

**The Counterfeit Trap in Shakespeare's
Comedies: *Twelfth Night*,
The Taming of the Shrew,
and *Much Ado About Nothing***

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Counterfeiting another person through disguise, invention, or dissembling creates a kind of trap in Shakespeare's comedies. "Trap" applies to counterfeiting and comedies in two different senses. It can refer to the unintended consequences to self and to others that adopting a disguise or other pretense brings about. In substantial ways, these consequences are the bases of the comic disguise plots with which we are familiar. Comedies with plots based on counterfeiting pursue complications to the point of greatest disorder before restoring the world back to harmony, often in ways that seem (or are) magical. The traditional view dating back at least to C.L. Barber holds that this new order is more promising than the world left behind, the one that necessitated the disguise to begin with. Read from a distant and narrow point of view, *As You Like It* might be the paradigm case of potential consequences and

romantic transformations, ending as it does not only with Rosalind and the Duke's restoration of their roles but also with Frederick and Oliver's reformation of their souls.

But counterfeit's "trap" can also more directly refer to the confines of the disguise or pretense itself. In this way, being trapped means the perpetrators of counterfeiting are caught permanently in their disguises, in the very fictional roles they create to escape their troubles or achieve their goals. Put another way, in this second form of counterfeit trap the means of achieving a goal unintentionally become the end or, in some cases, the dead end that would keep impersonators from accomplishing their aims. In the most extreme version of this trap, the character would actually become her or his disguise, unconscious of any existence outside the self that was formerly mere pretense. It is this second form of trap that I am mainly concerned with here. Shakespeare's comedies of disguise tend to trap counterfeit's practitioners in the roles and the worlds they create in a way that goes beyond unintended consequences and collapses the ready distinction between that character's fiction and reality. I say "tend" because the phenomenon takes place much more subtly than the first trap of unintended consequences. As a tendency, counterfeit's trap in these plays has two qualities of note. The first is that it is not complete: characters, as a matter of course, do not fully and conclusively turn into the counterfeit figures they put forth. The second is that it persists and sometimes even arises at the play's resolution, when the loose ends of the first kind of trap are all supposedly being tied up. By allowing for this persistence, the endings of Shakespeare's disguise comedies do not so much resolve the tensions of the first kind of counterfeit trap as transform them into another kind of tension, one that intensifies the palpable nature of dramatic fiction itself.

Of all Shakespeare's comedies, *Twelfth Night* offers perhaps the most extensive and observable instance of both kinds of counterfeit traps. The unintended consequences of

Viola's disguise as Cesario may surpass those of any other Shakespeare comedy. Even an abbreviated list is daunting: Orsino has commissioned Cesario (against her will) to woo Olivia; that same Countess has fallen for Cesario; Antonio's mistaking of Cesario for Sebastian has evoked wrath and insults; Sir Andrew's mistaking of Sebastian for Cesario has resulted in a sound beating (as almost happens to Feste in 4.1); Olivia's mistaking Sebastian for Cesario has moved him to the point that he "wrangle[s]" (4.2.14) with any conclusion other than that he is mad. By the final scene, the play, as the genre demands, has pursued dissonance to its most confused place where Viola's role as feigned Cesario is at the center of a mounting number of seemingly intractable problems.

As the genre dictates, the ending of the play addresses these comic complications. Sebastian's appearance clears up the confusions brought about by Viola's imitating her brother; Olivia's misplaced love finds a place; Orsino understands that his servant is not only loyal to him but also available as a wife; Viola no longer has to endure the blame for thrashing Sir Toby or for abandoning Antonio in his hour of need; she also is on the cusp of marrying the "bachelor" she has been thinking about since she was first informed of Orsino's rule in Illyria.

However, in the act of resolving these complications the play brings about the second sense of counterfeit's trap in which Viola's fiction threatens to become reality. According to terms the play introduces only at the end, reuniting with her brother and marrying Orsino both require Viola's eventual escape from Cesario by having her gender-normative clothes returned to her. She tells Sebastian not to embrace her until "each circumstance / Of place, time, fortune" confirms that she is Viola (5.1.247-48).¹ Orsino likewise makes his marriage to her contingent upon finding her women's clothes: "When that is known, and golden time convents, / A solemn combination shall be made / Of our dear souls" (5.1.375-77). However, as Stephen Booth discusses extensively in

Precious Nonsense, this eventuality never materializes in the play's action.² Cesario's restoration to Viola remains potential, not actual. Her deliverance depends on the release of the Captain who has Viola's women's clothes but is being held "in durance" (5.1.278) by Malvolio who has just stormed off swearing revenge "on the whole pack" (5.1.377) of them and who must be entreated "to a peace" (5.1.380) before any of these things can happen. The sense that Viola might be trapped as Cesario is further emphasized by Orsino's address at the end of the play. Orsino persists in calling her by her counterfeit sex ("Boy") and adopted name ("Cesario, come") and identifies her in a grammatical form of simple identity that treats her disguise and her presented gender as real: "For so you shall *be*, while you *are* a man" (5.1.267, 386, 387, emphasis added). If Malvolio is never found and the entreaties are unsuccessful, then, again according to Orsino's stipulations and her own, Viola remains Cesario and a man. Shakespeare has effectively replaced one set of complications with another.

In large part the novelty of the analysis above resides in its emphasis on identity more than in its information about problems remaining at the end of *Twelfth Night*. However, some features of the ending's comic complication are worth pausing over. For one, the play has introduced the second type of trap at the moment it is resolving the first type, even though nothing in the play calls for such a trap to emerge. Thus, the play connects this new complication to the old ones despite the fact that it in no way is a logical or necessary consequence of them. Even more mysteriously, Viola herself is the one who introduces the conditions that could leave her trapped as Cesario and unable to unite with Orsino or reunite with her brother. In an article connecting Viola's "Do not embrace me" to hermeneutic traditions contemporary to Shakespeare surrounding Christ's enjoining Mary Magdalene, "Noli me tangere," Yu Jin Ko acknowledges the mystery of this development: "Why Viola-as-character

defers the embrace seems to me inexplicable.”³ While Ko’s focus is on Viola’s failed reunion with her brother and how that failure prolongs the pleasure of desire unfulfilled, just as notable is the failure of time, place, and circumstance in the play to confirm her identity as Viola. The conditions, occasions, grammar, and names all conspire to leave Viola not just unfulfilled but also in the counterfeit identity of her own making.

Although the threats of counterfeit’s trap are more visible by the end of the play, the potential for Viola to be caught in her fiction has been present since she conceived her disguise. At the point she creates and announces her plan, Viola already focuses on its means much more than its ends. She instructs the captain, “Conceal me what I am” and “present me as a eunuch” to Orsino (1.2.50-53). However, the goal of her disguise she leaves vague, asking the captain only to “aid” her in creating “such disguise as haply shall become / The form of [her] intent” (1.2.50-52). Editors usually (and correctly) gloss this phrasing so that “become” is “suit” and “form of my intent” the “nature of my purpose.” Even so, the lines merely announce that she has a plan without specifying her goal beyond serving the Duke. “What else may hap” Viola arbitrarily commits “to time” (1.2.57). Moreover, Viola’s phrasing is overly difficult to the point of near obfuscation. We cannot arrive at this typically-glossed meaning without entertaining the older and more common definition of “become” as “come to be.”⁴ While paraphrasing these lines to mean “help me to adopt such a disguise as shall perhaps come to be the nature of my goal” may be exegetically perverse, such a reading aptly becomes the fate of Cesario at play’s end, where “disguise” and “intent” really do threaten to merge. Plus, a visually realized pun on “become” as “fitting” and “come to be” is at the heart of Maria and company’s gulling of Malvolio. The “postscript” to Maria’s letter instructs the designated reader, “If thou entertain’st my love, let it appear in thy smiling—thy smiles become thee”

(2.5.169-170). Maria's dupe is complete only when Malvolio becomes (turns into) the "still smil[ing]" figure the letter says becomes (befits) him.

The soliloquy in Act 2 where Viola recognizes and states the unintended consequences of her disguise also holds the potential for counterfeit's second-type trap. Viola states the tangle of these unforeseen effects in this way:

What will become of this? As I am man,
 My state is desperate for my master's love;
 As I am woman, now alas the day,
 What thriftless sighs shall poor Olivia breathe.
 Oh time, thou must entangle this, not I,
 It is too hard a knot for me t'untie. (2.2.36-41)

On the level of sense, Viola must mean, "Inasmuch as I am disguised as a man, gaining Orsino's love is hopeless, and insofar as I am really a [heterosexual] woman, Olivia [also heterosexual] is wasting her breath when she sighs for me." However, Viola does not directly say this intended meaning. Getting to this meaning requires that we untie a lexical knot in which identical phrasing is meant to be read in two different senses. The exact grammatical parallel of "as I am man" and "as I am woman" does nothing to prioritize her formerly real self over her now fictional one. The phrases exist in complete parity, not distinguishing any difference between the degree to which Viola is one gender over the other. Catherine Belsey's influential analysis of this soliloquy holds that such an equivalency "disrupts" sexual difference and that Viola "occupies a place that is not precisely masculine or feminine."⁵ Such an analysis arises from Belsey's correct sense that occupying equally and at once two exclusive identities is impossible, i.e. if Viola is both, then she must be neither and so exists in some realm of "possible meanings."⁶ However, the simultaneity of these two opposing states of being actually provides a way of understanding the "knot" beyond the terms of unintended consequences and in those of the counterfeit trap. The grammatical equivalence compels us to

ask exactly which too-hard “knot” Viola commends to time “’untie” (2.2.40-41): the problems caused by her disguise or the possibility that her real gender at this point could go either way. Similar to her announcement of disguise, Viola’s very articulation of the first kind of counterfeit trap, of the unintended consequences of disguise, already contains the second.

The idea that Shakespeare’s comedies, particularly those involving disguise or mistaken identity, are in an important sense transformative is a long-standing part of criticism. At the opening of *Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy*, Barber speaks of how comedies “express. . . the experience of moving to humorous *understanding* through saturnalian release.”⁷ In *Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy*, Leo Salinger claims Shakespeare’s comedies differ from their Italian precursors because they contain realistic characters and the possibility of real character transformation:

Shakespeare’s characters are not merely capable of being surprised by what happens to them . . . like people in Italian comedies; they can be carried out of their normal selves, ‘transformed’, observe themselves passing into a new phase of experience, so strange that it seems like illusion. This is only part, indeed, of a more fundamental innovation which in its general effect distinguishes Shakespeare’s plays from all previous comedies, that he gives his people the quality of an inner life.⁸

A relative latecomer to this tradition, Karen Newman’s *Shakespeare and the Rhetoric of Comic Character* more directly spells out the theory of comedic transformation. In the analysis of *Much Ado about Nothing* near the end of her work, Newman summarizes her argument about comedy as a whole: “Mistaken identity, role playing, and alternative identities are therapeutic instruments which lead characters to self-knowledge, for these comic devices are not simply tools for developing plot, but springboards for experimentation whereby men and women escape from self-delusion to the

self-understanding which enables them to live and learn.”⁹ This early work of Newman’s came out in 1985, in the same year (and by the same press) that John Drakakis’s *Alternative Shakespeares* begins, interrupting a critical tradition that reads comedy teleologically as a move to self-understanding. The essays and arguments in Drakakis’s introduction and collection classify the premises of work like Newman’s as expressions of “liberal humanism” and fundamentally alter criticism as a whole by rejecting the idea that “‘consciousness’ precedes action, and that dramatic character constitutes axiomatically a unified subject of consciousness.”¹⁰ Writing specifically about disguise in 1993, Lloyd Davis critiques the notion that characters transform and learn as upholding “cultural ideals and myths of selfhood.”¹¹ For most of the 90s and 2000s, this materialist critique ended character-based criticism and readings of character transformation.¹²

The tendency of Viola to be caught in her disguise does not challenge Newman on materialist grounds such as those Drakakis names, nor does it fully discount the idea that characters discover their mistakes, change, and even learn. But it does present a truly “alternative” possibility that stands beside and counterpoises the tradition of comedy as progress narrative. In the process of escaping self-delusion, characters are caught in new illusions; instead of being delivered from their problems, they are stuck in the counterfeit creations of others or themselves. In the act of really going somewhere, characters in some way get nowhere at all.

From the standpoint of criticism, it would be hard to overstate how important the questions of what is an actual self and what is a counterfeit self, in drama and the real world, have been to late twentieth-century philosophical, psychoanalytical, and sociological thought and to Shakespearean criticism. Its prominence in Shakespeare and early modern English studies reaches back at least to Stephen Greenblatt’s *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*. Greenblatt argues that culture in early modern England witnessed an “increased

self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process.”¹³ His work’s influential thesis is consistent with post-modern theories of the subject and maintains that the self, the real self that dwells and hopes to advance in the world, is a kind of fiction—an invention or fabrication that subjects fashion—and that written fictional texts are parts of strategies that create these selves. In *Guise and Disguise: Rhetoric and Characterization in the English Renaissance*, Davis defines the function of disguise in terms that are consonant with Greenblatt’s ideas of self-fashioning: “Disguise represents a calculated effort by a character to resolve problems or realize goals through manipulating identity in certain situations.”¹⁴ Extending Greenblatt and others’ notions of the fictional self to drama, Davis asserts, “There may never be a ‘disguise-less’ character; instead, it is the degree or intent of deception and the control over the effects of disguise that vary.”¹⁵ As a way of acknowledging the factitious nature of human subjects while preserving their distinction from disguised dramatic characters, Davis calls disguise “a personal palimpsest” that “establishes ordinal and temporal hierarchies among primary, secondary, and possibly more personae.”¹⁶ Although related on some theoretical level, disguises in drama differ from self-fashioning in that the counterfeit selves that characters fashion are secondary, distinct from the primary selves these characters hope to advance even if those disguises are part of the advancement. In terms of the framework that Davis is establishing, Viola’s situation, as an instance of the counterfeit trap, threatens to invert or disrupt these hierarchies of personae at all of the stages above (announcing her intent, voicing her predicament, and supposedly resolving her problems). Viola dissolves an identity that is clearly primary to create a secondary identity in such a way that it impedes her ability to “resolve problems or realize goals.” Put another way, even if the subject marks a kind of existence where the fictional becomes real, the threat in these comedies that characters might become their

counterfeits works against the self-fashioning that Greenblatt has in mind.

More thoroughly than *Twelfth Night*, *The Taming of the Shrew* brings into focus both forms of counterfeit trap and the relationship between the two insofar as they permeate all levels of action including Induction, main plot, and subplot. The comic subplot in which Lucentio pursues Bianca by disguising himself as the Latin tutor Cambio and having his own trusty servant Tranio take his identity as a scholar and as official suitor has escalating consequences that involve the "supposed Lucentio" getting a Merchant to disguise himself as the "supposed Vincentio" (2.1.411). The subplot's comic climax in 5.1 involves a kind of confusion between fiction and reality in which the "right Vincentio" (5.1.106) is unable to prove his real identity (he has already been called a woman in the previous scene) and is threatened with jail by his "supposed" son Tranio. Clarification can only occur when the real Lucentio marries Bianca and returns to validate the existence of his real father. When Lucentio arrives at the last possible moment, he tells Baptista in a summarizing couplet, "I have by marriage made thy daughter mine, / While counterfeit supposes bleared thine eyne" (5.1.107-08).

This solution sounds simple enough, but the play has prolonged this marriage and delayed Lucentio's return and has done both in terms of the counterfeit trap. In his most recent appearance in 4.4, Lucentio, who is on the verge of getting what he wants, seems to be less of himself and more of his counterfeit. Even though the two are alone, his other servant Biondello persists in calling Lucentio "Cambio" and twice refers to Tranio as "my master," once to initiate discussion and later to say that he cannot tarry because his "master" has given him orders to ready the priest at St. Luke's. Part of the persistence of these titles could be contractual: i.e., Biondello is compelled by prearrangement to call Lucentio 'Cambio' and Tranio his master. However, earlier dialogue seems to stipulate the opposite. The understanding that Biondello

has with Tranio requires only that Biondello call his fellow servant 'Lucentio' "in all kinds of companies" but not "when [they are] alone." (1.1.246-47). Based on this logic, moments such as this are tailor-made for Lucentio and Biondello to revert to their customary titles and roles.

However, it is not just that Biondello is using the disguised names unnecessarily; Lucentio, on the whole, is really acting as if he is not quite all there, especially at the moment Biondello communicates the plan for elopement:

Biondello: Cambio!

Lucentio: What sayst thou, Biondello?

Biondello: You saw my master wink and laugh upon you?

Lucentio: Biondello, what of that?

Biondello: Faith, nothing; but h'as left me here behind to expound the meaning or moral of his signs and tokens.

Lucentio: I pray thee, moralize them.

Biondello: Then thus: Baptista is safe, talking with the deceiving father of a deceitful son.

Lucentio: And what of him?

Biondello: His daughter is to be brought by you to the supper.

Lucentio: And then?

Biondello: The old priest at Saint Luke's church is at your command at all hours.

Lucentio: And what of all this? (4.4.73-89)

Inexplicably, Lucentio does not understand that Biondello is referring to Lucentio's opportunity to elope with Bianca while Tranio and the Merchant (or Pedant) are busy giving "counterfeit assurance" (4.4.92) to Baptista. This failing is even more baffling because Lucentio has already discussed this exact plan with Tranio in 3.2. While the others are offstage for Katherine and Petruchio's wedding, Lucentio tells Tranio,

Were it not that my fellow schoolmaster [Hortensio in disguise]

Doth watch Bianca's steps so narrowly,
 'Twere good, methinks, to steal our marriage,
 Which once performed, let all the world say no,
 I'll keep my own, despite of all the world. (3.2.137-40)

Lucentio is failing to recognize the device of his own plotting. Considered further, this moment is Lucentio's best opportunity for release from Cambio. Biondello is laying before him the easy pathway to deliverance from the unintended consequences of his disguise, a release that Lucentio himself initially contrived. Yet, at this moment, counterfeit identity asserts and reinforces itself, as if it has taken on a life of its own. It is almost as if Lucentio has become someone else altogether.

Some possible explanations for Lucentio's behavior come to mind. The first is that the scene is a protracted comic exposition meant to give Biondello a chance for antics. Perhaps Lucentio's uncharacteristic thickness is the result of suddenly cold feet or a fear that Bianca is unwilling to go through with the elopement—possibilities he suggests when he asks, "She will be pleased; then wherefore should I doubt?" (4.4.105). However, neither of these explanations fully accounts for the consistent mistaken identity that takes place throughout the entire episode. It is as if Lucentio has become alienated from himself and from his plans and teeters on becoming his disguise rather than himself. Even the final line of the scene, in which he resolves to marry Bianca, has him doing so as Cambio rather than as Lucentio: "It shall go hard if Cambio go without her" (4.4.106). The bawdy double meaning of "it shall go hard" suggests that the reason Lucentio will marry Bianca is one of the same reasons that Sly in the Induction eventually accepts the counterfeit that he is a lord rather than a tinker: because of his desire for his "lady far more beautiful / Than any woman in this waning age" (Ind.2.60-61). Driven by a bodily impulse that is neither sly nor lordly, Sly asks, "Am I a lord, and have I such a lady?" before concluding, "Upon my life, I am a lord

indeed" (Ind. 2. 66, 70). Lucentio's statement of resolve does not confirm that he no longer sees himself as Cambio but that Cambio will not get to enjoy sex if he does not marry (with the implication that marriage to Bianca requires that he be Lucentio rather than Cambio).

The possibility that Lucentio might have really become Cambio casts new light on his hardly credible response to Bianca's claim that "Cambio is changed into Lucentio," and his own that "Love wrought these miracles" (5.1.116-7). According to his hyperbole, Lucentio's change into Cambio and back could not have occurred without divine intervention. But the larger significance in terms of the plot is that while Lucentio has inexplicably struggled to understand Biondello's meaning and slough his role as Cambio so that he can marry Bianca, the welter of complications in 5.1 has grown so intense that the play abandons the attempt to resolve the subplot in the action. Whatever resolution has occurred at the opening of 5.2 (where Lucentio announces, "At last, though long, our jarring notes agree") has taken place in the ether offstage. Therefore, *The Taming of the Shrew* ends with a conundrum. The play never resolves its subplot even though its subplot is resolved, and behind this conundrum is the counterfeit trap.

The chance that Lucentio might actually become Cambio is a more serious version of the Induction's farcical premise in which a Lord creates a counterfeit life for the tinker Sly in hopes that the drunk "beggar" will "forget himself" (Ind.1.40) and believe that he is a mighty lord. The difference is that Lucentio by his own suggestion falls; Sly by the schemes of others. Of course, the extent of Sly's transformation into the identity that has been counterfeited for him is debatable. At no stage in his existence does Sly's grasp on identity ever seem more than tenuous, descending as he has from "Richard Conqueror" (Ind.1.4) and moving through a series of veritable non-professions to reach his "present" trade of tinker (Ind.2.19). While Sly may not know that he is being

victimized, he still does not make a convincing lord. But more telling than the fate of Sly is that of the schemers who concoct and effect his counterfeit in the first place. This fate is impossible to witness because in the only surviving version of the play called *The Taming of the Shrew*, the Lord and his servants never reappear to release themselves and others from their counterfeit designs. Effectively, all participants remain trapped in a permanent saturnalian role reversal where the Lord, gentlemen, and servants curtsy to Lord Christopher Sly.

If it does not offer an answer to whether Katherine is tamed, the context of these counterfeit traps certainly presents a new way to frame the problem of her taming in the play's finale. Unlike Tranio, Katherine does not put on disguises, at least not any that are verifiable as such. Petruchio schemes to tame Kate by altering her identity through a series of announced counterfeit ploys and scenarios (2.1.167-79, 306-21; 4.1.177-200, 4.5.6-10) that compel her participation. Like Sly, she is the object of others' designs. Katherine herself never visibly practices subterfuge, at least not until 4.5 when she self-consciously obeys Petruchio's command that she call the sun the moon and old Vincentio a young woman. Such self-conscious obedience to Petruchio would place Katherine in a category different either from Sly, whose self-cognizance is at no point beyond question, or from Lucentio, who inclines toward unselfconsciously becoming Cambio before reemerging as Vincentio's right son. The question is how seriously we are to take Baptista's hyperbole stated as fact: that Katharine has actually become "another daughter" deserving "another dowry" and is no longer Katherine—that "she has changed as [if] she had never been" (5.2.121-22). It is possible that in her final speech we are witnessing the summit of the counterfeit trap, a place where an imposed role looks so exactly like a real self that it is impossible to tell where one ends and the other begins.

By the end of the play this indeterminate condition has extended from Katherine to her audience on stage who

might be just as tightly wrapped in the new fictional world as Katherine. Almost all present on stage desired at some level that Katherine would become a tamed Kate, but all are also (whether literally or figuratively) held captive by the insistent nature of this new self and her compelling speech. Lucentio's designation of Katherine as a "wonder" bears witness to the aporia both in the phenomenon of her sudden change and in the audience witnessing it. The episode on the whole is little short of transforming.

Although not a disguise comedy in the vein of *Twelfth Night* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Much Ado About Nothing* still concerns characters whose pretended selves have a tendency to become real and investigates as thoroughly as these other plays the complications and traps arising from counterfeiting. The play's variations on the counterfeiting motif are numerous. First none of the major lovers willingly assumes a disguise in the hopes of achieving some goal, romantic or other. Similar to the imposed identities of Sly and Katherine in *The Taming of the Shrew*, the eventual lovers Benedick and Beatrice unknowingly have their counterfeits affixed to them, here by the scheming Prince Don Pedro and his confederates. Also like Katherine's marriage, this romantic comedy's promised happy ending depends on the focal characters really becoming or being the selves that others counterfeit for them. Additionally, careful viewers or readers suspect that Benedick and Beatrice may already be the lovers that the conspirators pretend they are. The subtext of disappointed past love between the two is so powerful and their transformation (once each hears of the other's affection) into lovers so rapid that it is difficult to know whether the loving selves the Prince and others ascribe to them are counterfeit or just latent. Hence, counterfeiting may exist only in theory, not in reality. However, once the two acknowledge their love (at least to themselves), they have trouble performing the real love they supposedly feel for each other—as if real life is a series of postures that feel fake or

that one might perform inexpertly. Even at the play's end, the question of whether Benedick and Beatrice's love is real or feigned is not fully resolved. We are left with characters in positions remarkably similar to those in *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Twelfth Night*. Benedick and Beatrice cannot be fully verified as their counterfeit selves or as the selves prior to their counterfeits. Upon receiving their own written proof against their denials of love, Benedick figures the two of them as physically, and so ontologically, divided: "A Miracle! Here's our own hands against our hearts" (5.4.91-92).

Despite its variations on and departures from typical disguise comedies, *Much Ado's* plot is like them in one essential way: it still dramatizes the dangerous consequences for those who author counterfeits. At the outset, Don Pedro, Claudio, Leonato, and others hubristically figure the task of bringing Benedick and Beatrice into "a mountain of affection th'one with th'other" (2.1.349-50) in terms of a divine power that would out-Cupid Cupid: "If we can do this, Cupid is no longer an archer: his glory shall be ours, for we are the only love-gods." (2.1.366-67). However, the main result of their efforts is the chaos normally associated with the love-god. The point in 4.1 where Don Pedro's scheme to create love meets Don John's scheme to destroy it turns out to be a dangerous intersection. For the same affection that Don Pedro and Claudio have engineered tilts the play further towards tragedy. In his effort to prove himself the lover the conspirators plotted for him to become, Benedick requests Beatrice to, "Come, bid me do anything for thee" (4.1.287). Beatrice's avenging reply, "Kill Claudio," obligates Benedick by chivalry to disprove her assertion that "There is no love in" him should he continue his refusal (4.1.292-93). Benedick recommissions the same hand that he just used to swear love to promise that he will make Claudio "render [him] a dear account" (4.1.330).

Other than Don John's ploy to ruin Claudio's happiness, the most influential fabrication in the latter part of the

play is Friar Francis' scheme to falsely publish Hero's death, a pretense that results in both types of counterfeit traps. The Friar claims Hero's pretended death will be doubly-reformative—that it will be so moving that it will restore Hero in everyone and especially Claudio's eyes and will make her recently betrothed mourn for his shamed beloved, going so far as to “wish he had not so accused her,” even if he still believes “his accusation true” (4.1.232-33). When it comes to the result, the Friar is so wide of the mark that were the play not terrifying, it would be comical. Instead of leading to reconciliation, the Friar's plan magnifies hostilities. It is not just that Claudio infuriatingly fails to react the way the Friar predicts, but the pretense of Hero's death is also what really gives Benedick the footing he needs to follow through with the promise he made Beatrice to challenge Claudio for Hero's disgrace: “You are a villain; I jest not: I will make it good how you dare, with what you dare, and when you dare... You have killed a sweet lady, and her death shall fall heavy on you” (5.1.143-47). The characters become so caught up Hero's pretend death that it verges on creating real deaths.

However, the character for whom the Friar's scheme exceeds practical, physical consequences and threatens to alter his very identity is Hero's father Leonato. This threat emerges most clearly at the opening of 5.1 in Leonato's dispute with Antonio about whether or not he feels or exhibits his grief too passionately. Against Antonio's objections that he “seconds” grief, Leonato argues for the singularity of his mourning (“Bring me a father that so loved his child”) and asserts that in such a case all counselors against grief would prove eventual hypocrites given the inevitability of succumbing to grief when we actually feel it.

No, no, 'tis all men's office to speak patience
 To those that wring under the load of sorrow,
 But no man's virtue nor sufficiency
 To be so moral when he shall endure
 The like himself. (5.1.27-31)

This episode is among the most complex of any in Shakespeare's comedies, and its complexity pivots on the question of what portion or element of his grief is counterfeit and what in it is real.

These questions arise from two different ambiguities. The first has to do with the point of reference. For what is Leonato grieving, for his daughter's disgrace or for her death? If it is the first, then his mourning is real, but if it is the second, then his mourning would appear to be an invention meant to draw from Antonio the very kind of reaction that Leonato receives. However, the source of his grief is difficult to locate. In this opening part of the scene, Leonato does not specifically allude to this source other than stating a deep love for his daughter. Immediately before his and Antonio's encounter with Claudio and the Prince, Leonato mentions his soul's confidence that "Hero is belied," but such a statement does not rule out the possibility that he is grieving for her death rather than her slander (5.1.42). When Leonato challenges Claudio later in the scene, he sincerely links the slander to Hero's death, "I say thou hast belied mine innocent child. / Thy slander hath gone through and through her heart, / And she lies buried with her ancestors" (5.1.67-79).

The issue of whether Leonato's mourning is real or feigned is complicated by the question of what Antonio knows. Neither the 1600 Quarto nor the 1623 Folio's stage directions for 4.1 list Antonio among those present when the Friar invented the ploy. At this point, the play has not revealed whether Leonato has informed Antonio of the Friar's deception. If Antonio does not know, then it is possible that Leonato is merely counterfeiting the grief that Antonio warns him against feeling too palpably. In claiming his grief is irrepressible, Leonato may be adhering closely to the Friar's instruction to "publish it that [Hero] is dead" and to "maintain a mourning ostentation" (4.1.204-05), even to his brother. That Leonato's argument to Antonio is essentially one for why his "mourning ostentation" cannot

help but be maintained further suggests the likelihood of this explanation.

So, at what point does Antonio know about the scheme? In his brief analysis of the uncle's absence from the Church-Scene, J.C. Maxwell argues that Antonio could not possibly be aware of Hero's death at this point in 5.1 for reasons both aesthetic and practical: "It is simply that the opening dialogue between Leonato and Antonio in V.i. cannot plausibly take place between two speakers both of whom know that Hero is still alive."¹⁷ While Maxwell may be correct, by the latter part of this long scene Antonio clearly is aware of the ruse because Leonato is volunteering a woman he claims to be Antonio's daughter as Hero's replacement. The play does not dramatize what happens offstage in the time between Leonato's receiving his daughter's exculpation and his reappearance to castigate Borachio and Claudio. Although Maxwell does not suggest that Antonio's ignorance means that Leonato is merely pretending to grieve, this possibility is much more likely if his brother does not know of the Friar's scheme.

However, the expertise of Leonato's performance might suggest that his mourning here is not feigned. Leonato, it turns out, is a terrible actor. In the improvised dialogue where Don Pedro, Claudio, and he attempt to gull Benedick, Leonato is the one whose performance stumbles most visibly. When the Prince prompts Leonato to recount the "effects" of passion Beatrice shows, Leonato awkwardly defers to Claudio: "What effects my lord? She will sit you—you heard my daughter tell you how" (2.3.111-12). Additionally, in the same ruse to convince Benedick of Beatrice's love for him, Leonato weighs in on a matter related to his argument about grief to suggest in general that counterfeiting strong emotion is impossible. To Don Pedro's doubting prompt that Beatrice "doth but counterfeit," Leonato attests to the inability to feign real passion, a point that complements his later contention about the impossibility of hiding genuine sorrow: "O God, counterfeit! There was never counterfeit of

passion came so near the life of passion as she discovers it" (2.3.106-08). But as in 5.1, context dents the authority of his statement. After all, Leonato's utterance about counterfeiting takes place within a larger counterfeit frame. Does Leonato mean what he says? Or is such a statement a truism so readily available that even as poor an improviser as Leonato can seize upon it regardless of whether he subscribes to the belief or not?

Recent critics writing on mourning and grief in *Much Ado About Nothing* take Leonato's grief as sincere. In an excellent analysis of "the dangerous control that the giver of comfort can all too easily wield over the needy person who suffers," Fred B. Tromly assumes Leonato's show of grief is thoroughly authentic.¹⁸ Although he recognizes a certain unflattering "self-mourning" behind Leonato's professed grief for his daughter, Tromly uses Leonato's reaction to his brother as a model of the "characteristic" treatment of consolation in Shakespeare "in which a character who is grieving resists the counsel that another character has proffered."¹⁹ From a different perspective Alan Döring, in his consideration of mourning's "performance" in *Much Ado*, focuses solely on the parodic potential residing in the "silly rhymes" of Claudio's funeral rites, and not on Leonato's public grief which precedes it. Döring calls the ritual "parodic" in the sense of "incongruity" because Hero's still-living status makes the application of mourning rites "out of place," saying, "The heavy-handed rhymes [of Claudio's bad verses] reflect this fundamental incongruity between the solemn modes of mourning and their present use."²⁰ Döring adds that Claudio needs not be cognizant of parody for it to exist, noting, "the immediate protagonists, Claudio and Pedro, are unaware that the rite they perform is a counterfeit production."²¹ Here, Claudio's ignorance that "Hero's death is counterfeit" is significant for creating the distance and incongruity that are necessary for parody.²² In light of both these critics, the question arises of how Leonato's knowledge that "Hero's death is counterfeit"

might affect the relationship between speaker and speech in this scene. Döring does not extend to Leonato the possibility that his mourning too is a “counterfeit production,” nor does Tromly consider how the potential for counterfeiting itself might spur resistance to Antonio’s “proffered” counsel. Each shows in a different way how the default is, as Benedick does in 2.3, to credit “the white-bearded fellow” (2.3.120) at his word.

From the combination of his bad improvisation and his utterly convincing performance that seems to convince audiences both on stage and off also arises the possibility that Leonato has somehow become less than clear himself on the source of his mourning or the difference between the counterfeit he perpetrates and reality. In the turmoil of emotions over his daughter’s disgrace and the question of what he should believe about her, Leonato has perhaps begun treating the fiction of Hero’s death as real. Thus, Leonato may be speaking with sincere conviction when he tells Claudio, “Thou hast killed my child; / If thou kill’st me, boy, thou shalt kill a man” (5.1.78-79). With Leonato’s grief, the audience must, like those judging Hero’s blush at the nuptial, struggle to determine whether these signs and semblances of mourning are true or not. The issue, however, goes beyond whether or not the audience can discern Leonato’s sincerity. It is possible that Leonato is, as Döring claims for Claudio and Don Pedro in their mourning, “unaware” that his grief “is a ‘counterfeit production.’”

The prospect that Leonato has become his counterfeit offers a more powerful way of understanding the puzzling claims and exclamations uttered during Hero’s unveiling at her second nuptial to Claudio:

Hero: And when I lived, I was your other wife
 And when you loved, you were my other
 husband.

Claudio: Another Hero!

Hero: Nothing certainer:

One Hero died defiled, but I do live,
And surely as I live, I am a maid.

Don Pedro: The former Hero! Hero that is dead!

Leonato: She died, my lord, but whiles her slander lived.
(5.4.60-66)

The four speakers here make at least three claims about Hero's present identity with respect to her counterfeit death. First, Claudio claims and Hero confirms that the bride before him is not the former or the dead Hero but another Hero altogether. The other Hero, this Hero claims, "died defiled." Don Pedro counters their certainty and exclaims joyously that she is the same Hero, the "former Hero," but in doing so avouches her, in present tense, as the dead Hero that was supposedly mere counterfeit. In performance, one must imagine that Don Pedro's delivery registers the delight of finding Hero alive, but denotatively his words preserve Hero's alleged death, even when she stands before him and claims that she is both alive and "a maid." Leonato would appear to correct one or all by saying that Hero was dead only while her slander lived and that the death of that falsehood has resurrected Hero. Even the Friar's assurance that he will qualify their "amazement" holds to the rhetoric of authenticity: "When after that the holy rites are ended, / I'll tell thee largely of fair Hero's death" (5.4.67-69). As stated, not one of these interpretations of the present Hero disconfirms the counterfeit report that she was (or is) dead. All evidence the tenacity of the counterfeit death that was created for Hero. Even living and breathing before Claudio, Hero cannot be said to have fully escaped the counterfeit death the Friar crafted for her.

A similar ambiguity about what is real and what is counterfeit inhabits Hero's claim that the other Hero "died defiled" and that the Hero before him is a "maid". Most immediately Hero intends the statement as a defiant assertion of her own virginity, a correction to the defilement with which Don John or, more pointedly, Claudio's public slander stained her. The participle "defiled," however, is a

surprising choice because it would seem to suggest that Hero is admitting to the crime of which she was accused. That “defiled” appears only in the Quarto and not in the Folio aids editors who wish to avoid the word and its entanglements. Other editors have looked for ways to dismiss the Quarto’s use of “defiled.” J.P. Collier emends it to “belied” in his 1858 edition and then in 1877 to “reviled,” a change he claims “must be welcomed by everybody.”²³ The Arden Third Series’ editor Claire McEachern sidesteps the issue altogether by keeping “defiled” but glossing it as “slandered” and so reads the term as an allusion to the actions of those who accused her falsely of her crime rather than to the crime itself. But “defile” at almost all other places in Shakespeare’s works (*All’s Well That Ends Well*, *Henry V*, *The Rape of Lucrece*) means “morally foul or polluted” and suggests illicit love or sexual violation.²⁴ Only Edgar in 3.6 of *King Lear* attaches the term to the “false opinion” whose “wrong thought defiles” him. As a synonym for “morally polluted,” “defiled” is more consonant with the terms Leonato, believing Hero guilty of premarital disloyalty, attaches to the child he wished was adopted rather than his own, one about whom, “*smirch’d* thus and *mired* with infamy,” he would disclaim, “No part of it is mine” (4.1.133-34, emphasis added). Additionally, glossing “defiled” as “slandered” obscures the essential contrast that Hero is trying to define between the dead Hero who was unchaste and the live one before him who, sure as life, is a “maid”. But to make this point, Hero risks ceding the impossible, that the dead Hero really was unfaithful. Although Hero is clearly innocent, by applying “defiled” to her “dead” self, Hero does not clearly or fully differentiate between the slanders of the accusers and the crimes for which she was accused. “Defiled” ironically suggests that the label attached to the Hero before has stuck, as if the counterfeit claim made the reality on its own. Such an idea, that at some level the accusation and crime become inseparable, might give further meaning to the inappropriate and unwittingly bawdy double entendre in Claudio’s elegy

the Lord reads at Hero's tomb that claims Hero was "[d]one to death by slanderous tongues" (5.3.3). Insofar as "defiled" belongs to the text of *Much Ado About Nothing* and preserves its general meaning, her use of the term only makes more intense the point that Hero is making about slander and women, that the damage done by false reports is equal to the report itself and cannot be simply undone, that shattered nuptials cannot be repaired, but must be remade into and out of something new.

The timing in *Much Ado* of counterfeit's potential transformation into reality is also important. *Much Ado* resembles both other comedies in that the second type of counterfeit trap is emerging at the very moment a character is or should be undergoing delivery from the first. In an important foundational work on disguise comedy, Victor Oscar Freeburg points to a general truth about the relation between disguise's problems and its discovery: "The disguise ceases to be active the moment it is discovered" because such discoveries remove "the cause which produced the difficulties."²⁵ However, *Much Ado*, like these other comedies, seems to neutralize discovery's key function. At the moment that Hero's counterfeit is being discovered and her previous self is being delivered and restored, the language in the play keeps insisting, in spite of ocular proof to the contrary, on the impossible idea that this figure is "another Hero" and that the heroine might indeed have died. An obvious question is what the persistence of Hero's counterfeit self, even if merely rhetorical, means to *Much Ado's* resolution. To the extent that the counterfeit becomes real and Hero is not the same, can the play be said to reach a comic resolution that depends on revealing Hero's death as mere disguise, securing her redemption, and conjoining her with Claudio? The point is not to claim that these lovers are different figures but that the consistent validation of the counterfeit forms a distraction and a problem even at the moment where distractions and problems should fall away.

The presence in all three plays of the second type of counterfeit trap, along with its timely occurrence at the resolution of the first type and in such a way that it risks preventing that resolution, suggests something about how Shakespeare is working counterfeit identity in these comedies. Shakespeare employs counterfeit traps of unintended consequences and of potential metamorphosis into disguise as ways to increase pleasure by making more intense certain core experiences of plays and theater. At the center of theater is disguise and counterfeit. Plays involving disguise and its consequences are already a pleasurable redoubling of the common feature of theater whereby actors impersonate roles and these impersonations provide the occasion for all succeeding action. Inasmuch as the consequences of counterfeiting are unintended and occur outside the control of characters who dissemble, they also create tension with the audience's experience of a play as scripted, predetermined, and designed. Disguise plots offer a kind of pleasure in which the counterfeit nature of dramatic character and theatrical action gets experienced first as a tension and then as a release from that tension in the resolution of the play, where order is restored only at the closing.

The second-type trap, or the tendency of characters to morph into their counterfeits, intensifies the necessary antithesis to theater's experience of character as a kind of disguise. What for actors are counterfeits become for characters real identities. Theater is the process of converting the fiction of the actor in the real world into the reality of the character in the play's world. Drama, therefore, is an experience whereby the counterfeit becomes the only reality characters know. Beyond the transformation of counterfeit into life, theater adds another potent experience of what is real and palpable in a fictional medium. Theater is the sole artistic form in which real human bodies with their own (real) identities are used to animate imaginary characters with fictional identities. For the audience, the counterfeit trap recreates the

tension in the simultaneity of real and imaginary that exists in the experience of dramatic characters. Characters whose counterfeit identities tend towards becoming their real selves enlarge the experience whereby fictional selves are already a kind of "real" self in that a real entity occupies the fictional one. The tension between the two terms of counterfeit appears most evident in the figure of the cross-dressed romantic heroine in early modern England. Because boy actors played women's parts, for a female character to cross-dress entailed that a counterfeit be removed in the very act of another's being assumed and so activated a return to the actor's "reality" even as the character's fictions were mounting. The second-type counterfeit trap seems to be another instance of the principle involved in the cross-dressed heroine whereby the pursuit of disguise and counterfeit in the plot triggers, at least by the end, the impulse toward the real.

The special thing about these Shakespeare comedies is the way they use and activate the second type of counterfeit trap at the precise moment that audience is being released from the tension of the first. The plays, therefore, move audiences from one property of drama (that all characters play artificial roles) to its complement (that the roles are the reality of characters). In part, the second form of counterfeit trap comes first to replace the plot's problems of dissembling and then to compound them, especially insofar as it presents a new hurdle to resolving these problems. However, this impediment does not completely negate resolution in these plays. For one, the transformations are not fully enacted. At the end of the plays, characters approach becoming their counterfeit selves, but they have not verifiably and fully transformed into what was previously false. Viola has become Cesario, Lucentio has become Cambio, and Hero has died more in language than in fact, more in potential than in finality. Therefore, less-than-complete transformations in part block resolutions from becoming fully complete. The interaction between these two competing impulses creates a

new type of energy at the end of the plays when one might expect by generic convention the main energy to disperse. Even at the ending, the plays continue their drive toward resolution in spite and even because of these new elements that would halt it. Through the counterfeit trap, Shakespeare has discovered a way to sustain the energy of comedies by compounding the paradoxical tensions of drama to the very end, keeping audiences captive even at the very point of their release.

Notes

1. All quotations from this and other Shakespeare plays are taken from the Arden Edition, third series. *Twelfth Night*, ed. Keir Elam (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008); *The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. Barbara Hodgdon (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010); *Much Ado About Nothing* (2015), ed. Claire McEachern (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010).

2. See the section called “The Last Few Minutes of *Twelfth Night*” in Stephen Booth, *Precious Nonsense: The Gettysburg Address, Ben Jonson’s Epitaphs on his Children, and Twelfth Night* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 183-212.

3. Yu Jin Ko, “The Comic Close of *Twelfth Night* and Viola’s Noli Me Tangere,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 48 (1997): 395.

4. *OED Online*, s.v. “become,” accessed Oct. 19, 2018, <http://www.oed.com.mu.opal-libraries.org/view/Entry/16784?redirectedFrom=become#eid>.

5. Catherine Belsey, “Disrupting Sexual Difference: Meaning and Gender in the Comedies,” in *Alternative Shakespeares*, ed. John Drakakis (London: Methuen, 1985) 187.

6. *Ibid.*, 189.

7. C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and its Relation to Social Custom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 3-4 (emphasis added).

8. Leo Salinger, *Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 222.

9. Karen Newman, *Shakespeare’s Rhetoric of Comic Character* (New York: Methuen, 1985), 118.

10. John Drakakis, ed., *Alternative Shakespeares*, 11, 10.

11. Lloyd Davis, *Guise and Disguise: Rhetoric and Characterization in the English Renaissance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 15.

12. More recently, Shakespearean criticism has returned to once passé questions of character. A central collection that helped reopen serious academic investigation into character-based readings of plays is Yu Jin Ko and Michael W. Shurgot, ed., *Shakespeare's Sense of Character: On the Page and From the Stage* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2012).

13. Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 2.

14. Davis, *Guise and Disguise*, 4.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*, 10.

17. J. C. Maxwell, "The Church Scene in *Much Ado*: The Absence of Antonio," *Notes and Queries* 14 (1967): 135.

18. Fred Tromly, "Grief, Authority, and the Resistance to Consolation," *Speaking Grief in English Literary Culture: Shakespeare to Milton*, ed. Margo Swiss and David A. Kent (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2002), 25.

19. *Ibid.*, 23, 12.

20. Tobias Döring, *Performances of Mourning in Shakespearean Theatre and Early Modern Culture* (New York: Palgrave, 2006), 164.

21. *Ibid.*, 165.

22. *Ibid.*, 161.

23. William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing: A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare*, ed. Horace Howard Furness (1899; repr., New York: Dover, 1964), 282.

24. *OED Online*, s.v. "defile," accessed Oct. 9, 2018, <http://www.oed.com.mu.opal-libraries.org/view/Entry/22974?redirectedFrom=breathe>.

25. Victor Oscar Freeburg, *Disguise Plots in Elizabethan Drama: A Study in Stage Tradition* (New York: Benjamin Bloom, 1915), 9, 10.