for the merchandise. There is no reason given by Lacy/Hans as to why he does this, but the result of his generous loan to the shoemaker is Eyre's help with his elopement to Rose and the influence of Eyre in getting a pardon for Lacy from the King. This may be part of the reason for Lacy's financial assistance, that is, to help Simon Eyre become rich so that he can ask for the shoemaker's help later. But another reason is implied, namely Lacy as Hans lends Eyre the money in a gesture of gratitude for hiring him and as a result of his inclusion in the fellowship of the Tower Street shop. In particular, this action of Lacy/Hans displays a different character than the typical self-serving aristocrat that Lacy seemed to be before his arrival in Simon Eyre's household. According to Parr, "Lacy's working disguise, like a romantic hero's ordeal, has mended his inner linings . . ." (Introduction, xvi-xvii). As this is the case, the

way in which Lacy's problems are resolved at the end of the play seem more fitting than might be obvious. Actually, it is only after Lacy as Hans has joined the fraternity of Simon Eyre's shoemakers that the audience sees the meeting of Lacy with Rose Oatley. The language Lacy uses here, while English and in verse, still reflects the influence that Simon Eyre has made on the courtier.

Lacy's speech to Rose in their first on-stage meeting is interesting because of Lacy's use of economic terms in conjunction with romantic declarations. But Lacy is not the first of the pair of lovers to use this type of language. Dekker establishes this pattern of combining the terms of love with the terms of economics in the romantic courtship of Lacy and Rose with Rose's reflections on hers and Lacy's love in scene two. Rose deliberates over the obstacles that are placed in the path of the lovers' and laments the difficulties of love:

> O my stars,
> Why loured you so at my nativity
> To make me love, yet live robbed of my love?
> Here as a thief am I imprisionèd
> For my dear Lacy's sake, within those walls
> Which by my father's costs were builded up
> For better purposes.
> (2.8-14)

Here Dekker sets up a motif of loss in love in economic terms. Rose is 'robbed' of love and at the same time she is imprisoned like a 'thief' behind walls built at the expense of her father. Here Rose is both the victim and the object of robbery for the thief, since it is she who is the one robbed as well as the object guarded behind the walls of her father. Dekker continues this use of speaking of love as economic loss or gain with the speech Lacy

makes to Rose in scene fifteen. Specifically, Lacy's speech at his romantic reunion with Rose uses terms most often associated with usury:

> O, how I feel surfeit with excess of joy,
> Made happy by thy rich perfection!
> But since thou *payest sweet interest* to my hopes,
> *Redoubling love on love*, let me once more,
> Like to a bold-faced debtor, crave of thee
> This night to steal abroad.
> (15.9-14, italics mine)

Rose's "interest" which is given to Lacy "redoubles love on love" much the same way, and in the same language, as interest increases on a loan. Lacy, as love's "debtor" asks Rose again to give him her interest by eloping with him. The language Dekker uses for the love declarations of Rose and Lacy is as dualistic as the language of Simon Eyre. If Eyre's language combines holiday with business, the love dialogue of Rose and Lacy combines the language of love with the language of money. As such in the play's ending the King not only affirms the festive economics of Simon Eyre but the monetary love discourse of Rose and Lacy.

The second character who emulates Simon Eyre with some success is his journeyman Firk. Firk can almost be said to have as much presence as Eyre when he speaks. The difference between the two is that while Eyre's flamboyant linguistic style has a serious side, the language Firk uses is rarely serious. Perhaps the most notable feature of Firk's language is the constant sexual innuendoes that accompany almost every speech he makes. As such Firk is representative of what happens when the balance between holiday and reality is distorted. As Joel Kaplan remarks:

> once the delicate balance maintained in Eyre himself is shifted, the interdependence of his festive and commercial energies becomes apparent .

> If industry is used to justify madness, mirth and good fellowship are equally important in justifying materialism; when one or the other predominates, as in Firk and Margery, its short-comings are revealed. (115)

Perhaps the best definition of what Firk represents is the chaotic holiday spirit which without guidance can turn any society from hierarchy to anarchy. In dramatic terms, Firk resembles the witty slave/servant of new comedy who attempts to outwit all those who cross his path. In particular, he outwits them by using language. Although he generally is content to make puns on the speeches of Margery Eyre, as well as his fellow shoemakers, it is when Firk outwits Lincoln, Oatley and Hammon that the ribald journeyman most closely imitates his master, Simon Eyre.

As was previously mentioned, the main source for both love plots in *The Shoemaker's Holiday* is the Crispine and Crispianus story of Deloney's *Gentle Craft, Part 1*. In his play, Dekker divides the story of the brothers between Lacy, the aristocrat, and Ralph, the shoemaker. The changes Dekker made to the Crispine story for the Lacy-Rose plot are minor in comparison to the changes made to the Crispianus story for the Ralph-Jane plot. Basically the only remnants which Dekker keeps from Deloney's original are the fact that both Ralph and Crispianus are shoemakers and that they both go to war. In the Crispianus story there is no love intrigue and the main character returns from the war uninjured and covered in military glory (8.1-50). In Dekker's play, however, Ralph must leave his wife Jane behind and comes home with a maimed leg. On his arrival home he discovers his wife is no longer in the establishment of Simon Eyre and the hope of reunion seems slight. Many critics consider the darkness of the Ralph-Jane plot as intrusive in the otherwise holiday world of the play. It is by reuniting Ralph and his wife that Firk shares,

for a moment, Simon Eyre's power to affect social change through language.

The first entrance of Ralph and Jane in *The Shoemaker's Holiday* is the impressment scene. As was discussed before, this is the first time the audience sees not only Ralph and Jane but also Eyre. Once Eyre has failed to free Ralph from military service, the journeyman disappears from the action until scene ten. He has returned alive but maimed from the wars in France. The return of Ralph to the action of the play maimed is significant because of its visual dramatization of the darker realities of urban life. Rather than erase all contradiction and have Ralph return from the wars unharmed, Dekker chooses to highlight the very real dangers of impressement for city dwellers. To be injured in a war might very well mean loss of income to the returning soldier[4]. In other words, coming back alive but maimed would be a frightening possibility in a urban centre where one's survival depended on one's ability to fend for oneself economically. Dekker resolves this conflict by making Ralph's injuries non-threatening, that is, he is injured in the leg not in his hands that, as a shoemaker, are essential to his economic well-being. In theatrical time, Ralph's return to the world of the play coincides with the election of Simon Eyre to the post of Sheriff of London.

Of course, the main concern of the maimed shoemaker is the whereabouts of his wife Jane and how he will support her economically:

> Tell me, good Roger, first, what news in England?
> How does my Jane? When didst thou see my wife?
> Where lives my poor heart? She'll be poor indeed
> Now I want limbs to get whereon to feed.
> (10.76-79).

It is after Hodge reassures Ralph that "Thou shall never see a shoemaker want bread,

though he have but three fingers on a hand" (10.80-81), that Margery informs Ralph that none of the Eyre's household knows what has happened to Jane. The reason for this is that Margery has kicked Jane out of the Eyre's household because she "grew more stately than became her" (10.86). Where Jane lives remains a mystery until scene fourteen when a servant of Hammon, the citizen, enters Eyre's establishment with Jane's shoe. The servant has been sent by Hammon to have a shoemaker make Jane a pair of wedding shoes (14.4-10). The shoe that the servant brings to the shop is given to Ralph so that he may get the measurements he needs to make the new pair. It is through this shoe that Ralph discovers where his wife lives as it is the one of the shoes that he had made for Jane before his departure for the war in France (14.32-37). With the recognition of the shoe comes the vow from Ralph that if the gentlewoman who is to marry Hammon is indeed Jane, he will "take her in despite/ From Hammon, and the devil, if he were by" (14.62-63). Ralph confirms that the woman is indeed Jane when he fits her shoes, a meeting reported by Ralph but not seen on-stage (18.7-13). Before the confirmation of the identification of Jane, however, Firk has already decided the woman marrying Hammon is Ralph's wife and has made his own plans to help both Rose and Lacy as well as Jane and Ralph. Specifically, Firk uses his wit and sharp tongue to block the interfering actions of Lincoln and Oatley while devising a plan to stop the wedding of Jane and Hammon.

Firk enters the Oatley household just after Oatley discovers that Rose has eloped with the man who he thinks is Hans, the Dutch shoemaker (16.30-47). Once Firk is aware of the reason for Oatley's anger, he decides to fool Lincoln and Oatley into thinking the marriage of Jane and Hammon is the marriage of Rose and Lacy. The main reason Firk

gives for his deception of Lincoln and Oatley is for the "sport" of fooling the two men. This is not his only reason, however, as Firk realises that by sending Lincoln and Oately to the church where Jane and Hammon are to be married he is helping both sets of lovers within the play. Firk's pleasure therefore arises not only from deceiving the two men but also from helping his friends:

> Here's no craft in the Gentle Craft. I came hither of purpose with shoes to Sir Roger's worship, whilst Rose his daughter be cony-catched by Hans. Soft now: these two gulls will be at Saint Faith's Church tomorrow morning to take Master Bridegroom and Mistress Bride napping, and they in the meantime shall chop up the matter at the Savoy. But the best sport is, Sir Roger Oatley will find my fellow lame Ralph's wife going to marry a gentleman, and then he'll stop her instead of his daughter. (16.143-152)

Firk's plans come to fruition in scene eighteen. The tension is highlighted in this scene because of seemingly inevitable threat of violence it contains due to the fact that Firk and the other shoemakers' are armed for their confrontation with Hammon. Indeed, a fight does almost break out between the shoemakers' and the citizen's servants. The resolution of the tension is left to Jane who must "choose her man" (18.54). As Jane has been, to a nominal extent, associated with Simon Eyre, she chooses Ralph declaring that his "humble weeds / Makes thee more beautiful than all his wealth" (18.58-59). Jane even goes as far as to return the wedding clothes which Hammon has purchased for her but is stopped by Hodge who claims that he who "sows in another man's grounds foreits his harvest" (18. 63-64). Here Jane has proved her love for Ralph by choosing him over Hammon who, at least in material wealth, could make her life much easier. Harold Toliver remarks:

> when set between the cripple Ralph and Hammon, like Everyman between Vice and Virtue, and forced to distinguish between false and true honor, she has little difficulty in choosing, but the choice, considered in context, is not a facile one. (214)

Ralph also proves his love by rejecting Hammon's offer of twenty pounds in gold for Jane (18.78-79). His indignant reply confirms the true nobility of the honest shoemaker; "dost thou think a shoemaker is so base to be a bawd to his own wife for commodity? Take thy gold, choke with it! Were I not lame, I would make thee eat thy words" (18.84-86). Hammon, knowing he cannot win, offers an apology to the couple and gives them the money as a gift (18.90-93). Once the confrontation between Hammon and the shoemakers' has been resolved, Lincoln and Oatley arrive. With their arrival the triumph of the shoemakers' of Simon Eyre's household over the old order is complete as Lincoln and Oatley learn that Firk has misdirected them and Rose and Lacy are already married (18.137-156).

If Firk is the representation/reflection of the holiday-festive side of Simon Eyre, than his fellow journeyman, Hodge, is the representation/reflection of Eyre's economic-business side. One example would be Hodge's encouragement of the maimed Ralph who, as was mentioned previously, is concerned not only about the location of his wife but his ability to economically support his family due to his war injuries. Hodge's response that a shoemaker can be productive even if he only has three fingers is telling for two reasons. First his encouragement that Ralph can still work keeps Ralph within the fraternity of the "Gentle Craft" and hence within the shop/community of Simon Eyre. Second, Hodge, by keeping Ralph productive within Eyre's shop, helps to keep the economic engine of the work-playhouse running smoothly. Another example is Hodge's insistence on the hiring of Lacy/Hans. His reasons for wanting the 'Dutch' shoemaker are more serious than Firk's

who wishes only to be linguistically entertained. Hodge, however, feels Lacy/Hans, as a trained shoemaker, will increase the economic resources of the shop: "Dame, 'fore God, if my master follow your counsel he'll consume little beef. He shall be glad of men an' he can catch them" (4.55-56) . Hodge's economic reasoning is then bolstered by a sense of fraternal concern claiming he will not work for Eyre if he will not hire his brother-shoemaker: "'Fore God, a proper man, and I warrant a fine workman! Master, farewell; dame, adieu. If such a man as he cannot find work, Hodge is not for you" (4.59-61). In both cases, Hodge, the journeyman who takes the place of Eyre in the shop once he becomes Lord Mayor, emulates Eyre's discourse of economics balanced with community. It is through the wit and language of Firk and the authority of Hodge that Ralph and Jane are reunited. The reunion is also due to the moral character of each of the lovers.

As is the case with all the characters of *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, the language of Ralph and Jane reflects their moral attitude. Ralph and Jane are the only two members of the Eyre household who speak, for the majority of the play, in verse. As the completely middle-class foil of Lacy and Rose, Ralph and Jane share the same threat to their love (in that they are separated by social forces) and the same way of speaking. Just as the happy resolution of the Lacy-Rose match is a reconfirmation of the festive economic language of Simon Eyre, the resolution of the Ralph-Jane match is a reconfirmation of middle-class honour and values. Kastan notes that

> the reconfirmation of Rafe [Ralph] and Jane's marriage asserts the power of love over hostile social and economic forces that threaten to divide and degrade, and their love is affecting precisely because it succeeds in the face of such powerful threats. The blocking action is not primarily the suit of Hammon by a society in which Jane can actually be lost in the burgeoning urban density of London and Rafe apparently killed though in fact only

> wounded in a war in which the poor serve unwillingly and anonymously. (329)

The linguistic link between the couples is the language of true romantic love, and this language is spoken in verse by both couples (Lacy only speaks prose as Hans and never with Rose). Their link in language reaffirms the link between the plots and the success, linguistic and economic, of Simon Eyre in that the resolution of both love plots reaffirms the middle-class holiday world of festive economics coupled with good values. Lacy and Firk remove the respective blocking actions to the love plots by imitating to some extent the linguistic patterns of Simon Eyre. The result of not emulating the language of Eyre seems to be exclusion or alienation at the play's conclusion. The characters who best exemplify this are Hammon, Lincoln and Oatley.

Hammon plays a role in both the love plots as the man who threatens to take the place of each woman's true lover. The most noticeable characteristic of Hammon is the linguistic inadequacy reflected in his absurd, stilted language, that of the romantic courtier of a generation earlier. Hammon's character and presence, like Eyre, is set in the minds of the audience in his very first speech. However while Eyre's speech is jovial and real, Hammon's speech seems contrived, insincere and above all, inappropriate to one who remains a citizen. A small example of this sufficiently marks Hammon as a character who does not belong in the world of Simon Eyre, or for that matter, Roland Lacy: "Cousin, beat every break. The game's not far/This way with his winged feet he fled from death" (5.1-2). A similar inadequacy is further highlighted in his romantic banter with Rose Oatley (6.29-45). According to Manheim, Dekker keeps the audience from feeling any real

sympathy for Hammon mainly due to the unnatural aspect of Hammon's language. Of the difference between Lacy and the citizen he writes that

> while Lacy's presence in the shop [of Eyre] is natural, Hammon's imitation of the courtly lover is unnatural. He affects the artificial diction of the romance, of Lyly's or Peele's elegant young courtier, who wooed in rimed couplets and word-play. (318)

Because of his insincere and 'unnatural' way of speaking Rose has little difficulty in rejecting Hammon on a personal level and remaining true to Lacy. Even during Rose's rejection of Hammon, Dekker is careful to keep the audience from feeling any sympathy for the pompous citizen since directly after Rose's rejection, the citizen turns his thoughts to another woman, namely Ralph's wife, Jane.

The manner in which Hammon woos Jane in relation to Rose shows Hammon's awareness of social position. While he uses the romantic language of the courtier with Rose (even if it is insincere) the language of his courtship with Jane is based in the language of commodity. Hammon asks Jane the price of her hand. When she replies that "My hands are not to be sold" (12.27), the citizen claims he has "come to buy" (12.28). After offering to purchase Jane's hand, Hammon then wished to purchase her time. Jane, constant to her husband who is in France fighting as she informs Hammon, rejects the citizen's offers. Hammon asks Jane for her husband's name and then claims he has seen Ralph's name on a casualty list (12.82-86). Once he has shown the list that contains Ralph's name to Jane, Hammon presses her with a marriage proposal. Rather than leaving her private time to mourn, he remains until Jane promises that "If ever I wed a man it shall be you" (12.122). The behaviour of Hammon towards Jane emphasizes the character

portrait that can be drawn from his language. Like his language, Hammon is insincere as well as unaware of the ideal of love and honour. The faults that are apparent in his language are the faults that become apparent in his moral make-up. Hammon's moral deficiency is also clearly defined in the aborted wedding that follows. Rather than gracefully accept Jane's decision to remain with her true love, Ralph, Hammon offers to buy Jane (18.76-80). After Ralph's adamant refusal, Hammon offers the money as a gift and leaves the play vowing "no woman shall be my wife" (18.94). Within *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, the rejection of Hammon is the rejection of the outdated and insincere language of courtly romance as well as the rejection of buying love as if it is a commodity. Hammon is a study in extremes: with Rose he represents an extreme version of the romantic courtier and with Jane he represents an extreme version of morally corruptive economics. As Kaplan states Hammon "is totally out of tune with the rhythms of Simon's London, and is, significantly, the only major character in the piece who never meets the shoemaker" (118). The other two main characters who seem to be out of tune with the world of the play are Lincoln and Oatley.

As was mentioned before, the main problem in Lacy-Rose love plot are the obstacles that the lovers face in their attempt to marry. The overriding obstacle is presented in the form of familial objection. Specifically the respective families object to the match because of social or class prejudices. These prejudices are made abundantly clear in the opening speech between Lincoln , Lacy's uncle, and Oatley, Rose's father (1.5-44). Dekker arranges the speech so that both Lincoln and Oatley play upon their separate prejudices to justify why they do not like the match. Oatley plays upon Lincoln's class

prejudice by claiming "Too mean is my girl for his [Lacy's] high birth" (1.11). Other than insisting Rose is too common for Lacy, Oatley relies on Lincoln's belief in the greed of the middle-class merchant class by adding that, "Poor citizens should not with courtiers wed,/ Who will spend more in silks and gay apparel spend/ More in one year than I am worth by far" (1.12-15). Lincoln takes his cue from Oatley and assures the Lord Mayor that his economic fears of the match between his nephew and Rose are well justified since "A verie unthrift lives not in the world/ Than is my cousin" (1.17-18). To emphasize this fact Lincoln explains an example of Lacy's spending habits to Oatley claiming that when travelling on the continent, his nephew wasted his money and ended up as "a shoemaker in Wittenberg - / A goodly science for a gentleman/ Of such descent!" (1.29-31). Lincoln warns Oatley of the economic disaster that would befall the Lord Mayor should he allow Lacy to marry his daughter:

> Suppose your daughter have a thousand pound,
> He did consume me more in one-half year;
> And make him heir to all the wealth you have,
> One twelve-month's rioting will waste it all.
> (1.31-35)

Social prejudices of class and economics underlie the verbal banter of the aristocrat Lincoln and the wealthy citizen Oatley. Kaplan notes that both Lincoln and Oatley are aware of the "mutual contempt and hostility" which "are never very far beneath the rhetorical patinas of this old order . . ."(109). As is apparent from the language of Lincoln and Oatley, the familial objections that Lacy and Rose face are two-fold. First there is the objection towards the class difference between the lovers as Lacy is an aristocrat and Rose is a citizen. Grafted onto this basic social difference is the type of prejudice often found in

city comedy, namely the view that all aristocrats/gentleman are spendthrifts and all middle-class merchants are miserly and greedy. Therefore the mutual desire of both families to block the marriage is based on prejudicial assumptions founded on social types. The second obstacle Lacy faces in his marriage to Rose is the war in France that also arises from familial blocking action. Lincoln, in his attempt to thwart the continued courtship between Lacy and Rose, gets Lacy appointed "Chief colonel of all those companies/ Mustered in London and the shires about" (1.46-47) who will be leaving shortly for the battlefields in France. Other than keeping Lacy from Rose, Lincoln feels the military duty will help Lacy to advance further up the aristocratic ladder since military honour may "increase the King's love which so brightly shines/ And gild thy hopes" (1.80-81). For his part, Oatley attempts to block the Lacy-Rose love match by keeping Rose under lock and key at the Old Ford as well as trying to force her to marry Hammon. Neither Lincoln nor Oatley are successful in keeping the lovers from getting married, and in the end they appeal to an authority higher than Eyre, that is, the King, to confirm their prejudicial values.

During the final scene of the play, both Lincoln and Oatley appeal to the King to annul the marriage of Lacy and Rose thereby restoring the social and economic status with which the play begins. Before the King grants the request, he asks Lacy and Rose if they wish their marriage annulled. Upon receiving a negative answer from the lovers, the King divorces the couple. When he has done so he asks Lincoln and Oatley if they are pleased by his actions and both respond in the affirmative. The King then remarries the couple, much to the shock of the two men, claiming that his "conscience lives in pain/ Till these

whom I divorced be joined again" (21.92-93). When Oatley asks if the King will usurp the right of the father to give away his daughter in marriage, the King asks if Oatley thinks Lacy is not as worthy as a citizen (21.99-101). Lincoln answers the question for the former Lord Mayor by voicing the opinion that "Her [Rose's] blood is too base" (21.103). The King rejects Lincoln's reasoning on the grounds that "love respects no blood [class]" (21.104) at which point he knights Lacy. Than the King asks if Lincoln and Oatley are happy with his decision and again they respond positively. The King's behaviour towards Lincoln and Oatley may seem somewhat curious since he already knows all the details of the Lacy-Rose affair from Simon Eyre (21.1-5). It is not curious, however, if the questioning of Lincoln and Oatley is a test. Both men fail the test because they do not understand what the King is saying. Once the King has explained that he knows all about Lacy's behaviour and has pardoned him, both Lincoln and Oatley should accept the decision of the King's authority. They do not because they fail to comprehend the fact that their social ideology of class antagonism has been replaced by the festive economic discourse of Simon Eyre, a discourse that has the authority of the King's approval. For Bevington the outcome of the final scene again represents Dekker's self-conscious idealism:

> romantically and with no semblance of social realism, this king denies to a powerful London ex-mayor and to a baleful nobleman the right to block the marriage of Rose and Lacy. The King aligns himself with the spirit of festively romantic comedy itself, thus reinforcing our impression that Dekker's play is self-consciously aware of its own role in the idealised resolution of social conflict. (115)

Furthermore, the King's forcing the two enemies to shake hands is a subtle reminder that

the type of class division that each represents no longer has a place in the world of the play. In other words, the class antagonism based on type prejudice no longer has a voice in a world which uses the discourse of festive economics. This discourse, like the world it dominates, is, of course, not only ideal, it is fictional.

That *The Shoemaker's Holiday* resolves social conflicts in an extremely idealistic manner is not the issue of debate in this paper. As Seaver comments the idealism of the play "is all the more remarkable for coming at the end of a decade in which the Four Horseman of the Apocalypse seem loosed on the land" (88); these were years in which war, apprentice riots, skyrocketing commodity prices, and political in-fighting at Court were unsettling factors of English life. Despite, or perhaps more accurately, because of this Dekker purposely makes his dramatic representation of the urban world of mercantile activity in Simon Eyre's London a picture of social harmony based upon fraternal community that inspires mutual goodwill between citizen and monarch, that is, the city and the court. Eyre, as a character, is according to Bevington, "a spokesman for what drama can do best: celebrate saturnalian release and its purging of social discontent through Eyre's attainment of his own dream" (107). Indeed, Eyre is also the spokesman for the play's discursive methodology. In a world where increased economic activity led to a social mobility that many feared would erupt into a complete breakdown of social hierarchy, Dekker attempts to respond to this fear by proposing an ideology through the language of Simon Eyre.

The tenets of this ideology proposes a world in which economic activity is subsumed within a society based on the principals of fraternal community and good values,

albeit, middle-class values. This view of London is self-consciously idealistic. As Kastan observes:

> it is a realistic portrait only of Elizabethan middle-class dreams - a fantasy of class fulfilment that would erase the tensions and contradictions created by the nascent capitalism of the late sixteenth century. The comic form offers itself as an ideological resolution to the social problems the play engages. Social dislocations are rationalised and contained in a reassuring vision of coherence and community. (325)

For Kastan, Dekker's "strategies of idealization are too blatant to function successfully as instruments of legitimation and social mystification . . ." (335). Indeed Kastan sees this idealization "at odds even with the conditions of their theatrical presentation" (335). It is the blatant nature of the idealization of social conditions which Dekker uses to highlight the discourse of festive economics and this discourse is a discourse of "wish" fulfilment, a wish that people could work together for the betterment of society in general. By positing a discourse which is, in effect, a fusion of nostalgic past, a sense of fraternal community, and possibilities of the future, economic security gained through hard work, Dekker proposes a way to deal with the shifting realities of socio-economic life in London. By presenting this discourse on the stage, Dekker attempts to offer his audience not only a holiday from the reality of their lives but also a more positive and optimistic view of how economics could work in the urban setting. This discourse includes the business of the theatre. As Kastan remarks the play's "idealization takes place in a commercial theatrical environment that itself exposes the fantasy. The reality is that, for Dekker, the play is work, as for his characters work is play" (336-337). Dekker, who was imprisoned himself on several occasions for debt, uses his 'shop', that is, the playhouse, to posit a discourse

of fraternal community combined with commercial gain, and he includes himself as one of the citizens for whom the socio-economic realities of urban London were the cause of anxious concern. In situating himself as a member of the audience as well as the playwright who works for the audience, Dekker includes himself in the discourse the play proposes. By creating a discourse of how wonderful urban life could be if society was based on a sense of fraternal community where economics provided security for all, Dekker posits his own desire to be a part of such a society. In this sense "Taking all in good worth that is well-intended" is to understand the discourse of communal holiday and festive economics depicted in *The Shoemaker's Holiday* as one possible method of dealing with social strife and anxiety in an increasingly fluid urban landscape. Darker edges, however, are not hard to find. The linguistic issues dealt with here to fashion the holiday character of Simon Eyre are taken up again by Thomas Middleton in a much more troubling manner in his play *Michaelmas Term*, to which we must now turn.

[1] Where to place the apostrophe in the title of the play, to make it either *The Shoemaker's Holiday* or *The Shoemakers' Holiday*, depends largely on which modern editor or critic one decides to follow as the original title page of 1600 is unpunctuated. I have chosen to use the singular possessive since my argument is that the holiday of the play is in fact due to the language of Simon Eyre, the "shoemaker". This said, I also agree with David Bevington's remarks that "no modern spelling rendition can capture the perfect ambivalence of the original *The Shoemakers Holiday* . . ."(106).

[2] The impressment of Ralph as Kastan notes "would not be matters of indifference to the Rose Theatre audience in 1599. For three years, beginning in 1596, the number of impressed soldiers had begun to increase dramatically as the Irish situation worsened demanding reinforcements" (329). Paul Seaver also makes reference to the number of English soldiers needed during the end of the 1590's due to the continuing war with Spain, engagements in France and the Low countries as well as the troops needed to repress rebellion in Ireland: "In the spring of 1598 the earl of Essex had sailed for Ireland with an army of 12,000, but within months the Council was contemplating the dispatch of another 4,000. At the end of August London was ordered to muster 400 reinforcements for the troop of 2,100 to be dispatched to Ireland, and in late December London was ordered to supply another 600" (87-88).

[3] Kastan also notes the disparity between the 'reality' of London and Dekker's presentation: "In reality, relations between English craftsmen and immigrant workers were hardly so supportive. Early in the century, antagonism toward alien workers erupted in the Evil May Day riots of 1517" (325).

[4] According to Seaver, "vagrants and the unemployed flocked to London, competing for work and poor relief with the discharged and 'maimed' soldiers, and in 1598 Parliament gave statutory authority to the great Elizabethan Poor Law, a measure which doubled the poor rates in some London parishes" (88).

CHAPTER THREE

"With his own blood he writes"
Language and Identity/Economics in *Michaelmas Term*

As was the case in Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, language plays a central role in the conception and recognition of identity and economics in Thomas Middleton's *Michaelmas Term*. The structure, theatrical ploys and plot lines of the play are fairly conventional within the definition of city comedy. The structure consists of one main plot that is mirrored by interconnected sub-plots. The major thematic impetus of these plots is concerned with issues of prodigality, the ambiguity of identity in the city and the prey-predator mentality of its inhabitants. Middleton uses theatrical devices such as disguise, the fake-death of a major character and inverted familial relationships in an urban setting to establish the comedy, confusion and contention so prevalent in city comedies. The dominant attribute, however, which makes his dramas stand out is the playwright's masterly use of language. Brian Gibbons perhaps gives the most accurate description of the impact that Middleton's use of language has for *Michaelmas Term*,

> *Michaelmas Term* has for a main plot a modernized version of *Everyman*. The young innocent abroad is conventional and Middleton clearly indicates the kind of play we can expect in the opening scene; the conventional situation itself is perfunctorily sketched, ***it is the urgent activity in the language, the compression of statement which urges us that the play will be alive***. (129, italics mine)

Middleton's use of language in this drama is pluralistic in that it embodies both oral and written codes. It is through both of these codes that identity in the play is established. The type of identity established by each form of language, however, is different.

The two main types of identity established by language in the play are seeming or false identity and true or real identity. Characters such as Andrew Lethe use oral codes or spoken language to establish for themselves an identity in the city by which their true identity is hidden. In other words, they use spoken language to reshape how their identity is perceived by the other characters. This reshaping is linked to the socio-economics of the city because by reinventing themselves through their speech and clothes to the semblance of a higher class, these characters hope to increase their economic status as well. Written codes are used in the play to defeat the false appearances created by spoken language; that is, the written word in the play supersedes the identity established by spoken language to reveal each character's true identity. In the play both linguistic codes are used in establishing who each character is in appearance and in truth. Of particular importance in the "man devouring city" of *Michaelmas Term* is the transformation of identity which occurs through the act of signing, specifically the signing of legal documents. It is on the fulcrum of their signatures that the personal and economic fortunes of the two main characters, Richard Easy and Ephestian Quomodo, balance. In parallel to the signature, identity of character is further (de)constructed by the several letters which are highlighted in the play. It is by examining how Middleton uses language as a tool to manipulate identity

as well as a tool to decipher appearance and reality in the world of *Michaelmas Term* that the play's moral ethos is established.

To deal with the moral implications of language and its relationship to identity in *Michaelmas Term*, it is necessary to examine how each character's identity is perceived or construed by other characters as well as by the audience. Identity in the city of this play world is constructed upon two main building blocks: personal economic status and appearance. First, who each character is and what position each holds in the drama is determined by their personal economic status. Rearage and Salewood, the veteran city gallants, are characterised by their lack of personal fortune. The best indication of this is how Middleton names them. Rearage refers to not only to the character but also to the economic situation he finds himself in, that is, that he is behind on paying his debts. The same applies to Salewood[1]. To furnish his living in the city, he has sold off all or at least parcels of his land (wood). Easy's present, as well as his near future, economic status is also determined by his name. He is 'easy' in the first instance economically in that he has just inherited his father's estate. However, because of his 'easy'-going nature and naivete, he will soon be an 'easy' victim for Quomodo and his fellow cozeners. The other important indicator of character identity in the play is appearance.

The first thing to be discussed in relation to appearance is that appearance does not mean physical appearance only. In other words, while clothes and disguises of a physical nature are important in the city of the play world, they are not the only means by which a character can change his identity. Another attribute of appearance used quite deftly by the characters of *Michaelmas Term* is a linguistically constructed

appearance. They use language to establish for themselves a perception of who they are and what social position they hold. The best examples of this phenomenon are Quomodo and Andrew Lethe. In the city world of the play, identity becomes proteus-like because of the protean quality of the city's language. In a discussion of Middleton's *The Phoenix*, George E. Rowe notes that the

> failure of language to communicate clearly and accurately is another source of disorder throughout the play. Throughout much of the drama, words simply do not mean the same things to all characters . . . . because there is no common language, there is no common ground for judgement, and words can no longer be counted upon to provide a clear and accurate description of what is and is not. (25)

I think this statement is equally applicable to the use of spoken language in *Michaelmas Term*. Quomodo's plan to gull Easy relies heavily on the ability of Shortyard to transform himself into a gentleman not only by physical standards such as clothes and behaviour but also through his use of language. Andrew Lethe becomes a viable contender for Susan Quomodo's hand in marriage not because of what he has but by how he has constructed himself linguistically, as an up-and-coming courtier, to the perception of Quomodo. The majority of the lines spoken in the play have far more linguistic meaning than their face value. This is an essential element for meaning in Middleton's plays. Other than giving Middleton's work a theatrical depth "the complexities and redoubled ironies of situation and language are not merely entertaining but, expose the fluctuating presence of meaning and value behind words, gestures and attitudes" (Gibbons 112). Middleton, by making duplicity the salient feature of spoken language in *Michaelmas Term*, creates a fast paced comic dialogue as well as a path to understanding the moral ethos of the play. In particular,

> Middleton's careful semantic "field" creates his moral "field" - a construct superior to the more generalised "moral vision" that critics claim Middleton depicts. Each play establishes its own system of values whose relativity - not universality - Middleton dramatizes. (Friedenreich 12)

While the 'villains' use language to dupe the naïve, it is also true that it is by language that they are defeated. Specifically, the upstart villains of the play world are defeated by the use of the written word.

The abundance of documents in *Michaelmas Term* is the first indication of the importance of the written word to the fortunes of the play's characters. In total there are at least four legal bonds in the play as well as the mention of four letters. The difference between the spoken word and the written word is that the meaning and/or truth of the spoken word is misleading in that often characters say one thing while meaning another. The spoken language in the play never consists of one literal meaning but rather each statement is refracted into multiple meanings either through the speaker's intention or the listener's perception. Ironic statements, intentional or unintentional, abound in the text. In contrast, the meaning of the written word is literal and stable. In each bond and letter the intended meaning of each transaction or personal declaration is clear. The bond into which Quomodo tricks Easy is legal and binding even if the language used to induce Easy into signing the bond is duplicitous or at least vastly misleading. The letter Lethe writes to Thomasine Quomodo reveals in writing the true nature of his character, an over-reaching, pretentious egotist. Because of its literal and stable nature, it is through the written word that true identity is established in the city of *Michaelmas Term*. Quomodo has to admit to being a thief and usurer in order to get Thomasine and his identity back and Lethe's identity, a

combination of his forgotten past and lecherous present, is revealed through the letter which Rearage shows to the court. As such the two main villains of the play, Quomodo in the main plot and Lethe in the sub-plot, are brought to admission of their true identities and immoral behaviour through the power of the written word. A close examination of the use to which Middleton puts language in *Michaelmas Term* reveals the play's theatricality as well as the moral dialectic of its city.

The first indication of the importance of language in establishing Middleton's moral dialectic is to be found in the Induction to *Michaelmas Term*. In particular Middleton uses the characters of Michaelmas Term and his associates to introduce to the audience the central issues of the play. As was discussed in relation to *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, the inductions and prefaces in city comedy often function as a preliminary sketch of the moral and practical values that the main body of the play will elucidate. At the same time the author uses the induction as a disclaimer to deny that anything of a moralistic nature will be viewed and this play is no exception. The basic structure of the Induction is an interrupted soliloquy by the character Michaelmas Term on several thematic concerns which are imbedded within the main body of the play. In fact, the Induction seems to be a miniature morality play with characters which represent larger abstract concepts such as periods of time, specifically in this case, the sessions of the legal calendar. Therefore, the issues upon which Michaelmas Term expounds - clothes, heirs, legalism (especially law suits) and money - are linked not only to the main body of the play but also to the sense of a larger moral meaning.

The first topic, clothes, is brought forward by the physical action of Michaelmas Term changing his robe on coming to the city. The reason for his exchanging his white

robe for a black robe is explicitly explained by the character; white is for the country and black is for the city:

> Lay by my conscience,
> Give me my gown, that weed is for the country;
> We must be civil now, and match our evil,
> Who first made civil black, he pleas'd the devil .
> (Induction 1-4)

The moral implication of the robe changing of Michaelmas Term is that the country robe of white symbolizes attributes of innocence that have no place in the city. Specifically, the country innocence to which Michaelmas Term is referring is the naïveté of the people of the country with respect to the ambiguity of both language and identity in the city. The white robe that represents those ignorant of the deceptive nature of the city must be exchanged for a black robe that symbolises those who have knowledge of the darker moral aspect of the city. The character's actions, and comments upon those actions, represents the relation the characters of the Induction have to the morality tradition. Michaelmas Term's speech on white versus black (respectively, good/innocence versus evil/corruption) outlines for the audience the character's view of the morality of the city. The Induction is a miniature morality play but in reverse. While the vice (black) characters of the morality play disguise themselves as virtues (white), Middleton has a virtue, Michaelmas Term (representative of justice), disguise himself as a vice (legal chicanery). This change of clothes becomes representative of a change of identity from country innocence and morality to city experience and immoral avarice,

> thus white, conscience and goodness characterise the country until it arrives in town; black, evil and cunning are the garb of the city. This moral contrast

> is carried out, sometimes seriously, sometimes comically, and frequently ironically throughout the play. (Kistner, A. L. and M.K. 61)

The change of clothes and attitude is mirrored by the multitude of disguises found in the play. It also foreshadows the occupation of the main villain of the play, Quomodo, the woollen draper. This symbolic change of clothes/identity is strengthened by Michaelmas Term's statement of his purpose in coming to the city:

> From wronger and wronged I have fee,
> And what by sweat from the rough earth they draw,
> Is to enrich this silver harvest, Law;
> And so through wealthy variance, and fat brawl,
> The barn is made but steward to the hall.
> (Induction 8 –12)

Michaelmas Term, the characterization of the fall legal term, has come to the city to reap, through legal contention, the benefits/profits of the country's autumn harvest. This is possible due to the number of people who immigrate to the city in the fall as is shown by the boy's answer to the Term's question of whether or not the legal complainants have arrived from the country, "Oh like hops and harlots sir!" (16). As Charles A. Hallett notes, the substance of the Induction is used by Middleton to posit the basic social polemic which is seen throughout the entire play:

> the country is to the city as white is to black. The two are as opposed as the conscience's standards of conduct are to the devil's. Hard labor is for the country; contention and brawling for the city. Money earned in the country is lost or foolishly spent in town. The opposition of barn to hall is hardly original, the images called upon to depict it are trite, yet the point is basic to Middleton's theme. Vast numbers of those who come up to London in search of pleasure will according to Michaelmas Term, be rewarded by the urban world of misery. (26)

Once Michaelmas Term's purpose and the ability to achieve this purpose have been established, the character moves from the topic of the country versus the city to the topic of heirs.

In responding to a witty response of the boy, Michaelmas Term starts to speak about heirs and wealth. The character is childless yet wealthy: "I have no child, / Yet have I wealth would redeem beggary" (Induction 19-20). This link between economic prosperity and biological sterility is a common theme of comedies set in the city.[2] The link is important in establishing the replacement of man's natural sexual drives (for the purpose of propagation of heirs) to the unnatural greed-driven desire to make money multiply. Immediately following Michaelmas Term's claim he has no heirs is the entrance of the three lesser terms[3]. They greet him as the "father of the Terms" (Induction 35) and wish him prosperity in the city although this wish is somewhat negative as the prosperity they wish for him comes at the expense of others, that is, they wish him success in his legal 'dealings' (Induction 36-42). The first part of their greeting is then followed by a request that Michaelmas Term not forget his "poor kinsmen" and allow the other terms the remnants of his profit in the city (Induction 45-48). Michaelmas Term accepts their homage and promises them "suits come sixteen times about" (Induction 52). Once the lesser terms have left, however, Michaelmas Term comments rather sardonically on the lesser terms "vassal-appetite" which "gnaw, / On our reversions" (Induction 54-55). In other words the lesser terms/sons wish Michaelmas Term success in order to secure economic gain for themselves. According to Rowe the father-son relationship demonstrated between Michaelmas and the other terms is important because it "establishes the significance of

the relation of parents and children in the comedy as a whole" (61). In particular the relationship between Michaelmas and the other terms reflects the destruction or abandonment of familial obligations and duties in the city-world of the play. There are many examples of this familial degeneration as is apparent in the prodigality of Easy and the other city gallants, the inverted parent-child relationships of Andrew Lethe and the Country Wench as well as Quomodo's desire to secure Easy's land for his son, Sim.

Interlaced through the Induction is the reference to the final, and perhaps the most important, issue dealt with in *Michaelmas Term*, that is, the issue of legal documentation (writs) and money. As was previously established, Michaelmas Term has come to the city to use the law to enrich himself (Induction 8 -12). This purpose is repeated near the end of his soliloquy:

> One day our writs, like wild-fowl, fly abroad,
> And then return o'er cities, towns, and hills,
> With clients like dried straws, between their bills;
> And 'tis no few, birds pick to build their nests,
> Nor no small money that keeps drabs and feasts!
> (Induction 58-62)

Michaelmas Term's restatement of his purpose, to use legal documentation for economic gain, is significant in emphasizing the link in the play between written legal documents and economic prosperity. It is by realising the importance the Induction places on "writs" leading to money that the importance of written documents in the main body of the play is highlighted. This emphasis makes the meaning of Michaelmas Term's disclaimer that "he that expects any great quarrels/ in law to be handled here, will be fondly deceived" (Induction 70-71) somewhat misleading. Indeed, while the

play does not focus directly on legal matters solely, the importance of legal and other written documents to the play's outcome cannot be dismissed. Knight also sees the disclaimer given by Michaelmas Term as somewhat modest "because he does join the episodes, language, sub-plots, and plots to reach a moral position about the interconnection of the various activities long associated with London's busiest law Term" (93). So while it is literally true that the play doesn't handle "any great quarrels in law," it is also true that the importance of the written word (which includes bonds and letters) in separating appearance from reality or disguise from true identity is a significant theme in *Michaelmas Term*. This ambiguity of meaning in the disclaimer of what the play is or is not about is best alluded to by Michaelmas Term's statement that he hopes that "there's no fools i'th' house" (Induction 73-74).

By referring to the Induction, and especially the disclaimer, it is possible to see the shape into which Middleton forms the language in this play to construct a moral dialectic. In fact the characterization of the fall law term, Michaelmas, in the Induction can be paralleled, to some extent, to the characterization of the play's main villain, Ephestian Quomodo. Quomodo, for the majority of *Michaelmas Term*, is in control of the fate and lives of those characters directly involved in the main plot just as Michaelmas Term will control the legal machinations which will occur during his stay in the city. Like his legal term counterpart, Quomodo also has lesser versions of himself to help him in "reaping" the benefits of the "country harvest," Shortyard and Falselight. Another similarity between Michaelmas Term and Quomodo is their imaginative use of language. The most important aspect of Quomodo's use of language is his ability to manipulate or employ both the oral and written codes of

language. He uses spoken language for the purpose of disguise and cozening and the written word to secure that which he gains through tricking the gullible Easy. Quomodo also reveals his true identity, a trickster, and desires, land and respectability, to the audience in two separate speeches marked by their lyricism. Unlike many of the characters in the city world of the play, Quomodo is fully conscious of the use to which language in the city can be employed for one's own economic benefit. Hence, of all the ironies which abound in *Michaelmas Term*, Quomodo's loss of all he has gained through his egocentric over-reliance on his mastery of language is perhaps the most significant. To understand better the implication of this ending, an examination of how Quomodo uses language and what this use reveals about his identity is necessary.

Quomodo's identity and ambitions are established from his first entrance. First he reminds Falselight to "make my course commodities look sleek, / With subtle art beguile the honest eye" (1.1.81-82). In other words he wants his servant Falselight to arrange his inferior merchandise so that on the surface they look much more expensive. [4] Once Falselight has left to perform this duty, Quomodo reveals his newest plot for economic gain to Shortyard, that is, his plan to trick Richard Easy out of his "Land, fair neat Land" (1.1.101). When Shortyard asks to whom the land belongs, Quomodo responds with a speech that is as remarkable for its revelation of intention as its invective:

> Why, the fairest to cleave the heir in twain,
> I mean his title; to murder his estate,
> Stifle his right in some detested prison,
> There are means and ways enow to hook in gentry,
> Besides our deadly enmity, which thus stands:

> They're busy 'bout our wives, we 'bout their lands.
> (1.1.102-107)

The style of the language of this speech is as witty and sharp as the character that delivers it. Thus from the start of the play the identity of Quomodo is established as the ambitious, moneyed merchant-citizen who believes, or at least professes to believe, the stereotypical vision of class antagonism which is presented as part and parcel of the urban context. This speech, however, is important for reasons other than Quomodo's statement of purpose. First, the words which Quomodo uses to describe his plan of using Easy's title "to murder his estate" gives the audience/reader a foreshadowing of the exact nature of Quomodo's plan in that he does use Easy's title, his signed name, to murder his estate, Easy's economic footing. Just as the means by which Quomodo's plan to take Easy's land are foreshadowed here, so is Quomodo's fate to be cuckolded by Easy, "They're busy 'bout our wives". As Ruby Chatterji notes in reference to this passage:

> the violence of his language reflects on his character as well as revealing the point of the moralist playwright. Quomodo's reason are class-antagonism and potential cuckoldry, the latter carrying some dramatic irony, as the course of events is made to reveal. (353)

After this speech, Quomodo sets Shortyard, in the guise of the gentleman Blastfield, to begin the process which will "cleave the heir in twain". Quomodo tells Shortyard to fashion himself into a gentleman and to "keep foot by foot with him [Easy], out-dare his expenses, / Flatter, dice, and brothel to him; / Give him a sweet taste of sensuality; / Train him to every wasteful sin, that he / may quickly need health, but especially money" (1.1.120-124). Here Quomodo intends for Shortyard/Blastfield to give Easy "the city powd'ring" (1.1.56) that is referred to by Cockstone. Once this is

accomplished, Quomodo sets into motion the plan by which he tricks Easy out of his land.

Quomodo's plan to gull Easy relies heavily on the difference between appearance and reality. In the first place, Shortyard is instructed to disguise himself as a gentleman and to befriend Easy so that he can ruin him financially. In order to ruin Easy financially, Shortyard-Blastfield instructs Easy in the importance of appearance in the city. Specifically, Shortyard-Blastfield instructs Easy that to be perceived as a gentleman in the city, the naïve country gentleman must assume the appearance and habits of the other city gallants. When invited to play dice with the other gallants, Easy replies, "Faith I'm scatter'd"(2.1.30). Shortyard-Blastfield responds by informing Easy of the 'proper' behaviour of a city gentleman:

> **Shortyard**: Sir, you shall not give out so meanly of yourself in my company for a million. Make such privy to your disgrace? You're a gentleman of fair fortunes; keep me your reputation. Set 'em all; there's crowns for you.
> **Easy**: Sir, you bind me infinitely in these courtesies.
> **Shortyard**: You must always have a care of your reputation here in town, Master Easy; although you ride down with nothing, it skills not.
> (2.1.31-38)

The irony is implicit in Easy's claim of indebtedness to Shortyard-Blastfield's lending him money to play dice. Shortyard-Blastfield is well aware of this and forms his actions and speech not only to instruct Easy in the importance of appearance in the city but also as tools to quickly force Easy into debt. When Easy, realising the amount of money he is losing, attempts for a second time to disengage himself from the dicing game, Shortyard-Blastfield is quick to point out that Easy must not risk his "reputation" or appearance as a city gentleman for a lack of money and introduces him

to the means of getting money in the city. Specifically, Shortyard-Blastfield introduces Easy to the concept of getting money on credit from the city merchants. When Easy comments on his companion's "very spacious" credit, Shortyard-Blastfield tells the gullible young man that his ability to get credit lies in the stock that the merchants put in his appearance, "let a man bear himself portly, the whoresons will creep to him o'their bellies, and their wives o'their backs" (2.1.89-91). In response to Shortyard-Blastfield's suggestion that Easy invite the other gallants over for another game of dice the next day, Easy declines claiming that "I'll forswear dicing" (2.1.105). Once again Easy's good intentions are undone by the response of Shortyard-Blastfield to such a plan: "what would gentleman say of you? 'There goes a gull that keeps his money!' I would not have such a report go on you, for the world" (2.1.112-114). Each time Easy is about to behave properly, that is, to spend within his limits, Shortyard-Blastfield talks him out of doing so. The result of Shortyard-Blastfield's linguistic dexterity is that both Easy and Shortyard-Blastfield run out of money and have to resort to borrowing from Shortyard-Blastfield's "creditors".

Shortyard next appears in the play when Quomodo is informed by Falselight of his return as Blastfield in the company of Easy (2.3.75ff). Immediately after this follows one of Quomodo's more lyrical speeches:

> Oh, that sweet, neat, comely, proper, delicate parcel of land, like a fine gentlewoman i'th waist, not so great as pretty, pretty; the trees in summer whistling, the silver waters by the banks harmoniously gliding. I should have been a scholar; an excellent place for a student, fit for my son that lately commenc'd at Cambridge, whom now I have plac'd at Inns of Court: Thus we that seldom get lands honestly, must leave our heirs to inherit our knavery. (2.3.82-89)

Quomodo starts this speech with a loving description of Easy's land that reveals the depth of the draper's desire to get the land. This speech also reveals, at least partially, that one of the reasons for wanting Easy's land is to reinvent his class status by making himself, as well as his son after him, a landed gentleman. In other words, "Quomodo's real passion is to own land, and to command the respect and admiration that are (he believes) essential concomitants" (Gill 25). This idea is emphasised by Quomodo's other lyrical outburst when the draper believes he is assured of possession of the title to Easy's land:

> The land's mine; that's sure enough, boy.
> Let me advance thee, knave, and give thee a kiss;
> My plot's so firm, I dare it now to miss.
> Now shall I be divulg'd a landed man
> Throughout the Livery; one points, another whispers,
> A third frets inwardly, let him fret and hang!
> Especially his envy I shall have, ...
> Now come my golden days in.
> --- Whither is the worshipful Master Quomodo and his fair bedfellow rid forth? -- To his land in Essex! -- Whence comes those goodly load of logs? -- From his land in Essex! -- Where grows this pleasant fruit? says one citizen's wife in the Row. -- At Master Quomodo's orchard in Essex. (3.4.2-17)

This rather substantial speech by the draper shows that his joy in stealing Easy's land is not merely economic. The greater aspiration of Quomodo is to become "a landed man' entitled to the respect and power which traditionally rested with the landed gentry, that is, Easy and the other gallants. As such Quomodo hopes that by replacing Easy as the owner of the estate in Essex, he will also replace Easy in the socio-political hierarchy. The desire for upward social mobility on the part of Quomodo begins with the fleecing of Easy in Act two, scene three and language plays a central role in the success of the draper's crafty design.

In the gulling of Easy, Quomodo shows his awareness of how to use language to fulfil his ultimate desires. It is in the fleecing of Easy that Quomodo uses spoken language (oral code) to manipulate his intended gull into signing his name to a legal bond (written code). The first step Quomodo takes in the protracted cozening scene is to construct linguistically for Easy the image of himself as an overly sympathetic and honest citizen-merchant. When Shortyard-Blastfield asks Quomodo for the funds that he has promised to him, Quomodo responds that he is "not able to furnish you" (2.3.107). When asked to explain why he has no funds, Quomodo claims that it is his 'merciful' nature which has defeated him. He explains that while he has bonds worth a thousand pounds which "lie forfeit in my hands" (2.3.111-112), he also claims his own pity is his downfall because his debtors "know I have no conscience to take the forfeiture, and that makes e'm so bold with my mercy" (2.3.116-117). Quomodo then tells Shortyard-Blastfield that he can give them double the amount which they have asked for if they can wait three days (2.3.119-121). Here the influence which Shortyard-Blastfield has had upon Easy becomes apparent. Rather than worrying about his expenditures, Easy is more worried about his "everlasting shame, if I have no money to maintain my bounty" (2.3.129-130). Even Shortyard-Blastfield notes with surprise and pleasure Easy's transformation as is revealed when he comments in an aside that "I look'd still when that should come from him" (2.3.131-132). Easy then suggests that his friend send to the other merchants he has mentioned to get money. Easy's memory of Shortyard-Blastfield's instructions, and his ability to pick up on the city game of credit so quickly, disturbs Quomodo's servant who thinks "the trout will be a little troublesome ere he be catch'd" (2.3.140). The implications of

Shortyard-Blastfield's comments about the minor difficulties in duping Easy will be discussed later in relation to the defeat of Quomodo. Once Easy is informed that the other merchants are out of town, Quomodo offers to lend the two gallants cloth in the amount of money which he has promised them which will "raise double the commodity by exchange" (2.3.189). Easy is tricked into thinking this is a good idea by his belief that Quomodo is "like an honest, true citizen" (2.3.180) trying to help both himself and Shortyard-Blastfield. Easy's acceptance of the commodity for cash swindle is fortified by Shortyard-Blastfield's linguistic reluctance, "what should I do with cloth?" (2.3.183) and his belief that Quomodo is dealing fairly with them. By the end of the commodity discussion, Easy is led to believe that he is in control of the situation as Shortyard-Blastfield claims that "none but you [Easy] could have persuaded" (2.3.211-212) him to accept the cloth in lieu of the money.

The importance of the use of language in the initial set-up of the commodity scheme is that Easy's lack of urban knowledge makes him take everything said by both Quomodo and Shortyard-Blastfield at face value. Easy's country ignorance of the duplicity of language in the urban context means that he only sees one meaning to each statement given by the characters who are gulling him. This is especially apparent in the number of times that Easy's own statements double as ironic comments on his own naïve folly. One example here is his response to Quomodo's statement that some gentlemen would be happy to "take up commodities in hawks' hoods, and brown paper" (2.3.197). Easy immediately responds by claiming "Oh horrible! Are there such fools in town?" (2.3.198). The irony here is obvious. Any gentleman who participates in the commodity game of the city is a fool, including himself.

Unfortunately, Easy's own security in his identity as a true gentleman precludes him from recognizing the trap which both Quomodo and Shortyard-Blastfield have set for him. It is Easy's own perception of his identity which ultimately leads to the lost of that identity.

Quomodo and Shortyard-Blastfield, as city dwellers, are keenly aware of the shifting quality that permeates identity in an urban context. It is this knowledge which allows them finally to trick Easy into giving away not only his land but also the identity which he sees as his own. Specifically, both Quomodo and Shortyard-Blastfield frame their words to play upon Easy's sense of his own identity in order to manipulate him into signing the bond. Easy's perception of his own identity as a free and economically secure gentleman is clearly demonstrated in the second phase of Quomodo's plan to secure Easy's land for himself. Quomodo relies on Easy's pride in his status as gentry to get the country gentleman to sign his name to a bond. The draper does this by using the conventional views of class antagonism against his victim. Once Shortyard-Blastfield has agreed to the bond, Quomodo asks if he has sent for a citizen in order to sign the bond for the cloth (2.3.237). Easy, unfamiliar with the legalities of lending commodities/money in the city, asks Shortyard-Blastfield why he needs a citizen and upon realising that his supposed friend needs a second signature to secure the cloth, Easy volunteers. In order to insure that Easy signs the bond of his own free-will, Quomodo at first rejects the gentleman as a co-signer using citizen-gentry prejudice as the foundation of his reasoning:

> **Quomodo**: Alas, sir, you know he's a mere stranger to me; I neither am sure of his going or abiding; he may inn here tonight, and ride away

tomorrow. Although I grant the chief burden lies upon you, yet we are bound to make choice of those we know, sir.
Shortyard: Why, he's a gentleman of a pretty living, sir.
Quomodo: It may be so, yet, under both your pardons, I'd rather have a citizen.
(2.3.249-256)

Quomodo carefully plays/preys upon Easy's sense of honour as a gentleman by using his status as gentry to imply that he is not trustworthy enough to sign the bond. In fact, his manipulation is so successful that he almost destroys his own scheme. Quomodo's manipulation enrages Easy to the point where he is too affronted to sign any bond with the insulting draper; "No sir, now you would, you shall not" (2.3.274). The scheme is saved only by Shortyard-Blastfield's timely reminder to Easy as to what is at stake, his city reputation, combined with the insults he directs towards Quomodo (2.3.280ff). Quomodo, rather than being upset by the insults his servant heaps upon him, rejoices in the ability of his "sweet boy" and "excellent Shortyard" to salvage his plan. Unlike Easy who takes literally the insults implied by Quomodo's lack of faith in a gentleman's word, Quomodo sees Shortyard's insults for what they are - linguistic affectations which will secure Easy's signature on the bond. Once the bond has been signed, Easy has not only relinquished his ownership of his estate but also his self-perceived identity since that identity is based upon his economic standing. Shortyard-Blastfield's response about the quality of Easy's signature reveals not only the technical aspects of Easy's writing but the socio-economic implications this sample of writing has for Easy's future identity, "you rest too much upon your R's, and *make your E"s [ease] too little*" (2.3.347-348, italics mine). The reference to how Easy writes the letter 'e' is ironic since it refers to not only the physical size of his 'e's' but

also to the inevitable effect that signing his name to the bond will have for his future. Once the bond becomes forfeit Easy's "ease" or economic standing will indeed be little and his identity as gentleman based upon his status as a landowner will be exchanged for an identity based in prodigality. The importance which Easy's signature carries for his identity in the play-world of *Michaelmas Term* is that by signing the bond, Easy signs over not only his land but also his true identity. This is clearly demonstrated through Thomasine Quomodo's reaction to and description of Easy's action of signing: "Now is he quart'ring out; the executioner/ Strides over him; *with his own blood he writes*" (2.3.341, italics mine). Unlike Easy, Thomasine is cognisant of the possible future consequences of signing one's name to a bond. As well, she recognises that one's signature is one of the only reference points by which one's true identity can be established in an urban context which is characterised by the duplicity of its language. The comparison which Quomodo's wife makes, between ink and blood, anticipates Quomodo's speech to Easy (once the bond becomes forfeit) comparing bonds with children.

When the bond is due, Quomodo sends Shortyard and Falselight, disguised now as sergeants, to arrest Easy for the forfeiture of the bond. It is at this point that Easy discovers that his own perception of identity has been wrong. Instead of being faced with the merchant who is filled with mercy for his debtors, Easy is faced by a merchant who will see the bond fulfilled by either of the men who have signed their names. Finally Easy recognises his own mistake in taking Shortyard-Blastfield on his word that his signature was for fashion's sake:

Easy: You know my entrance was but for fashion sake.

> **Quomodo**: Why, I'll agree to you; you'll grant 'tis the fashion likewise, when the bond's due, to have the money paid again.
> (3.4.49-51)

Because the only legal action which Quomodo can take against Easy for not paying the bond is arresting him, the draper and his servants convince Easy that he can sign his own bond with two moneyed citizens who will keep him out of jail by paying the money owed. In fact, the sergeant, Shortyard in disguise, asks for payment from Easy to find and convince two 'citizens' to come to his rescue. Easy acquiesces and Shortyard and Falselight disappear from the stage. It is during the absence of Shortyard and Falselight that Quomodo lectures Easy on the importance of keeping a bond:

> Oh, what's a man but his honesty, Master Easy? And that's a fault amongst most of us all. Mark but this note; I'll give you good counsel now. As often as you give your name to a bond, you must think you christen a child, and take the charge on't, too; for as the one, the bigger it grows, the more cost it requires, so the other, the longer it lies, the more charges it puts you to. Only here's the difference: a child must be broke, and a bond must not; the more you break children, the more you keep 'em under, but the more you break bonds, the more they'll leap in your face; and therefore, to conclude, I would never undertake to be gossip to that bond which I would not see well brought up. (3.4.133-144)

Like Thomasine's comparison of blood and ink, Quomodo's comparison of bonds and children is appropriate in the moral dialectic of *Michaelmas Term* where the continuation of a personal identity which is based in economics depends upon being consciously aware of how both the oral and written codes of language work in the city. In an urban setting where true identity is based on the written word, one's signature is one's identity: "Bonds (or bands and ties) are important then as legally recognisable extensions of one's self through ink and blood" (Knight 102). If the

bond is broken then one's money, the base of identity in the play world, becomes forfeit to the person who holds the bond. This is related to the issue of children because by signing over one's personal/economic identity, one signs over the identity of one's offspring. In this urban context signing a bond is the method by which gentleman become prodigals, thus affecting not only their own economic identity but the identities of their parents and their children:

> Quomodo and Easy develop an extended metaphor of a bond being a man's child, guaranteed the man's land, but all the bonds he signs or children he begets after he loses the land are bastards, without parentage or identity. (Kistner, A.L. and M.K. 63)

This awareness is amply displayed by Rearage's statement when he loses at dice: "Oh, worse then consumption of the liver! Consumption of the patrimony!" (2.1.118-119).

Yet Easy still has not learned his lesson fully. Rather than heeding Quomodo's advice to be careful of entering into bonds, Easy once again puts his identity on the line based in his naïve faith in the news of Blastfield's return by agreeing to be bound in "Body, goods, and lands, immediately before Master Quomodo" (3.3.211) to two 'citizens' who are Shortyard and Falselight in yet another disguise. Instead of waiting for Blastfield to come to Quomodo's with the money, Easy again risks his money and identity to venture out into the city and it is here that Easy learns the lesson of trusting appearances in the city by losing everything to Quomodo. Being unable to find Blastfield, Easy must honour the bond he has made with the 'citizens' who have supplied his bail. In return, the 'citizens' Shortyard and Falselight give the land and money they have taken from Easy to Quomodo, quickly turning Easy from a

gentleman to a penniless drifter. To add insult to injury, Shortyard berates Easy for his behaviour:

> Away! If you had any grace in you, you would be ashamed to look us i'th' face, iwis! I wonder with what brow you can come amongst us. I should seek my fortunes far enough, if I were you, and neither return to Essex, to be a shame to my predecessors, nor remain about London, to be a mock to my successors. (4.1.12-17)

Other than using this speech as a means of forcing Easy away from his cozeners, Shortyard carefully outlines the fate of gentlemen like Easy who sign away their money; they lose their identity becoming a 'shame' to their fathers and a 'mock' to their future children. Easy is now well aware of his position and the new identity which comes with it; "I am not the first heir that rob'd, or beg'd" (4.1.58). Easy recognises too late that he has, by entering two separate bonds, exchanged his identity as a landed gentleman for the identity of a penniless prodigal. Given the intricacy of Quomodo's cozening of Richard Easy, many critics find the next actions of the draper not only morally ambiguous but theatrically disconcerting. Rather than simply rejoicing in his acquisition of Easy's land and money, Quomodo decides to fake his death[5] in order to see whether or not his son, Sim Quomodo, will follow the traditional path of heirs towards prodigality. While this plot device may seem contrived to give *Michaelmas Term* a morally appropriate ending, it is in fact essential in recognising the moralistic dialectic of this comedy. In a setting where the meaning given to spoken language is interpretable only by the speaker, not even a master of language such as Quomodo is safe. Like the rest of the characters, Quomodo is susceptible to becoming a victim of 'the city-powd'ring'.

In order to somehow explain or justify why Middleton allows Quomodo to be defeated by the same language codes the character seems to be a master of, it is necessary to recognise the draper's own inability to decipher all the nuances of urban life. The three characters who best illustrate that Quomodo, like the rest of the characters of *Michaelmas Term*, is unaware of all of the city's deceptions are his servant Shortyard, Andrew Lethe and his wife, Thomasine Quomodo. All of these characters are able to hide their true identity from Quomodo by construing for the draper identities in which he wishes to believe. Shortyard to Quomodo is simply a loyal and able servant whom the draper believes he can "trust ee'n with my wife" (1.1. 86). Shortyard plays upon this trust to trick Sim, Quomodo's heir out of the land that previously belonged to Easy. Andrew Lethe, presenting himself as an up-and coming courtier, plays upon Quomodo's desire to become part of the established hierarchy which, as is clearly illustrated, is Quomodo's primary motivation for gulling Easy out of his estate. Lethe does this for his own economic gain, namely, to present himself as a viable suitor for the dowry that comes with marrying Susan Quomodo. Thomasine Quomodo plays upon her husband's conceit of his own marital security and superior intelligence by letting him see only that side of her which he wishes to see, the submissive and retiring wife. The true identities of each of these characters becomes apparent only after Quomodo's supposed death.

The theatrical and thematic reasoning which Quomodo gives for wishing to fake his own death is that he wishes to see whether or not his son, Sim, will be a worthy heir. Quomodo wishes to know whether or not Sim upon his father's death will become as much of a prodigal as the rest of the sons in the play:

> I will presently possess Sim Quomodo of all the land; I have a toy and I'll do't. And because I see before mine eyes that most of our heirs prove notorious rioters after our deaths, and that cozenage in the father wheels about to folly in the son, our posterity commonly foil'd at the same weapon at which we play'd rarely; and being the world's beaten word, what's got over the devil's back (that's by knavery) must be spent under his belly (that's by lechery); being awake in these knowings, why should not I oppose 'em now, and break destiny of her custom, preventing that by policy, which without it must needs be destiny? And I have took the course; I will forthwith sicken, call for my keys, make my will, and dispose of all; give my son this blessing, that he trust no man. . . . (4.1.80-93)

By faking his death, Quomodo hopes to break the prevalent cycle of prodigality. Another reason for his plotting his 'death' is his own egotism; he wants to see how his family will react to the news of what he perceives to be their loss. As well there are religious or moral implications for Quomodo's 'death' and 'resurrection'. Through his plan of faking his death and miraculously resurrecting himself, Quomodo is attempting to reinvent or disguise his immorality by clothing himself as Jesus Christ, the ultimate example of morality. Quomodo's reconfiguration of himself as a Christ figure, however, is, like the other disguises, completely insubstantial, having no base in truth or reality. The irony implicit in Quomodo's reinvention of himself in the guise of a Christ-figure is that unlike Christ, the truth of God's word and love made flesh, is that the draper fails to see the truth in those around him. Until it is too late, he trusts that he knows the identities of those most closely associated to him. Because of this Quomodo, in his disguise as a Beadle, sees only the reaction he expects:

> What a belov'd man did I live! My servants gall their fingers with wringing, my wife's cheeks smart with weeping, tears stand in every corner; you may take water in my house. But am not I a wise fool now? What if my wife should take my death so to heart that she should sicken upon't, nay, swoon, nay, die? . . . . Peace, 'tis near upon the time, I see; here comes the worshipful Livery; I have the Hospital Boys; I perceive little Thomasine will bestow cost of me. (4.4.1-13)

Quomodo's speech on seeing the display of what he sees as genuine grief at his passing is as ironic as Easy's comments during his gulling. The audience/reader knows that shortly before the funeral procession begins Shortyard has already begun the process of taking Sim's inheritance away from him (4.3.6ff) and Thomasine has already sent a letter and money to Easy with plans to help him regain what her 'dearly departed' has stolen from him (4.3.23ff). It is through listening to "how the world tongues" (4.4.15) that Quomodo first learns that everything is not as it appears; " I see the world is very loath to praise me" (4.4.18). It is here that he learns of not only his son's prodigality but also of the hatred which Sim holds for him; "Oh, if I had known he had been such a lewd fellow in his life, he should ne'er have kept me company" (4.4.40-41). While Quomodo at this point determines to disinherit Sim, like Easy, he has still not learned his lesson about the difference of appearance and truth in the city. This inability to perceive the falsity of one's perception of the true nature of the identities of others is apparent in Quomodo's faith in his wife Thomasine; "Oh, my most modest, virtuous, and rememb'ring wife,/ She shall have all when I die, she shall have all" (4.5.52-53). Of course, immediately following Quomodo's departure from the stage, the audience/reader sees the love declaration and betrothal of Thomasine and Easy. Thomasine is as far from dying of grief as Quomodo is from perceiving the truth of the appearances of those around him. As such Quomodo is unaware that the trick he will play, signing his own name to bill of service for the Beadle, will result in his final defeat.

Shortly after the funeral for the newly departed Quomodo, Thomasine and Easy become man and wife (5.1.13). In their first appearance as the happily married couple, the two run across Shortyard who Thomasine identifies to Easy as "the villain, who in all those shapes/ Confounded your estate" (5.1.16-17). In the face of Easy's anger, the fast-thinking servant claims he has gulled Sim Quomodo out of his inheritance, that is, Easy's estate, for the purpose of giving it back to the original owner (5.1.27-32). After Shortyard and Falselight have been arrested, Easy, no longer innocent of the effect which bonds can have on one's identity, declares what he will do now that Quomodo's papers are in his possession:

> Here's good deeds and bad deeds, the writings that keep my
> lands to me, and the bonds that gave it away from me.
> These, my good deeds, shall to more safety turn,
> And these, my bad, have their deserts and burn.
> (5.1.52-55)

In this speech there is obvious emphasis on good and bad "deeds" and the emphasis is intentional. The implication is that Easy not only understands how one's identity can be changed by signing "bad deeds" and/or "bonds," that is, he is finally aware of his own complicity, by his deed of signing, in his gulling at the hands of Quomodo and his servants. By keeping the good deeds, the title to his estate, safe and physically destroying the bonds, Easy shows that he has performed the requisite reformation of the prodigal necessary to regain that which he had lost. It is at this point, the recognition of his own complicity in his loss of land and his original identity, that Easy completes the journey from country gull to city gallant. It is his recognition of the power of language in the city, especially written language, that illustrates Easy's transformation from naïve country gentleman to informed city gallant. Unlike

Middleton's other comedies such as *A Trick to Catch the Old One* and *A Mad World, My Masters*, where the main prodigal figure's identity has been transformed from gull to gallant before the start of the play's action, in *Michaelmas Term* the audience/reader is shown the process whereby a gentleman is transformed into a gull then a prodigal and then a gallant. Easy's identity here is once again exchanged from the identity of a prodigal to a landed gentleman. This shift in identity is balanced in the play's structure by the exchange of Quomodo's identity as a moneyed-citizen to the identity of the prodigal that Easy has just vacated. Significantly, for the issues of language in the play, Quomodo's exchange of identity occurs through the deed of writing his name on a legal document.

The beginning of Quomodo's final downfall comes about when he signs the "memorandum" drawn up for the payment of the Beadle. Still under the misapprehension of Thomasine's faithfulness, Quomodo signs the document with his own name; "I'll set my own name to't, Ephestian Quomodo; she'll start, she'll wonder" (5.1.92-93). Quomodo thinks that when Thomasine reads the name she will be pleasantly surprised. Thomasine's reaction, however, is forestalled by the entrance of Easy. Even at this point, Quomodo is unaware of the discrepancy between his perception of the truth and the reality of the truth. Rather than suspecting that Thomasine and Easy are involved in a personal realtionship, he thinks his widow has hired Easy as her overseer (5.1.100-101). Easy reads the memorandum and Quomodo's secret is revealed. At this point, the audience/reader sees Quomodo's initial awareness of what signing the document may mean to his identity and economic standing in the future, "What have I done? Was I mad?" (5.1.107). Once Quomodo

realises that Thomasine and Easy are married, he becomes enraged, paralleling Easy's own temper, and claims he will "have judgement" (5.1.121). It is the judgement which will reveal to Quomodo the difference between what he perceives to be truth and what is truth.

The trial scene starts en mise, so to speak, with the Judge and Easy discussing what Quomodo has done. The first lines of the scene are spoken by the Judge and his words are critical of Quomodo's behaviour; "His coz'nages are odious; he the plaintiff! / Not only fram'd deceitful in his life,/ But so to mock his funeral" (5.3.1-3). The negative tone of the Judge's words about Quomodo foreshadows the outcome of what will be decided legally. When Quomodo enters, he uses spoken language to confirm the identity he has revealed with his signature (5.3.17-18). The Judge, aware of the duplicitous nature of spoken language in the city, asks the draper how he can be sure that he is Quomodo (5.3.19). In order to make the Judge believe that he is who he says he is Quomodo must admit to the immoral acts which he has committed:

> **Judge**: I'll try you;
> Are you the man that liv'd the famous coz'ner?
> **Quomodo**: Oh, no, my lord.
> **Judge**: Did you deceive this gentleman of his right,
> And laid nets o'er his land?
> **Quomodo**: Not I, my lord.
> **Judge**: Then y'are not Quomodo but a counterfeit. --
> Lay hands on him, and bear him to the whip.
> **Quomodo**: Stay, stay a little,
> I pray; now I remember me, my lord
> (5.3.20-26)

To prove his identity Quomodo must admit to his bad 'deeds' or immoral acts. Once he has established his identity, Quomodo asks the Judge to annul the marriage of Thomasine and Easy because legally Thomasine is still his wife. The Judge

acknowledges that Thomasine and Easy's marriage is illegal and the marriage between Quomodo and Thomasine is still valid (5.3.54-58).

After getting back his wife, Quomodo then attempts to recover his economic assets, in particular, Easy's estate. Easy's argument is that he has re-signed the lands over to him by signing the memorandum. The judge, however, cannot rule in favour of Easy's argument since Easy, not being the true husband of Thomasine, has no claim on any of Quomodo's estate. It is the legal will of Quomodo which leads to his final defeat. In response to the Judge's decision that Quomodo's estate still belongs to Quomodo, Easy tells the court that "the lands know the right heir; / I am their master once more" (5.3.76-77). Quomodo asks whether this is legal, or as he says "good dealing?" (5.3.78). Here he is informed of the betrayal of Shortyard who explains to the Judge how he gulled Quomodo's legal heir, Sim, into signing the lands over to himself which Shortyard then returned to Easy (5.3.80-86). Just as the Judge acknowledges the legality of Quomodo and Thomasine's marriage, he also acknowledges the legality of the transfer of Easy's estate back to him. Quomodo recognises the finality of the judgement and acknowledges Easy's victory "for craft, once known, / Does teach fools [Easy] wit, leaves the deceiver [Quomodo and Shortyard] none. / My deeds have cleft me" (5.3.90-93). Quomodo's reference to deeds parallels Easy's earlier reference in that he is talking about both his physical deeds as well as his written deeds. In the end it is a combination of both physical acts of signing the two written deeds (the memorandum and his Will) which causes the downfall of Quomodo. The signature on the memorandum is significant in that it is used to identify the real Quomodo and it is by confirming his identity that Quomodo

legitimises his Will making Easy's claim of ownership valid. As such Quomodo, the ultimate master of spoken language in the play, is defeated by the written word.

The last false perception of Quomodo which is debunked in the final scene is his perception of the identity of Andrew Lethe. Andrew Lethe, Quomodo's counterpart in the interconnected sub-plots, is another city inhabitant who is adept in using oral codes in order to construct a false identity. It is in believing that Lethe is as important as he says he is that Quomodo is first characterized as having the same problem in separating appearance from reality as the other characters in the city world of *Michaelmas Term*. In fact, Quomodo is so fooled by Lethe's appearance that he favours Lethe as a perspective son-in-law over Rearage:

> He that can make us rich in custom, strong in friends, happy in suits, bring us into all the rooms o'Sundays, from the leads to the cellar, pop us in with venison till we crack again, and send home the rest in an honorable napkin. (2.3.39-42)

Instead of seeing Lethe as he really is, a kitchen servant who pretends to be a courtier, Quomodo believes that Lethe can raise the social respectability of the Quomodo household. The draper believes he can do this by introducing them to gentle society, "bring us into all the rooms o'Sundays," provide them with influence in legal dealings in court, "happy in suits," and provide the family with material benefits, specifically, food. Lethe's constructed linguistic identity is fortified by his use of clothes. Lethe dresses himself to appear as a courtier. In fact his disguise is so convincing that his own mother does not recognize him: "Good, she knows me not, my glory does disguise me; / Beside, my poorer name being drench'd in Lethe, / She'll hardly understand me. What a fresh air can do!" (1.1.265-267). Lethe's reference to his new

name, the name of the mythological river of forgetfulness, is interesting considering Quomodo's own forgetfulness of his first meeting with Lethe. The audience/reader is informed of this past meeting through Thomasine Quomodo; "'A has forgot [Lethe] how he came up, and brought two of his countrymen to give their words to my husband for a suit of green kersey, 'a has forgot all this" (2.3.9-11). Lethe is not the only one who has forgotten "how he came up." As apparent from his speech, Quomodo has also forgotten that in his first meeting with Lethe, the supposed courtier did not have enough credit to buy a suit. Quomodo's forgetfulness is constant until the final scene of the play when Lethe is revealed for who he really is by Salewood and Rearage.

Once Easy's lands have been legally returned to him, Rearage, Salewood, Lethe and the other characters from the sub-plot arrive on stage. Quomodo's comment on Lethe's entrance is one of hope; "A little yet to raise my spirit;/ Here Master Lethe comes to wed my daughter./ That's all the joy is left me" (5.3.93-95). However, instead of witnessing the marriage of his favourite to his daughter, Quomodo witnesses, as does the court, the revealing of Lethe's true identity, an immoral upstart. Quomodo's last words in the play are used to scold Lethe/Gruel: "Knave in your face! Leave your *mocking*, Andrew;/ Marry your quean *and be quiet*" (5.3.137-138, italics mine). There are two aspects of the draper's last lines which are worth noting. The first thing which is notable is the tone of the language. Instead of the dramatic vitality which usually characterizes the draper's words, the words here seem flat and unemotional. The implication is that with the exposure of his last false perception, Quomodo's spirit of trickery, and hence his linguistic power, is broken. The second

noteworthy feature of the lines is the choice of words. Quomodo tells Lethe to "leave your mocking" or attempts to hide who he really is and to "be quiet." Again the implication is that Quomodo realizes that linguistic chicanery in the form of spoken language has been defeated in the play world. By telling Lethe/Gruel to "be quiet," Quomodo is telling Lethe/Gruel to accept that his power to change his identity, his spoken language, will no longer work and he must accept the consequences by marrying the fallen Country Wench, his social equivalent. In order to understand how Quomodo is fooled by Lethe and why in the end both of these tricksters are defeated by the written word, it is necessary to examine how Middleton uses language in the Lethe-Country Wench sub-plots to mirror the dialectic of appearance versus reality in the main plot.

In *Michaelmas Term*, the ambiguity of identity is a central issue for both the Quomodo-Easy plot and the Lethe-Country Wench sub-plots. In the interconnected sub-plots, as was the case in the main plot, spoken language plays a key role in the establishment of false identity just as written language plays a key role in uncovering false identity. The use of legal documentation (bonds) in the main plot is mirrored by the use of letters in the sub-plots. It is through a letter that the true identity of Quomodo's counterpart in the sub-plot, is revealed. This letter also reveals the true identity of the Country Wench. The purpose of the sub-plots to the thematic content of the play is that it magnifies the social consequences in *Michaelmas Term* of the city's duplicitous language. In other words, the transient and ambiguous nature of identity in the main plot is reflected/refracted by the sub-plots. This use of the sub-plots of *Michaelmas Term* is significant because the sub-plots of Middleton's other

city comedies are more typically inset 'morality' pieces; that is, they are structured to illustrate a particular morality or lack of morality in the urban setting. One example of this is the Harry Dampit sub-plot in *A Trick to Catch the Old One*. The Dampit scenes in *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, rather than directly reflecting/refracting the thematic issues of the main plot, act more as a moral exempla. Dampit's character is clearly defined as the extreme dramatic evil usurer. The character seems to be completely lacking any moral character. The disturbing scene of his death can be interpreted as a moral judgement about what happens to those who, even in the city, are concerned only with their own material gain without regard to human relationships. While Dampit is related to two of the major characters, Hoard and Lucre, in terms of profession (all three are usurers), Dampit is separated by his own disassociation from any comedic enjoyments, such as an appreciation of wit and festivity. Unlike the sub-plots of *Michaelmas Term*, which are, more or less, condensed versions of the main plot, the Dampit scenes in *A Trick to Catch the Old One* are a moral inset connected to but not completely reflective of the main plot. In *Michaelmas Term*, an earlier city comedy, Middleton uses the sub-plots to strengthen and emphasize the thematic content of the main plot. Hence both sub-plots deal with language and the deceptive nature of appearance in the city. It is due to the ambiguity of meaning in the language and the difficulty in deciphering between reality versus appearance in the play's urban context that both Andrew Lethe and the Country Wench are able to hide their real identities.

The audience/reader is introduced to Lethe not by his appearance on the stage but rather through language, that is, Lethe's character is introduced to the play by his

gentleman rival for Susan Quomodo's hand in marriage, Rearage[6]. The picture or characterisation the audience/reader receives of Andrew Lethe is less than flattering. The first thing which is brought to light is that Lethe is not his real name, it is Andrew Gruel (1.1.143). The change in name is significant in that it articulates the ambiguity of identity in the city. Lethe, the river of forgetfulness, is an appropriate name for a character such as Andrew who "H'as forgot / His father's name, poor Walter Gruel, that begot/ Him, fed him, and brought him up" (1.1.144-146). This forgetfulness is possible because the large populace of the city allowed for anonymity. As Rearage observes:

> 'Mongst strange eyes
> That no more know him then he knows himself,
> That's nothing now, for Master Andrew Lethe,
> A gentleman of most received parts,
> Forgetfulness, lust, impudence, and falsehood,
> And one especial courtly quality,
> To wit, no wit at all.
> (1.1.148-154)

Other than Rearage's witty remarks about Lethe's character, the audience/reader is made aware of Lethe's true identity by Lethe, himself. In an extended speech, Lethe reveals not only his immediate future plans for economic gain (securing Susan Quomodo and her dowry), but his hidden and or true identity as well:

> But now unto my present business. The daughter yields, and Quomodo consents, only my Mistress Quomodo, her mother, without regard runs full against me, and sticks hard. Is there no law for a woman that will run upon a man at her own apperil? Why should she not consent, knowing my state, my sudden fortunes? I can command a custard, and other bake-meats, death of sturgeon; I could keep house with nothing. What friends have I! How well am I beloved, e'en quite throughout the scullery! Not consent? 'Tis e'en as I have writ; I'll be hang'd, and she love me not herself, and would rather preserve me as a private friend to her own pleasures, than any way advance her daughter upon me to beguile herself. (1.1.200-211)

Lethe then recites a letter which he has written to Thomasine explaining that his marriage to her daughter would not impair her chance to have an adulterous affair with him (1.1.214ff). His own comments on the content of the letter shows how Lethe views his use of language; "This is moving stuff, and that works best with a citizen's wife" (1.1.223-224). Lethe's comment demonstrates his arrogance and self-delusion about his self-constructed city identity. Other than exaggerating his position in court, "I can command a custard", Lethe thinks the only reason that Thomasine will not allow his marriage to her daughter is that she wants him for herself. In his arrogance, he thinks that Thomasine will accept him as a son-in-law if she can also have him as her lover.

Besides reciting his illicit 'love'-letter to Thomasine, Lethe also makes reference to his "pander" who he has sent out to "entice some discontented gentlewoman from her husband, whom the laying out of my appetite shall maintain" (1.1.226-228). In other words, Lethe has sent away his servant for the express purpose of seducing a woman away from her husband for the double purpose of satisfying his sexual "appetite" as well as for prostitution, "laying out".[7] In this, Lethe's longest speech, the audience/reader is made aware from the start of Lethe's true identity: a low-born country peasant who has used language and clothes to reinvent himself as a gallant. The ascension of Andrew Lethe from the son of a "Tooth-drawer" to a marriage rival for a wealthy citizen's daughter explores the danger which an ambiguity of identity in the city can mean for the social fabric,

> in *Michaelmas Term* Thomas Middleton presents a world in flux. Landed gentlemen are becoming beggars; laborers, merchants; merchants,

> gentlemen. Parents become servants of upstart children as the established order is replaced by a new regime, apparently without order, and the society is turned upside by city greed preying upon a rural desire for pleasure. The old socio-economic hierarchy, based on the productivity of the land, steadily disintegrates while a system based on a cash nexus and earnings unrelated to production takes its place. (Kistner, A.L. and M.K. 61)

Interconnected to and parallel with Lethe's change of identity is the change of identity in the Country Wench sub-plot.

The Country Wench sub-plot complements the Andrew Lethe sub-plot in that it shows how country identity is distorted and reinvented in the city. The Country Wench is directly connected to Andrew Lethe because it is Lethe's pander, Dick Hellgill, who brings the girl to the city to be Lethe's mistress as well as his prostitute. The Country Wench is enticed from the country by Hellgill's promises of wealth (in the form of nice clothes) and position (he claims he will make her a gentlewoman). The difference between the Lethe and County Wench sub-plots is that Lethe's city identity has already been established by the beginning of the play, whereas the city identity of the Country Wench is constructed in front of the audience/reader mirroring the on-stage transformation of Richard Easy from a country gentleman to a city gallant. As such, the initial guilt of the Country Wench in trading her country innocence for city experience is shown in her first comment made to Hellgill, "Beshrew you now, why did you entice me from my father?" (1.2.2). Hellgill's answering speech, full of bawdy inuenndoes, claims that the Wench should thank him for bringing her to the city where her sexual attractiveness will make her richer than any virtuous labour in the country ever would. He also tells her how in the city she can be remade into a woman of standing, that is, a gentlewoman (1.2.3ff). The

Wench's guilt is short-lived because her desires for material wealth far outweigh any moral consideration, "If I had not a desire to go like a gentlewoman, you should be/ hang'd, ere you should get me to't, I warrant you" (1.2.27-28). Like Lethe, the Wench is a willing participant to her own moral downfall. The Wench sub-plot is used by Middleton to emphasize the effect of desires for city wealth on country virtue. He also uses the Wench sub-plot to introduce a moral commentator for the urban world of *Michaelmas Term*.

The character of the Wench's father is a characterization of the former city gallant who understands what happens to virtue in the city. He comes to the city for the express purpose of finding his daughter before she receives the 'city-powd'ring'. Unlike the other country immigrants in the play (Easy, Mother Gruel and the Wench), the Father is aware of how the city works to destroy identity in both its economic and moral sense. His awareness of the pitfalls of the urban context is highlighted by the speech he gives on his own previous experience with the city:

> Woe worth th'infected cause that makes me visit
> This man-devouring city, where I spent
> My unshapen youth, to be my age's curse,
> And surfeited away my name and state
> In swinish riots, that now, being sober,.
> I do awake a beggar.
> (2.2.20-25)

Here the Father displays his own identity - the country prodigal who lost everything, including his identity to the appetite of the "man-devouring" city. As Hallet notes: "here and elsewhere the Father functions as a choric figure in the play. He has been ruined by the city and can speak from experience of the woes it inflicts on the innocent . . . . Along with his creator, he rejects urban values unconditionally" (34). However,

for all the Father's experience he still has trouble separating appearance from reality. This is evident in the fact that, like Mother Gruel, he cannot (and never does) recognize his own offspring. Also like Mother Gruel, he ends up in service to his own child. The Father's inability, even with his own experience, to see beyond the superficial identities of those around him, including his daughter, has an interesting implication. Specifically, that even with his personal experience of the duplicitous nature of the urban setting, he is unable to see the truth or reality of his surroundings, and thus highlights the difficulty of separating appearance and reality in the city. This inability also detracts somewhat from the audience/reader's acceptance of the Father as a moral commentator because it shows that even with his understanding of the city, his judgement remains impaired.

Another thematic issue handled in the Lethe-Country Wench sub-plots which mirrors the main plot is the issue of the parent-child realtionship. Specifically, the sub-plot deals with how parent-child relationships are inverted/subverted in the urban setting. Both parents in the sub-plots, Mother Gruel and the Father, come to the city to seek their children. Mother Gruel is seeking out Andrew for economic support due to the death of her husband, Lethe's father (1.1.253-257) while the Father searches for his daughter to save her from the corrupting influence of the city. Each parent, however, ends up in service to the children they no longer recognize. This inversion of the parent-child realtionship mirrors the issues of inheritance, prodigality and identity in the main plot. The inability of each parent to recognize their respective children shows explicitly the destruction of country identity and innocence in the city. Because Lethe and the Wench are unrecognizable to their parents, they have lost their familial

identity. They, in essence, become prodigals of identity. Unlike the other prodigals, however, they are never fully reformed by the end of the play. This is due to the fact that each child is rejected, not forgiven, by the parent. The Father, who never realizes the 'gentlewoman' he serves is his daughter, rejects the gentlewoman once he understands that her gentility is a superficial identity which hides her immorality:

> To be bawd!
> Hell has not such an office.
> I thought at first your mind had been preserv'd
> In virtue and in modesty of blood,
> That such a face had not been made to please
> The unsettled appetites of several men,
> Those eyes turn'd up through prayer, not through lust;
> But you are wicked, and my thoughts unjust.
> (4.2.2-9)

The Father's rejection of the daughter is followed by the mother's rejection of the son. The rejection of Lethe by his mother comes at the end of the play when Rearage identifies him as her son and lets the court know of his behaviour. When Mother Gruel comes to the city, the first person she meets is her son. As was the case in the Father-Wench relationship, Mother Gruel mistakes her son for a gentleman (1.1.240ff) and ends up being his bawd. Specifically, Lethe uses his mother to deliver his illicit offer to Thomasine Quomodo. It is here that Mother Gruel, unknown to her, hears Thomasine's appraisal of her son:

> And how does he appear to me when his white satin suit's on, but like a maggot crept out of a nutshell, a fair body and a foul neck; those parts that are covered of him looks indifferent well, because we cannot see 'em; else, for all his cleansing, pruning and paring, he's not worthy a broker's daughter. (2.3.11-17)

Thomasine's ironic remark to Mother Gruel that Lethe would make his mother "a drudge" is revealed to be the truth in the final scene. It is in this scene that Lethe, like Quomodo, is finally defeated.

After Quomodo has been judged, Salewood and Rearage enter the presence of the court to reveal the true identity of Andrew Lethe. Before this judgement occurs, Rearage mentions that "the letter's made up and all; it wants but the print of a seal, and away it goes to Master Quomodo" (3.5.1-2). The contents of the letter describe Lethe's immoral behaviour, in particular, it focuses on the relationship between Lethe and the Wench. On the strength of this letter, Rearage and Salewood have Lethe arrested along with the Country Wench. When brought before the Judge, Lethe is made to marry the Wench and is also given a sentence of corporal punishment. All the immoral acts he has committed during the action of the play are brought forward and condemned. Once Lethe realizes he cannot get out of marrying the Wench he asks that his sentence to corporal punishment be nullified. The Judge will consent to this only if "one here assembled/ Whom you have most unnaturally abus'd, / Beget your pardon" (5.3.132-134). Here Lethe admits his true identity by asking his mother to forgive him only to hear her reject him, "I defy thee, slave!" (5.3.146). Even after she has been told that Lethe is her son Gruel the mother has trouble accepting it:

> How art thou chang'd!
> Is this suit fit for thee, a tooth-drawer's son?
> This country has e'en spoil'd thee since thou cam'st hither;
> Thy manners . . . better than thy clothes,
> But now whole clothes, and ragged manners.
> It may well be said that the truth goes naked,
> For when thou hadst scarce a shirt, thou hadst
> More truth about thee.
> (5.3.156-163)

Mother Gruel's statement that "truth goes naked" is appropriate as it is only when the superficial lustre of spoken language is removed that true identity is found. The implications of how language operates in *Michaelmas Term* reveals the play's moral dialectic because it is only when the "truth goes naked" - when the written word prevails over the spoken word - that social upstarts like Quomodo and Lethe are put in their place and social order is restored.

The moral dialectic of *Michaelmas Term* relies heavily on deciphering the difference between appearance and reality in the urban context. The truth of morality in the city is distorted not only through physical disguise but linguistic camouflage. Characters like Quomodo and Lethe use the duplicity of language in the city to hide their true identities and their true purpose. Through their creation of false identities each character creates a loss in identity for their victims, respectively Easy and the Country Wench. This creation of as well as lost of identity leads to the instability of social order in the city. Through language one can recreate oneself personally and economically which causes instability in the social power base of an urban economic context. This instability occurs when morally bankrupt people control the acquisition of money through language to become a part of the social power structure. Middleton suggests in the play, however, that the instability caused by the duplicity of spoken language can be negated by using stable, written forms of language. By positing this idea, Middleton reflects how city comedy can be an effective moral agent. Through the written word of the drama, the dangers of ambiguous identity and acquisitive economics can be highlighted in order to create a social dialogue. In other words,

plays like *Michaelmas Term* (part of the written code), by dealing with issues of language and its use in the city (the oral code) can hope to stabilize the social consequences of language by making the audience aware of the danger which self-fashioning can precipitate. By watching the play, the audience has entered into a bond with the playwright, and like Easy, by the end of the play they understand the implications of keeping faith not only with the written word but with their own identities.

[1] "Masters Rerrage and Salewood, as suggested by Richard Levin, connote prodigal sons who have sold their woods and are in 'arrears' or arrearages ('. . . the remainder due after payment of a part of an account.' Black 140)" (Knight 93). This idea is reinforced by Rearage and Salewood's quick departure after hearing that there "are certain countrymen without, inquiring for Master Rearage and Master Salewood" (2.1.165-166). Fearing that it may be their tenants, Rearage and Salewood disappear from sight.

[2] The link between predatory economics and biological sterility is most often associated with the stock character of the usurer in city comedy. As Alexander Leggatt notes the figure of the usurer is "always an old man, and this naturally leads to jokes about impotence, which have special symbolic value in plays in which he impedes a love affair. Obsessed with the barren breeding of gold, he is a figure of sterility standing in the way of renewal of life to which comedy strives" (24). Middleton uses this theatrical convention to a further extent in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, in particular, focussing on the sterility of Sir Oliver Kix who needs a child to ensure the continuance of his estate.

[3] Though these terms remained unnamed in the text of *Michaelmas Term*, Knight in his discussion of the legal language of the play refers to them as "Hilary, Easter and Trinity Terms" (90).

[4] Quomodo makes at least two more separate remarks about the lighting in his shop, "my shop is not altogether so dark as some of my neighbours', where a man may be made cuckold at one end, while he's measuring with his yard at tother" (2.3.32-35). Also, in reference to Easy's inability to recognise Shortyard and Falselight who are disguised as wealthy 'citizens', Quomodo states that "a dark shop's good / For somewhat" (3.4.183-184).

[5] Middleton's use of this plot action is very similar to the action of the main character in Ben Jonson's *Volpone* (1606). Both Quomodo and Volpone fake their deaths for similar reasons, namely to see how the other characters react to the news of their demise. Quomodo's reasons, however, go a little deeper in that he wishes to forestall the circle of prodigality while Volpone's main reason is to antagonize those whom he has gulled. Each 'death' also raises similar problems since through their actions each villain is dispossessed of the wealth they have so wittingly accumulated. Indeed, it is significant that through their respective turns at 'playing dead,' that Quomodo and Volpone commit urban suicide by relinquishing control (through their 'deaths') over the servants who instantly turn to bite, so to speak, the hand that fed them.

[6] It is interesting to note that Quomodo, the main plot version of Lethe, is also introduced to the audience by Rearage before he appears on stage.

[7] Lethe's voracious sexual appetite is, of course, the parallel to Quomodo's economic appetite.

Conclusion

The dialectical nature of Renaissance drama provides its audience/readers a medium through which to see a reflection/refraction of the world. This is perhaps especially true for those plays included in the genre of city comedy. While the plays in this study are not all generally included within this specific canon, they do represent the growing concern in early modern culture with issues of identity in an increasingly mercantile urban landscape. Language is the key tool used by Shakespeare, Dekker, and Middleton in their respective examinations of Renaissance culture. The plays they, as well as other playwrights, produced have since become the mirror through which modern audiences/readers view early modern culture. As Greenblatt notes:

> Among artists the will to be the culture's voice - to create the abstract and brief chronicles of the time - is commonplace, but the same will may extend beyond art. Or rather, for the early sixteenth century, art does not pretend to autonomy; the written word is self-consciously embedded in specific communities, life situations, structures of power. We do not have direct access to these figures or their shared culture, but the operative condition of all human understanding . . . . is that we have indirect access or at least we experience our constructions as the lived equivalent of such access. (1980 7)

Therefore while we can never completely understand the culture of these plays, we can at some level 'recreate' the issues of the culture that produce such plays by recognizing the emphasis each dramatist places on these central issues. Through examining these plays, it seems apparent that one of the important issues facing early modern culture was the issue of locating identity in a city that was caught in a eddy of

socio-economic flux. In particular, the writers of comedies set in the urban context were centrally concerned with the problems of locating identity in a venue where the inhabitants were largely anonymous.

It seems part of the answer to the question of identity lies in being able to decipher the discourses of those who live in the city and how those discourses relate to the discourse of culture. It is also worth noting the emphasis that is sometimes placed on the difference between the oral and written codes of language. In an age which saw an enormous increase in the amount of published material, the dissemination of information to various levels of society meant the number of people with access to alternative discourses increased. In the theatre of Renaissance London, the written word is married to the spoken in an effort to not only entertain the audience but also to educate them. Of course, the entertainment and the education took place in a commercial theatre in which survival was dependant on people attending. Because of this the issues dealt with by the drama were issues of concern for the culture at large. Each playwright in this study provides his own answer as to the effect economic change had for urban identity.

The Merchant of Venice by William Shakespeare is concerned with how far the identification of money and person can be taken in the urban setting. Shylock, and to some extent, Antonio, learn to their cost that in the world of the play money and person are not one in the same thing; they are rather two contingent factors used to compile a singular, or more specifically, a cultural identity. In other words, only the characters who refashion their discourse of identity to match the social discourse of the world are completely included in the romantic resolution.

The Shoemaker's Holiday by Thomas Dekker concentrates its discourse into providing an overly idealistic portrait of late Elizabethan London. The most outstanding figure in this portrait is, of course, the jovial shoemaker, Simon Eyre. Eyre as a representative/representation of the discourse of festive economics sets the overall tone of the play. The characters who emulate this discourse are successful whereas the characters who are antithetical to this discourse lose not only their social power but their collective voices. Through the overt idealism and the discourse of festive economics, Dekker gives his audience/reader not only a holiday from the real world of work and pain, but also a vision of how their lives could be improved by adopting a discourse of hard work and communal co-operation.

Michaelmas Term by Thomas Middleton provides a discourse that stresses the importance of retaining one's identity. Of central concern to this play is one's ability to distinguish the difference between appearance and reality. This is especially the case when attempting to decipher ambiguities of identity in the urban context where anonymity abounds. In the world of *Michaelmas Term*, language is used to both construct and deconstruct identities; that is, even if characters like Quomodo, Shortyard and Lethe can construct identities by reconstructing themselves linguistically, those assumed identities can also be revealed through the use of language, primarily written codes of language. By having written codes of language predominant over oral codes of assumed identity, Middleton makes a case for theatre as a tool of enlightenment. By dealing with issues of identity in a play (which is both oral and written), the playwright can give his audience/reader a method of deciphering the dangers of the world around them, especially the urban world.

All of these plays provide their audiences/readers with ways of viewing the issues of economics and identity in an urban setting. By creating alternate ways of examining how discourse can (in)form identity the playwrights offer a means whereby the audience/ reader can locate themselves within their culture. For modern audiences/readers, the emphasis these playwrights place on economics, discourse and identity within their plays offers us a means by which to locate the growing concern of early modern culture in viewing/reading the shifting socio-economic conditions of the city.

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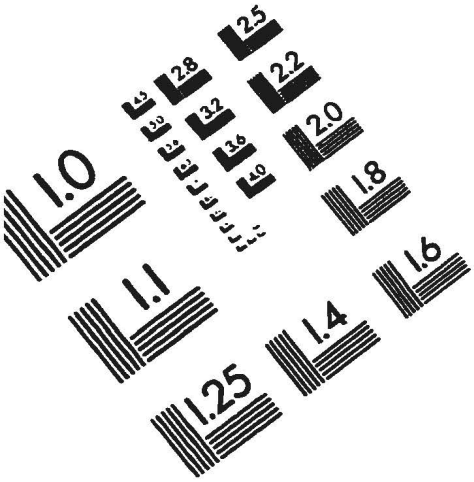

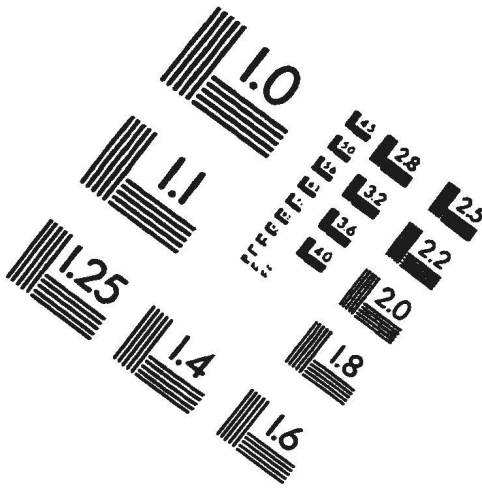

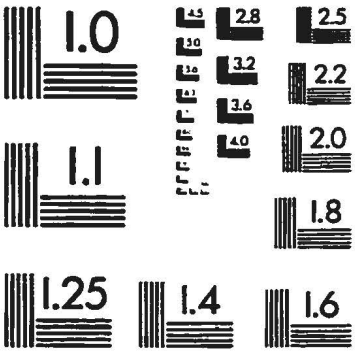

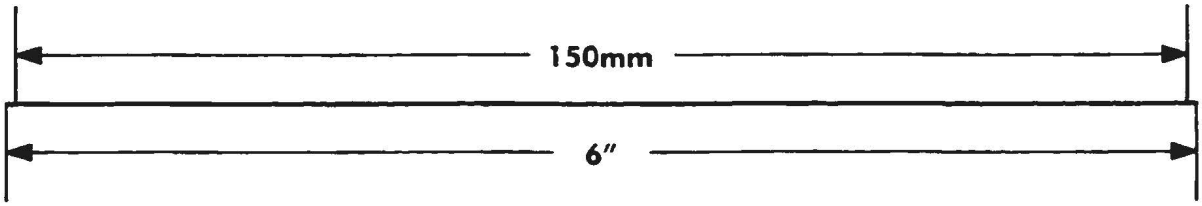

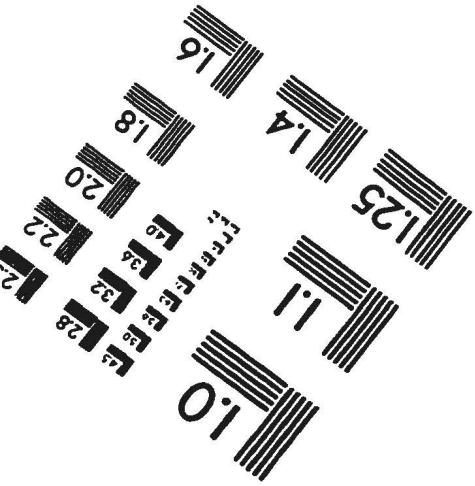

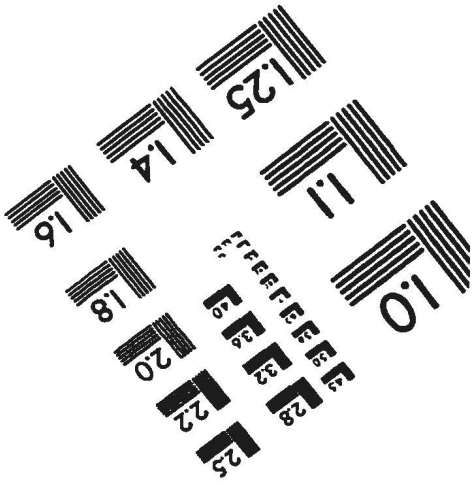

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