



Dialogism and intertextuality to translate *The comedy of errors*

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Abstract: The dialogical perspective which approaches literary texts within a web of relationships with other texts and discourses, past and contemporary, may be productive for the analysis, understanding, and translation of Shakespeare's works. The intertextual connections that every literary text establishes with other discourses determine not only its meaning but also its texture. The purpose of the present essay is to emphasize the importance to identify the dialogical relations of Shakespeare's plays for a deeper understanding of texts in their contexts, and for avoiding falling into reductionist interpretations or misconceptions. Also, to point out the relevance of taking intertextual phenomena into account in the act of translation, as it facilitates the translator's mediating task of establishing a dialogue between the languages and cultures involved and making more informed and conscious choices. To showcase the effectiveness of identifying these meaningful relations, the intertextual relations of *The Comedy of Errors* with other texts and sources, the literary traditions prevailing at the time, and the Elizabethan cultural discourses are analyzed in light of Robert S. Miola's proposal (2004).

Keywords: dialogism; intertextuality; Shakespeare's translation; *The Comedy of Errors*.

1. Introduction

Dialogism is an essential characteristic of any literary text. All texts are essentially dialogical since they contain a variety of discourses that originate in different social formations pertaining to different ages, social classes, geographies, etc. The intertextual approach which treats texts as "intertexts" within a web of relationships with other texts may be very productive in the analysis and study for drama translation, particularly of Shakespeare's works. It is well known that Shakespeare created much of his art from his readings and acquaintance with classical texts. Far from plagiarism, he was following the Renaissance poetic theory and practice, which stressed the importance of *imitatio*, the creative reworking of someone else's work. He freely borrowed

characters, plots, and ideas from other writers, and often used several sources simultaneously, collecting varying accounts of a character or incident attentive to the cultural discourses circulating at his time (Miola, 2000, p. 2).

Our focus shall shift from the individual text to the dialogues between texts, following Roland Barthes's (1981, p. 39) famous observation that "any text is an intertext; other texts are present in it, at varying levels, in more or less recognizable forms: the texts of the previous and surrounding culture". According to Mikhail M. Bakhtin, precursor of the theory of intertextuality, instead of seeking structure and meaning within the text itself, plays must no longer be treated as self-contained units "delimited and coherent" (Scolnicov, 1995, p. 210), but rather as enmeshed in an ever-growing web of intertextual relations from which they cannot be extricated in some ideal form. Thus, for me, understanding, and eventually translating, a text means being able to see it through other texts.

This approach attempts to challenge the readings of conservative criticism, which in their quest for familiar, obvious, and common-sense meanings, reaffirm what we already know (Belsey, 2002, p. 171), all the while countering the views of the New Criticism that regards each play as autonomous and focuses on internal relations among its different parts (Scolnicov, 1995, p. 210). The writings of Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser, Antonio Gramsci, Berthold Brecht, Jacques Derrida, Walter Benjamin, Julia Kristeva, and Jacques Lacan, among others, the burgeoning of semiotics, and the revised evaluation of Russian post-formalism and Bakhtin, have all served to change the procedure for the analysis of signifying practices. They have also provided a rich and heterogeneous foundation for the development of radically alternative strategies and objectives. These authors have, in a number of different ways, rejected the notion that reading is itself an exclusive component of the text, and contributed to the premise that texts understanding is "based on values such as the dialogue between cultures and knowledge, as well as the circulation of texts and ideas" (Brandini, 2018, p. 68). Accordingly, it is a multiplicity of factors that determine the process of understanding a Shakespearean work. The intertextual approach goes outside the individual work to create a context for it, highlighting the importance of the social nature of literature towards a better understanding not only of the intertextual factors that operate in a given literary text but also of the intratextual relations among different types of utterances or discourses within that text.

"Intertextuality is central to the production and reception of translations" (Venuti, 2009, p. 157). Using the theories of intertextuality, or "dialogism" in Bakhtin's (1981, p. 14) words, and approaching the text as intertext in multidirectional relations to its sources or pre-texts, its co-texts, and even its translations or post-texts, can be useful for the following three critical activities: a) the mediation of Shakespeare's texts in both the textual and editorial processes prior to translation (Montalt, 1998); b) the analysis for translation of Shakespeare's works (Ezpeleta-Piorno, 2007); and c) the approach to drama translation from a social, cultural, and ideological perspective (Ezpeleta-Piorno, 2009).

The translation of literary texts is supposed to render them comprehensible in other social contexts by means of the successful integration of their foreign aspects into a new cultural discourse. In translation, the main or original text becomes the pre-text of the translated text. In the process, the pre-text becomes de-contextualized and detached from its own context as it is placed in a new socio-historical context, even though there may be many aspects shared by both contexts. This movement from one context to another assigns new intertextual properties to the translated text

by adapting it to the discursive practices of the society it enters. Bakhtin (1981) himself insists that all literature is essentially social. Thus, in considering the text as part of social discourse, translation inevitably transforms it into a mixed social text, a heteroglot work, containing elements of different sociocultural languages. Accordingly, the creation of each new translation out of existing material orchestrates “the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types and by the differing individual voices flourishing under such conditions” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 263). These “objects and ideas depicted and expressed” are exactly those available in the culture-bound consciousness of the translator who, as a speaking subject, synthesizes the phenomena of diverse languages and linguistic systems into a new stylistic¹ unity. In many cases, translation can be considered an exercise of cultural adaptation which implies assuming that elements from the source text are not only considered, but creatively re-deployed, renovated, deconstructed, reconstructed, and ultimately incorporated into a target culture and tradition while remaining in touch with their original milieu. Such an approach can help critics and translators map the interpretive reach of literary texts once they become inserted into a target language and culture (Amorim, 2023). In the field of Shakespearean studies alone, one need only consider the many translations of Shakespeare’s plays that have been produced over the centuries, all of them to some degree attempting to update Shakespeare’s temporally, culturally, and geographically, placing remote texts in a new cultural-discursive environment. Also, the countless adaptations, theatre productions and myriad art forms “which contemplate, in Shakespeare, a means for the reconstruction of their own social history” (Amorim, 2023, p. 3).

2. Text as intertext

“Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (Kristeva, 1986, p. 37). As such, a text becomes an intertext that endlessly refers to other texts which precede it and becomes part of a chain that includes subsequent texts yet to come. Considering the text as intertext, we are identifying it simultaneously as an heir to the past, a product of the present, and a link to the future. Thus, texts relate diachronically to prior texts and synchronically to any text being produced in the present. Intertextuality questions the concepts of origin and source as, from this point of view, no text is an original, and no text is the source of another. There is no beginning or end to any text, but endless connections and references to other texts, as Leyla Perrone-Moisés (1990, p. 94) argues, “each work is a new continuation [...] of previously existing works, genres, and themes. Writing is, therefore, a dialogue with previous and contemporary literatures”. Norman Fairclough (1995, p. 5) sees texts as “part repetition and part creation”. This perspective has allowed critics to substitute the traditional textual study of the sources and focus of Shakespeare’s texts with a more comprehensive intertextual analysis. Robert S. Miola (2004, p. 13) in “Seven types of intertextuality”² outlines or, as he says,

¹ “Style” is a word Bakhtin uses idiosyncratically. For him it signifies both aesthetic form, in the narrower sense, and content. The word “expression” should not be understood as “direct and unmediated.” Bakhtin (1981, p. 267) seems to be aware of unconscious processes that supplement the conscious expression of the writer, as well as of the stylistic transformation of artistic “raw material”.

² The title echoes that of William Empson’s seminal 1930 work, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*.

tries to “map out” the complex territory featuring the types of intertextual transactions evident in early modern literature, especially in Shakespeare, and offers the basis for a theoretical model of the processes of mediation through which ideas, styles, themes, and interpretative strategies cross national borders. His proposal may also be productive in the study of intertextual transactions across time periods and traditions, and thus for the analysis for translation. Miola distinguishes among seven types of intertextuality and organizes them in three broad categories of intertextual circulation. His first category has to do with the direct process of authorial reading. Revision, quotation, and conventionally understood sources all belong here. For purposes of the present study, quotation and sources are the two most relevant modes of intertextuality. Quotation comprises specific books or texts mediated directly through the author since he or she literally reproduces or paraphrases the pre-text (in whole or in part). Quotations may be variously marked for audience recognition by typographical signals, by a change in language, or by the identification of the original author or text. Receivers may analyze quotations in early modern texts grammatically, according to quantity, quality, distribution, frequency, interference, and markers, as well as pragmatically, according to sender, receiver, code, place, time, medium, and function.

Critics and translators may also assess the degrees to which audience recognition is assumed or necessary. An interesting problem arises with lines and phrases that are very familiar. If audience recognition is clearly indicated (as with any parody) then our assumptions about familiarity with the main text may, paradoxically, begin to reverse themselves. The reputations of certain lines and fragments may take on a life of their own that separates from original contexts; when decontextualized, they exist in a new dialogue. They may be stock jokes, fragments of very-well known texts, proverbs, verses from ballads and songs, etc., which often trade in common linguistic currency. In our day, for example, a recitation of the catchphrase “what’s done is done” (*Macbeth*, 3.2.14) may not necessarily indicate familiarity with the original context or play. Critics and translators might consider the evocative value of a quotation in context. Sources could include innovation, omission, transference, the switching of characters, and the reattribution of personal traits. They might also include remote sources not clearly marked, or sources which do not coincide with the book-on-the-desk model—in fact, all that an author previously knew or read (grammar-school texts, classical stories and authors, the Bible) and thus present by means of allusions, turns of phrase, or recycled motifs.

Miola’s second category comprises broader literary traditions. A pre-text makes its presence known through countless intermediaries and indirect routes—commentaries, adaptations, translations, and reifications of other works. These texts exist in combination with other pre-texts largely as a set of inherited expectations, reflexes, and strategies. In the category of traditions, influence is indirect, and the author may have never read the pre-text at all. Dramatic conventions, configurations, and genres belong to this category. Shakespeare constantly appropriated and adapted numerous conventions from classical, medieval, and continental literatures, both formal and rhetorical. Senecan conventions in tragedy—the chorus, messenger, stichomythia, and soliloquy, for example—have been abundantly studied. So, too, have Plautine and Terentian conventions in comedy: eavesdropping, disguise, lockouts, stock characters like the witty slave, etc., as well as theatrical moving parts, semantic topoi, figures, relationships, actions, and framing patterns. Traditions of genre include the wide range of linkages which are implicit and explicit in generic choices. These may appear in individual signifiers (e.g., the play-within-the-play of revenge tragedy,



the singing shepherds in pastoral) whose function is much like that of conventions and ranges from broader to less discrete forms.

Miola's third category, cultural modes of reading and interpretation, includes "paralogues," which are texts that illuminate intellectual, social, theological, or political meanings in other texts. This last category consists of what an audience contributes to a text, rather than what the author offers in it. The focus moves from text and traditions to the circulation of cultural discourses. As Michele Marrapodi (2007, p. 1) states, this kind of intertextuality has been called "interdiscursivity," which is defined as the relationships that each text, oral and written, contains in combination with all other utterances (or discourses) recorded in a corresponding culture, and organized ideologically according to register and level. In practice, this constitutes whatever the literary critic perceives as revelatory of the cultural poetics that he or she, and not the author, may bring to the text.

We should add that, as Miola (2004, p. 13) points out, the distinctions among these types and categories of intertextuality are not absolute and exclusive; rather such divisions appear on a continuum with various nuanced and overlapping meanings. The continuum moves from closest approximations to ever freer suggestions, from conscious, positivistic, and author-directed imitations, through more distant and subtle evocations and, finally, to intertextualities that exist in discourses created by the receiver, rather than by the writer.

3. The Comedy's dialogism

The remainder of this essay analyzes the dialogic nature of *The Comedy of Errors* in light of Miola's proposal and explores the intertextual relations with its pre-texts and its co-texts to showcase how the intertextual analysis can contribute to a deeper understanding of texts in their contexts and facilitates the translator's mediating task building a dialogue between the languages and cultures involved.

If we look at *The Comedy* through Miola's paradigm we will see that it is dialogical in numerous ways. Diverse types of intertextuality are combined in this text and pertain principally to Miola's first category, which involves the direct process of authorial reading, quotation, and sources as most relevant. The play is rich in biblical references³. The Bible is always present in Shakespeare's texts, mainly as source remote⁴. In *The Comedy* it serves different purposes. Primarily, it helps to rarify the atmosphere he evokes in Ephesus—to distinguish it from another place, the coarse and immoral Epidamnus found in Plautus sources. Ephesus was replete with associations of witchcraft from another source, St Paul's epistles (Miola, 2000, p. 2). Shakespeare elaborates suggestions found in the Bible to create in Ephesus an atmosphere of strangeness, sorcery, and deception (Foakes, 1980 *apud* Shakespeare, 1980, p. xxiv), which, as Laurie Maguire (1997, p. 363) has stated, St Paul believed

³ Richmond Noble shows that Shakespeare knew well at least two English translations of the Bible: the Geneva version of 1560 (or in the later version of 1587) and the Bishops' Bible (1568). He seems to have used the Bishops' Bible in his early plays, and both translations from about the middle 1590s. It is probable then that he used the Bishops' Bible for *The Comedy of Errors* (Noble, [1935] 1970, p. 58-76).

⁴ Robert S. Miola (2004, p. 20) names *source remote* all sources and influences that are not clearly marked, or that do not coincide with the book-on-the-desk model and include all that an author previously knew or read.

was partly the result of demonic powers (Ephesians 2:2-3). In the Acts of the Apostles, he would have read the account of St Paul's visit to Ephesus:

Paul passed through the upper coasts, and came to Ephesus [...] Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits [...] Many also of the which used curious crafts, brought their books, and burned them (Acts 19:1, 13, 19).⁵

At the beginning of the play the fears of Antipholus of Syracuse indirectly recall this passage (Noble, [1935] 1970, p. 106):

They say this town is full of cozenage,
As nimble jugglers that deceive the eye,
Dark-working sorcerers that change the mind,
Soul-killing witches that deform the body,
Disguisèd cheaters, prating mountebanks,
And many suchlike liberties of sin.
(1.2.97-102)⁶

In addition to what Shakespeare draws from Classical sources, the Bible also provides the moral compass in *The Comedy* concerning the behavior of women and the “proper” relations between husband and wife (Miola, 2000, p. 74). Paulinian Ephesus offers two female role models: the independent pagan Amazon and the submissive Christian servant. At the beginning of the play, Adriana is clearly equated with the former, Luciana with the latter. Maguire (1997, p. 378) argues that it is because of Ephesus tradition of non-submissive women that St Paul directs to the Ephesians his letter about wifely submission:

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife [...] But as the Church is subject to Christ, likewise the wives to their own husbands in all things [...] For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and two shall be made one flesh [...] Let every one of you love his wife even as himself, and [let] the wife reverence her husband (Eph. 5:22-33).

It provides material for the teachings with which Luciana—and Emilia, the Abbess, less directly—respond to Adriana's complaints about her husband's apparent misbehavior and indifference to her. Paul is explicit in his message that husbands must love their wives, but wives must be subject to their husbands. Luciana seems to know Paul's lesson by heart (Maguire, 1997, p. 379) when she tells her sister:

A man is master of his liberty.
[...]
O, know he is the bridle of your will.
[...]
There's nothing situate under heaven's eye
But hath his bound, in earth, in sea, in sky.
The beasts, the fishes, and the wingèd fowls

⁵ I quote biblical passages from the 1568 Bishops' Bible. Available in: <http://studybible.info/Bishops>. Accessed in April, 2024.

⁶ I quote Shakespeare's examples from the edition of *The Comedy of Errors* edited by Staley Wells (Shakespeare, 1972).

Are their males' subjects and at their controls.
Man, more divine, the master of all these,
Lord of the wide world and wild watery seas,
Indued with intellectual sense and souls,
Of more pre-eminence than fish and fowls,
Are masters to their females, and their lords.
Then let your will attend on their accords.
(2.1.7-25)

The passage also contains echoes of the Old Testament. In Genesis 1:1-26, God makes the newly created man master over fish, fowls of the air, cattle, and every creeping thing:

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth [...] [and] God said: let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have rule of the fish of the sea, and of the fowl of the air, and of cattle, and of all the earth, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth (Gen. 1:1-26).

In Psalm 8:4-8, man has been made master over all things, and beasts, and fowls, and fish are again named:

What is man that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man that thou visitest him. Thou hast made him something inferior to angels: thou hast crowned him with glory and worship. Thou makest him to have dominion of the works of thy hands: and thou hast put all things [in subjection] under his feet. All sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field; the fowls of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever swimmeth in the seas (Ps. 8:4-8).

Luciana, however, explicitly includes “females” among “all things”: “Men [...] are masters to their females, and their lords.” Later in the play, it is Adriana who seems to recall the Pauline speech on marriage (Maguire, 1997, p. 380) as she tells Antipholus: “thou art then estrangèd from thyself [...] being strange to me” because husband and wife are: “undividable, incorporate” (2.2.129-131). Yet, as Naseeb Shaheen (1993, p. 56) points out, there are numerous other passages in Scripture that contain the same thought. Ephesians 5:22-23, and 1 Peter 3:1: “Likewise you wives, be in subjection to your husbands” are also quoted in the homily “Of the State of Matrimony,” as are many other Scriptures and examples of wifely subjection.

The Bible is also present when masters and servants are at odds with one another. In Psalm 94:13 we read: “That thou mayest give him patience in time of adversity,” and Dromio of Ephesus says in Act 4: “Nay, 'tis for me to be patient. I am in adversity” (4.4.19). In Ephesians, Shakespeare might have read: “Servants obey them that are your bodily masters, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ [...] with good will serving the Lord, and not men” (6:5-7). Dromio of Ephesus, as if paraphrasing the passages, complains: “I have served him from the hour of my nativity to this instant, and have nothing at his hands for my service but blows” (4.4.24-25).

Shakespeare's manipulations of his various sources include rewriting, innovation, omission, transference—the switching of characters and the reattribution of personal traits. Models of comic structure and plots were provided in the early modern English theater via a number of traditions, among them the Roman comedy. The plays of Terence and Plautus were used in schools to teach Latin even though their plots usually displayed the “immoral” triumph of young lovers, aided by clever servants, over foolish father figures. Plautus in Renaissance Europe was the most popular of the ancient playwrights, and in England his popularity was as great as on the Continent. Plautus's



Menaechmi is the principal source of *The Comedy*. Shakespeare retained the essentials of the plot: identical twins with the same name, the arrival of one of the twins in the city where the other was living, the same kind of bewildering encounters (but in greater abundance), the capture of the supposed madman, and the resolution of all confusion in a reunion of family. However, he made many changes, altering the name of the characters and adding new ones: Egeon, the Duke, Luciana, Emilia, Balthasar, Angelo, and most important of all, the second twin servant Dromio. In developing the action of *The Comedy* Shakespeare used as a second source, another of Plautus's comedies, *Amphitruo*. It was from this Roman play that he incorporated the fortuitous idea of the twin Dromios together with their twin masters. He thus doubled the opportunities for confusion and error, while also increasing the occasion for happiness at the end of the play with the reunion of the second pair of twins. From *Amphitruo* he also borrowed material for the scene in which Adriana fêtes Antipholus of Syracuse, believing him to be her husband, as well as the device of the husband denied entry into his own house. Shakespeare, however, reframed the original scene and understated the issue of adultery. In addition, "The Tale of Apollonius of Tyre," narrated by John Gower in *Confesio Amantis*, seems to have been the main source for the romantic side of the play, that of Egeon's adventures and his discovery of his long-lost wife. The *Aeneid* could be considered another source for the words and wanderings of Egeon. The narration of his woes at the Duke's request (l.i.29-36) is patterned upon the opening of the similar narration of Aeneas at the request of Dido (Baldwin, 1997, p. 106).

Miola's second category comprises broader literary traditions and has to do with inherited mindsets, expectations, reflexes, and strategies. In this category of traditions, influence is indirect and the author may have never even read the particular pre-texts involved. Shakespeare constantly appropriated and adapted numerous conventions from classical, medieval, and other European literatures, both formal and rhetorical. In *The Comedy*, besides stichomythia (closer to Senecan conventions in tragedy), we find examples of Plautine and Terentian conventions such as the lockout of Antipholus and Dromio; Shakespeare borrows directly from Plautus when center staging the community's own performance of the law by having Adriana, and Doctor Pinch collectively interrogate Antipholus and declare he should be bound and removed on account of his mental state. The presence of stock characters such as the witty slave represented by the Dromios; the *dea ex machina* convention of Greek tragedy with the apparition of the Abbess to untangle the plot⁷; or the ending of the play drawn from the tradition of escapist romance in which Shakespeare transforms the urban space into a Christian, morally controlled, apparently stable environment in which family is the primary source of identity (Hunter, 1986, p. 34). The comedy of mistaken identity existing throughout the play was a common theatrical device long before Shakespeare, and especially prominent in the writings of Menander and Plautus. Some critics have suggested that Shakespeare may have been acquainted with how this kind of comedy was featured on the Italian stage, and they have found parallels between Shakespeare's devices for moving and complicating the action in *The Comedy* and those in the *commedia dell'arte*.

The Comedy also echoes Gascoine's comedy *The Supposes*, a free translation of the prose version of Ariosto's comedy *I Suppositi*. He employs classical conventions concerning a series of disguises and errors, confused identities or "supposes" understood as "nothing else but a mistaking

⁷ Shakespeare also used the device in *As You Like It*, *Pericles*, *Prince of Tyre*, and *The Winter's Tale*. Ros King (2004, p. 17-18) points out that the Abbess has been considered a figure close to that of the goddess Diana. In addition to biblical information concerning Ephesus, the seaport was known as the site of the famous temple of Diana.

or imagination of one thing for another” (Levin, 1997, p. 119). From a legal approach, Jessica Apolloni (2022, p. 5) argues that *The Supposes* displays the comparative and legal connections to the development of comedy as a genre, given its clear connections to classical Roman and Italian comedy as well as its staging at the Inns. This complex lineage of literary and legal conventions sets the stage for Shakespeare’s *The Comedy of Errors* and illustrates the dialogue of literary and legal ideas circulating at the time. An intertextual development which is even more stimulating when placed within the context of the comedy’s first known performance during the Christmas Revels of 1594–1595 at Gray’s Inn (Knapp & Kobialka, 1997, p. 434). The Duke’s lines: “I am not partial to infringe our laws.” (I.i.4) at the very beginning of the play represent the law as an absolute power but also a duty he must adhere to. The lines: “Therefore by law thou art condemned to die.” (I.i.26); “For we may pity, though not pardon thee.” (I.i.98); “Yet will I favour thee in what I can.” (I.i.150) frame the strict social ordering of law in this play and portray the law as a force held by magistrates like the Duke that the community is obligated to obey. Legal approaches to Shakespeare’s play (Apolloni, 2022, p. 9) capture the legal ideology of professionalizing law occurring in early modern England—it was thought that law as a centralized system will be a stable force to contain disorder. Yet, at the time there was also an increased tension between the power dynamics of performing legal authority and the larger community resistance to this professionalization.

The Comedy of Errors contains some (quite hilarious) moments of resistance. The exorcism scene in Act 4, for example, contributes to the play’s overall commentary on the effectiveness of performing authority. Doctor Pinch, who is introduced as a “conjurer”, is clearly a counterfeit in the mask of authority and this farcical representation of Elizabethan exorcism adds to the mock credibility of authority throughout the play. In the same scene, the Officer is unable to keep control, interpret or contain the misunderstandings, Adriana will ask him: “What wilt thou do, peevish officer?” (IV.iv.112). The Duke himself is at a loss at the end of the play: “Why, what an intricate impeach is this!” (V.i.270). While the law is a strict, absolutist force, the actual legal performance of authorities and officials does little to restore order and prove useless at sorting out the confusion. This scene not only effectively mocks authority but also represents the power of communal actions (Neely, 2004, p. 139). A connection to changes occurring in English law at the time and the authority-community dynamics in this play could be established. As the common law system developed during this period, there were tensions on how power could be balanced between communal and governmental or central authorities. English subjects were expected to adhere to the authority of legal officials or magistrates and at the same time were still expected to actively participate in processes like crime detection, the presentation of evidence, and legal absolution (Apolloni, 2022, p. 7). This “double obligation placed on subjects—to be magistrates, to obey magistrates—became a source of increased contradiction” (Geng, 2021, p. 4). Shakespeare in *The Comedy* uses characters to have agency over more elite authority and shows the practice of communal care outside of elite hierarchies or authorities. We will hear, for example, the Second Merchant say: “Well, officer, arrest him at my suit.” (IV.i.68); or Angelo: “I attach you by this officer.” (IV.i.73); “Here is thy fee — arrest him, officer.” (IV.i.76); or “Sir, sir, I will have law in Ephesus,” (IV.i.84). In *The Comedy* two seemingly incompatible genres work together to form an aesthetic connection. We find contradictory worldviews juxtaposed: a cynical, subversive form of farce, which questions societal norms and conventions, relationships, identity, and the power of community, together with a type of romantic comedy that expresses socially conservative values and supports existing hierarchies (McCarthy,

2000). This combination of romance and farce in *The Comedy* initially resulted in the play being dismissed as immature by critics who valued unity and coherence. Regarding the explicit concerns about this intermingling of genres, Patricia Parker (1996, p. 80) argues that “we need to read the play’s fragmentation and disjunction more concretely and historically in relation to its contemporary contexts”, whereas George K. Hunter’s (1986, p. 41-43) subtle analysis of the characteristics of Shakespearean farce points to an aesthetic connection, a link to the world of romance.

Miola’s third category, cultural modes of reading and interpretation, comprises the contributions that audiences bring to a text, rather than what the author has enclosed in it. Paralogues are included in this category. These are texts that shed light on the intellectual, social, theological, or political meanings of other texts. *The Comedy of Errors* can be seen, as Marine Van Elk (2003, p. 324-325) observes, not only as the rewriting of a classical comedy, but also as a text that enters into a dialogue with the cony-catching pamphlets and rogue literature of the time. Thus, Van Elk establishes a relationship between Shakespeare’s reworking of Plautus’s comedies of misidentification and the popularity of the rogue literature together with the importance of misidentification as a cultural fascination. Shakespeare certainly read the cony-catching pamphlets of his time and was aware of the importance of cony-catching (or trickery by rogues and vagabonds) for Elizabethans⁸. His comedy interacts with these pamphlets as it speaks to the social issues of his time, especially the anxiety about the presence of foreigners in the streets. In fact, he appealed to the widespread interest in misidentification, since early modern audiences could see a close link between unintentional misidentification and the possibility of trickery by rogues and vagabonds. Seeing the parallel to those pamphlets furthers our understanding of the early modern fascination with processes of identification, and how Shakespeare’s scenes of misidentification work as complex, creative, and entertaining contributions to an early modern conversation on the social order. Identification is, after all, a crucial measure of the social order and the permeability of class and gender boundaries. When it becomes impossible to tell who someone is, regardless of whether the other is deceiving you or not, the mechanisms keeping individuals in their rightful place have broken down. Craig Dionne (1997) also places these pamphlets at the heart of the historical traditions of the period, discussing their ideological function in relation to the emergence of capitalism and the social mobility of the rising merchant class.

The commerce of legal ideas and conventions occurring between *The Comedy* and its source in Plautus’s *Menaechmi* exemplifies how key generic elements of Roman comedy became central to legal training at the Inns and reveals its potential in representing and critiquing how law was performed at the time (Apolloni, 2022). The play is fundamentally structured around socio-legal roles and dualisms such as “master-servant, husband-wife, native-alien, parent-child” (Heinze, 2009, p. 233). These, and the examples of how power is exercised either by the authority, the Duke, or common citizens, such as Adriana and Doctor Pinch, illustrate the way social identities were ordered and is related to the economic and social changes occurring in early modern England.

⁸ This is attested by the numerous reprints of the cony-catching pamphlets and rogue texts by Robert Greene and others (Van Elk, 2003, p. 324).

4. Concluding remarks

The intertextual analysis of *The Comedy of Errors* in light of Miola's proposal reveals the play as a complex web of intertextual transactions and deepens the reading of the text in all its nuances and dimensions. Shakespeare's choice of theatrical elements and his way of blending them are thought provoking. The addition of pathos and the hint of tragedy from the very beginning; the religious presence of the Bible, particularly the Old Testament; the moral de-emphasizing of the courtesan's role to play the wife Adriana and her nubile sister; the dialogue between these two on the topos of jealousy in marriage; the weaving of multiple sources into a newly complicated pattern of errors with something like a unifying theme of feared madness, sorcery, trickery by rogues and vagabonds, misidentification, confused identities, and instability of law and order all configure a play which, far from being a mere amalgam of diverse elements, imaginatively addresses some of the social concerns of its time.

The translator's role as an interpreter and cultural mediator between different cultural worlds is highlighted in this case study by the outcomes of intertextual analysis. When dealing with Shakespeare's works, the translator is expected, at least, to make textual and editorial choices to fix the source text before translation; to take an active role as reader of the text as an artifact dynamic, extremely varied rather than a stable and monolithic work; and to produce a translation that could encompass the multiple readings of the text when considering it in dialogue with other texts from a social, cultural, and theatrical perspective. Each reader establishes a unique relationship with the text they approach. This relationship involves bringing into play their entire sociocultural baggage. He or she will inevitably interpret the textual map through his own historical, social, and cultural lens. However, the hermeneutic dimension of translation requires the mediator/translator the distance of an active critical reading to interpret the text in all its depth and down to the last nuances. The translator should be able to decode the many and varied intertextual layers, from references, quotations, and conventionally understood sources, to indirect references to canonical or lesser-known works, the use of dramatic conventions or the allusions to cultural and socio-political elements in the original context and thus ensure an adequate position for the decision-making, which is the act of translating.

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Notes

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