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“A Rose by Any Other Name Would Smell as Sweet”: Names and Secret Identities in Shakespeare’s Plays

Charlène Cruxent

The secret identity of characters usually goes hand in hand with the use of names in Shakespeare’s plays. When characters want to hide their identity, they often change their name and assume a new one: the alias. Nominal elements thus play a crucial role in the process of concealing or simulating one’s self, a fact which appears to be in contradiction with the conventional referential function of names. However, this apparent ontological paradox can be explained as soon as one has a closer look at the various nicknames assumed. Analysing situations ranging from the Machiavellian disguise of the king in *Henry V* to protective pseudonyms in *As You Like It*, this paper explores the paramount importance of gender in the coinage of aliases and the way in which self-bestowed names enable characters to hide their identity from their peers while remaining identifiable for the audience. Juliet’s statement that “a rose by any other name would smell as sweet” suggests that a change of name does not modify a character’s identity. Nevertheless, aliases enable renamed characters to conceal their agenda while the meanings of the names often suggest the intentions and situations of their bearers.

Dissimulation and counterfeiting are recurrent patterns in Shakespeare’s plays; characters often have a secret to hide or a specific agenda that requires them to adopt a new persona. In “The Mechanics of Disguise in Shakespeare’s Plays,” P. Kreider acknowledges this fact and adds that whatever the circumstance of the counterfeiting may be, it follows a three-step pattern of disguise. First, the playwright “leads his audience to expect a masquerade”; he then makes his characters reveal the

disguise to the audience, a revelation they will reiterate in front of their peers once the climax has been reached (167). Later on, spectators can observe the characters' intention to alter their appearance by changing clothes, a change that is usually accompanied by the adoption of a new name.¹ This new name is an "alias," which the *OED* defines as "[a]n alternative name for a person or thing; esp. a false or assumed name" (A.2).² Unlike an official name, an alias is a nickname chosen by a character who wants to masquerade as someone else.³ Aliases play a crucial role in the display of a character's identity because a name has a direct impact on the way characters perceive each other. In early modern England, photographs did not exist and, even though portraits of wealthier individuals were painted, people were more likely to know someone by their name than their likeness. Names thus conveyed the identity of their bearer since they encapsulated all the pieces of information people would gather about someone, i.e., his/her age, sex, social status, nationality, profession.⁴ Changing one's name would amount to a significant change of identity; it could modify someone's social status and gender. Gender is paramount in the use of pseudonyms and must be taken into account to understand the motivation of a character assuming another identity through a new name. Both male and female characters in Shakespeare's plays use aliases, and both simulation and dissimulation are at stake when aliases appear, but the reasons why a female character takes a nickname are usually different from those that lead a male character to

¹ If Kreider notices that "Shakespeare infrequently permits masked characters to name themselves" (174), we may add that the new name, if it does not appear when the character announces the dissimulation of his/her identity, is uttered later in the plot and is part and parcel of the disguise.

² The terms "alias" and "pseudonym" will be used interchangeably in this essay, but one should keep in mind that the word "pseudonym," which designates "[a] false or fictitious name" (*OED*), only appeared in the English language in the nineteenth century. The terms "alias" or "nicknames" were usually used to refer to a pseudonym in the early modern period.

³ A nickname is "[a] (usually familiar or humorous) name which is given to a person, place, etc., as a supposedly appropriate replacement for or addition to the proper name" (*OED*, 1). The term appeared in the early sixteenth century; it is an alteration and misdivision of the Middle English "an ekename," literally "a name of addition" since the first part, the Old English "eaca," means an "increase," and the last one "nama" stands for "name."

⁴ Erika Fischer-Lichte lists these criteria (age, sex, social status, and profession) to explain what constitutes the identity of a dramatic character (290).

change his name.⁵ This essay first examines the extent to which female nominal disguise is used as a shield by women to protect themselves and is concurrently regarded as threatening from a male point of view. I will then analyse male aliases linked to surveillance since changing one's name is also a strategy to go unnoticed or become a spy in the context of either personal issues or the kingdom's security. Finally, I intend to explain and debunk the apparent ontological crux present in aliases. By convention, names are expected to function as reliable identifiers that enable us to be introduced and known to the rest of a community. However, it seems that changing one's name to hide one's identity was an easy thing to do, both in Shakespeare's plays and in early modern England. If, in theory, aliases challenge the legitimacy of names as reliable identifiers, then the way in which they are coined may be a subtle comment on naming practices.

A number of Shakespeare's female characters assume new names in order to protect themselves from harm in a patriarchal society. Picking a male name can enable a female character to blend in a community without drawing the attention of men. This is the case in *As You Like It* when Celia and Rosalind, after Rosalind's banishment from the court, decide to go to the Forest of Arden in order to find Celia's uncle. The journey they must undertake is too perilous a quest for Rosalind, who explains: "Alas, what danger will it be to us, / Maids as we are, to travel forth so far! / Beauty provoketh thieves sooner than gold" (1.3.105-7). Rosalind says she will disguise herself as a man, immediately triggering Celia's question: "What shall I call thee when thou art a man?" (1.3.120). Rosalind thus becomes Ganymede, while Celia assumes the identity of Aliena, Ganymede's sister. In *Shakespeare's Names*, Laurie Maguire confirms the status of aliases as safeguards when she states that "name equals identity [...] Nicknames originated as a way of protecting the real name (and thus the individual)" (189). Under the protection of the alias Ganymede, Rosalind and Celia will succeed in their quest with fewer troubles than they would have encountered as women travelling without the chaperonage of a male relative.

In the same vein, both Imogen in *Cymbeline* and Julia in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* adopt another name to travel, but their goal is to find their respective lovers. In Verona, Julia becomes Sebastian in order to reach Milan so that she can be reunited with her fiancé, Proteus. She tells her waiting-woman that by becoming a page, she will not be a sexu-

⁵ Simulation and dissimulation are closely linked, but we shall understand these terms as follows: while simulation is the act of pretending to be what one is not, dissimulation is the act of hiding what one is.

al prey: “Not like a woman, for I would prevent / The loose encounters of lascivious men” (2.7.40-41). Imogen’s case is somewhat different since she decides to become Fidele because she needs to enlist in the Italian army to reach her beloved, Posthumus, and tell him that she has not been unfaithful to him. She may choose the alias herself, but the transformation is suggested by Posthumus’s servant Pisano, who does not believe the lady to be unfaithful and wants to help her:

Now, if you could wear a mind
 Dark as your fortune is, and but disguise
 That which t’appear itself must not yet be
 But self-danger, you should tread a course
 Pretty and full of view (3.4.143-47)

Here Pisano tells her she needs to forget what would work against her, that is to say her gender and nationality, in order to restore the situation to normal. Rosalind, Celia, Imogen, and Julia thus gain a new identity and remain safe thanks to a linguistic simulation. Of course, they change clothes, but the name is what fully allows them to become what they are not, that is to say men or, in Celia’s case, someone else’s sister.

Interestingly, it is through simulation that these characters can be safe and reach their goal, which often includes a change of locale. Aliases empower women because, as Stephen Greenblatt explains in *Shakespearean Negotiations*, “[w]omen had less freedom of movement, real or imaginary, than men” (92). The self-bestowal of a male name leads to increased freedom and power because the female bearers of the pseudonym can act in the same way as men. Imogen can become Fidele once she refuses to submit to the authority of her father (“No court, no father, no more ado,” 3.4.131). In *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia is able to save Antonio thanks to her disguise as Balthasar, “*a young doctor of Rome*” (4.1.152) who acts as Antonio’s lawyer. Greenblatt reminds us that a “man in Renaissance society had symbolic and material advantages that no woman could hope to attain, and he had them by virtue of separating himself [...] from women” (76). Portia linguistically separates herself from her womanhood, taking a male alias that enables her to intercede on behalf of Antonio. While the most praised virtue for early modern women was their capacity to tame their tongue and remain silent in public, Portia/Balthasar is listened to and heard by male authority figures. While Portia manages to take the floor in the court, Viola in *Twelfth Night* not only succeeds in getting into the court of Illyria, but also becomes Cesario, the Duke’s counsellor. In order to do so, she asks the captain she has been travelling with to introduce her to the court: “Con-

ceal me what I am, and be my aid / For such disguise as haply shall become / The form of my intent. I'll serve this duke" (1.2.50-52). These prestigious positions (lawyer, counsellor), acquired thanks to pseudonyms, are not supposed to be held by women. The aliases reverse the "natural" patriarchal order since their effect "challenges the typical [image of] Elizabethan women of passive, submissive, and meek quality" (Atmanagara and Yeni 155).

This reversal of values, initially perceived by the audience alone, may be paralleled with the carnivalesque logic defined by Mikhail Bakhtin: through the linguistic mask of the alias, female characters can be and do what they would not normally do, thus climbing the social ladder and empowering themselves by subverting the status quo. This inversion of values may also be observed through the homoerotic associations that a change of name leads to: Rosalind/Ganymede offers to help Orlando by teaching him how to seduce a lady. Orlando thus needs to woo Ganymede as if the latter were a woman. We must bear in mind that members of the early modern audience who were acquainted with classical literature would have known that "Ganymede" was the name of Jove's cup-bearer and lover in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The name "Ganymede" was also used a few decades afterwards to refer to "any boy that is loved for carnal abuse, or is hired to be used contrary to nature, to commit the detestable sin of *Sodomy*" (Blount Hvr).⁶ Moreover, the potential same-sex desire of the shepherdess Phoebe for Rosalind – which is limited because of Rosalind's cross-dressing – may disrupt the heteronormative economy of the play. The same applies to Cesario/Viola, who is in love with Duke Orsino, but is also loved by Duchess Olivia.

The gender confusion implied by those linguistic disguises was considered a real threat at the time, because early modern women were described as particularly inclined to deceive. As Valentin Groebner states,

[m]edical theories of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries attributed a special capacity for pretense, disguise, and alternation of external appearance to women, because [...] their bodies were of a colder and damper consistency. Women were [...] more "fluid" and cold-blooded [...], and therefore more pliant to the practices of simulation and dissimulation. (19)

⁶ "Ganymede (*Ganymedes*) the name of a Trojan boy, whom *Jupiter* so loved (say the Poets) as hee took him up to Heaven, and made him his Cup-bearer. Hence any boy that is loved for carnal abuse, or is hired to be used contrary to nature, to commit the detestable sin of *Sodomy* is called a *Ganymede*; an Ingle." (Blount Sivv)

The fluidity attributed to the female body is translated into the alias in the linguistic sphere. The new name could lead to confusion as to the gender of its bearer, enabling women to reach a status they were not supposed to have access to, thus violating social norms and rules. In *The Tradition of Female Transvestism in Early Modern Europe*, Rudolph Dekker and Lotte van de Pol explain that early modern people needed to know the gender of the person they were addressing: “Unexpected direct confrontation with a woman in disguise very often provoked negative emotions” (74). Sixteenth-century books such as Andrew Boorde’s *The First Book of the Introduction to Knowledge* were devoted to the strict Renaissance dress code and would explain how to know a person’s group identity (e.g., gender, nationality, class, profession) at first glance.⁷ Dekker and van de Pol have found 119 records mentioning cases of European transvestite women, i.e., women wearing clothes of the opposite sex: “A far-from-exhaustive investigation into the literature resulted in fifty authentic cases of female transvestism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Great Britain” (1). Often described as women in men’s clothes, they held positions men would hold and took male names such as “David Jans,” an alias used by Maritgen Jans, who enlisted as a soldier after serving as the foreman of a silk-weaving workshop in Amsterdam (33), and Isabella Geelvinck, who served in the German army for fifteen years (37). Some of them even wedded another woman: Maeyken Joosten married Bertlemina Wale in 1606 (59). Once discovered, such unions could lead to the exile of one of the spouses even though the death penalty was initially demanded because of the seriousness of the deception:

It was not so much lesbian relationships or cross-dressing in and of themselves, but their combination, that was considered to be extremely serious. We can also conclude that the one of two female lovers who assumed the role of the man was as a rule more severely punished than her accomplice. The attempted usurpation of the male prerogative was not dismissed lightly. (80)

The examples of homoeroticism in *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night* may have triggered anxiety in the audience. Nevertheless, the initial decorum is soon re-established on stage as Rosalind and Viola only make use of a temporary male alias. In the end, the characters come back to their gender roles defined by the heteronormative patriarchy.

⁷ For more information on costume guidebooks, see Miriam Eliav-Feldon (181-82).

For men, aliases serve a rather different purpose. They are usually used as a means to spy on others and thus to gain power through secret knowledge.⁸ Male characters uses aliases in two kinds of situations: to assert their authority in the private sphere, or to assert their dominance in the public sphere of politics. In personal relationships, an alias serves to dissimulate – or hide – the identity of its bearer. Both Kent (*King Lear*) and Belarius (*Cymbeline*) are exiled by their respective kings and become Caius and Morgan for the sake of concealment. Kent is thus able to look after Lear incognito while Belarius can remain in his country without being identified. In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Master Ford suspects his wife has been unfaithful with John Falstaff. In order to verify the rumours he has heard Ford introduces himself to Falstaff as Master Brook, hoping that Falstaff will speak openly and reveal his true intentions to him. Commenting on the potential affair, Master Ford says that his wife

was in his [Falstaff's] company at Page's house, and what they made there I know not. Well, I will look further into't, and I have a disguise to sound Falstaff. If I find her honest I lose not my labour. If she be otherwise, 'tis labour well bestowed. (2.1.212-16)

Thanks to his linguistic concealment, Master Ford later “sounds” Falstaff, that is to say, examines or questions him “in an indirect manner” (*OED* v.2, 6.a). Notice here that Ford both wants to see (“look into’t”) and hear (“to sound”) Falstaff’s agenda; the verbs he is using are related to the semantic fields of sight and sound. The alias is a type of disguise that facilitates Ford’s investigation: Ford’s aim is to check, to verify with his own eyes and ears, what he has heard about his wife’s liaison with Falstaff. In this context, Ford may be considered a spy. In Cesare Ripa’s book of emblems, *Iconologia* (first published in Italy in 1625), the figure of the spy is depicted wearing a cloak covered with eyes and ears, a garment he also uses to hide his face. Since Ripa’s description stipulates that “[t]he Eyes, &c. are the *Instruments* they use to please their Patrons” (72), Ford qualifies as a spy acting for his own cause. He is the person who both requests and conducts the investigation, camouflaging his identity with a new name in the same way as Ripa’s spy hides his appearance with a cloak.

⁸ Only two male characters take on a new name for the sake of protection: Edgar in *King Lear* (Tom O’Bedlam), and Roderigo in *Twelfth Night* (Sebastian), and they do so because of the life-threatening situations in which they are.

Ford's spying may not affect others, but the political surveillance conducted by other characters has a greater impact. In *Measure for Measure*, Duke Vincentio commissions Angelo to restore order in the city of Vienna. Pretending to go to Poland while the newly appointed deputy is in charge of Vienna, Vincentio actually remains in the city under the guise of a religious figure, Friar Lodowick. The duke can thus monitor Angelo's progress without being noticed and test whether he is angelic by nature or by name alone: "Hence shall we see / If power change purpose, what our seemers be" (1.3.53-54). But more than keeping an eye on Angelo, Vincentio can gain further knowledge of the state of Vienna since he interacts with different strata of society, observing what the people do and also what they think about the duke. By adopting the guise of Friar Lodowick, the duke is therefore able to view the city he has been governing from a different angle and to see the bigger picture. His omnipresence is ironically acknowledged by Lucio, who calls him the "duke of dark corners" (4.3.156). Without knowing it, Lucio reveals that Vincentio is not in Poland but instead in a "corner," the word "corner" being also used in the sense of "hiding place" in early modern dictionaries.⁹ This "corner," this "place" in which he hides, is a metaphorical one; it is his disguise, which includes both his religious outfit and his alias.

Similar examples of espionage also appear in other plays. While the weakened British army is getting some rest before the attack on the French in *Henry V*, the king decides to mingle with his troops in order to assess his men's state of mind before their decisive battle. Most of the soldiers do not know what the king looks like; he thus wittingly presents himself as what he is: Harry Leroy (4.1.49). This camouflage name, which both reveals and hides who he is thanks to the pun on French Leroy, "the king," misleads one of the soldiers, Pistol, who believes the name to be Cornish (while the king is Welsh).¹⁰ As with Duke Vincentio, the king manages to disguise himself as a person of lower rank as he is mistaken for a soldier and, as a result, he gains access to and intelligence from the soldiers.

It is worth noting that both Duke Vincentio and King Henry V share features associated with spies. They both interact with commoners: Cesare Ripa states that the spy's "Cloths shew that he practises among Noblemen, as well as Vulgar" men (72). Vincentio and King Hen-

⁹ See for instance Claude Hollyband's *A Dictionary French and English* (1593), in which he defines the French word "Vne cachette" (hiding place) as "a corner, a close place."

¹⁰ "Camouflage name" is the equivalent of "linguistic disguise," but the military connotation it conveys perfectly fits a pseudonym taken for political and tactical espionage.

ry are able to go wherever they want, just as the spy in Ripa's emblem has wings on his heels to show that the spy can travel and get around easily; they can observe their peers day and night – the duke does both, and King Henry V becomes Harry Leroy at night – and the presence of a lantern in Ripa's depiction hints at the spy's omnipresence. Last but not least, they both use a camouflage name to hear and see what they want.

It seems that both men's actions correspond to Niccolò Machiavelli's definition of what a good prince is. In his political treatise *The Prince*, Machiavelli explains that to rise to power and then maintain one's authority, a prince may eschew conventional Christian morals and be dishonest "according to necessity" (56). A prince should be as cunning as a fox, but should hide it:

[I]t is necessary to be able to disguise this character [i.e., slyness] well, and to be a great feigner and dissembler; and men are so simple and so ready to obey present necessities, that one who deceives will always find those who allow themselves to be deceived. [...] Everybody sees what you appear to be, few feel what you are. (56)

An alias is a smart disguise: no one would suspect that a friar would lie, or that someone who is called "Leroy" is an actual king. The duke and the king deceive their interlocutors, but they do so to be more efficient rulers. The reigning monarch, Elizabeth I, did the same but in a more indirect way than the two Shakespearean characters. The queen had her own spies who informed her of the latest news and rumours. The "Rainbow" portrait of the queen (1600-02) may be a testimony to Elizabeth's practices, the eyes and ears depicted on her dress recalling her intelligence "network," thus presenting Elizabeth as the incarnation of political surveillance. A large number of her spies were counsellors or ambassadors who knew what was said and thought in other European courts. The nickname chosen by the queen for one of her favourites, Robert Dudley, Count of Leicester, reflects his position as a secret agent. Dudley's nickname was "eyes." In her 1586 letter to Dudley, the queen addressed him using a pictogram, "ô ô," representing two eyeballs and eyebrows: "Now will I end, that do imagine I talk still with you, and therefore loathly say farewell, ô ô, though ever I pray God bless you from all harm" (Marcus et al. 283). Dudley himself signed another letter using this nickname: "by your most faithful & most obe-

dient ôô [eyes]. R. Leycester.”¹¹ This nickname proves that Queen Elizabeth, just like Duke Vincentio and King Henry V in Shakespeare’s works, gathered intelligence through spies in order to protect the state.

No matter what motivates characters to change their names, the act itself proves to be an ontological dilemma: the initial role of a proper name is to denote its bearer in order to distinguish him/her from their peers because “names [...] mark an individual as unique, as *indiv-id-ual*” (Maguire 9).¹² If the proper name is suppressed or hidden, this should mean that no reliable identification is possible anymore, since the primary identity of the renamed character is erased. However, the nominalist position on names expressed by young Capulet in *Romeo and Juliet* implies that a person does not change even if his/her name does:

What’s in a name? That which we call a rose
 By any other word would smell as sweet;
 So Romeo would, were he not Romeo called,
 Retain that dear perfection which he owes
 Without that title. (2.2.43-47)

In Plato’s *Cratylus*, Hermogenes argues that terms and names are plain labels used in a community by joint agreement to enable communication and understanding between its members, an argument that leads him to the following conclusion:

Any name which you give, in my opinion, is the right one, and if you change that and give another, the new name is as correct as the old – [...] for there is no name given to anything by nature; all is convention and habit of the users; – such is my view” (65).

The “convention and habit of the users” referred to by Hermogenes are valid for the aliases in Shakespeare’s works. Even if few characters know the true identity of their disguised peers, the audience usually witnesses the change of name since the renamed characters explain why they need to hide their primary identity. Kreider describes this phenomenon:

Much more frequently Shakespeare supplies detailed preliminary information concerning the nature of the contemplated disguise. This careful

¹¹ Autograph letter signed to Queen Elizabeth I about the Spanish Armada, signed “R. Leycester,” 3 August 1588. LUNA: Folger Digital Image Collection.

¹² This is how contemporary onomasticians usually define a proper name. For more on proper names and their ontological value, see Fabre.

preparatory exposition, which constitutes the most lucid introduction to masquerade, is quite persistent [...] Such minute specifications make it impossible for any person of moderate intelligence to experience even temporary uncertainty [...] And a host more of Shakespeare's heroes and heroines, as well as lesser figures, take the audience into their confidence in exactly the same way. (169-70)

Because of the dramatic irony created by the alias, the latter does not impede identification of the characters by the spectators and if one looks closer, it even singles out renamed characters in a more accurate way than the original name. "Master Brook" clearly states the distress of Ford, who believes his wife to be unfaithful; he is "brooking," that is to say suffering from, this uncertainty. If "Master Brook" is transparent enough, other nicknames convey the state of mind of their bearer in a more oblique way. They can be described as "false-true" names in that they reveal the situations of the characters. Celia decides to call herself Aliena because she wants a name that summarises her new status (1.3.124-25). Laurie Maguire paraphrases "Aliena" using the locution "the estranged one" (39) because Celia, who has lived at the court her whole life, will travel to the Forest of Arden, where she will be an alien, a stranger out of her comfort zone. In *Cymbeline*, Imogen renames herself according to what she is: Fidele, French for "faithful, loyal," indicates that she has not been unfaithful to her lover, Posthumus. A Roman officer comments on her "ontologically suitable" (Maguire 39) name, saying: "Thy name well fits thy faith, thy faith thy name" (4.2.380), thus proving that aliases are in keeping with their bearers: the new name conveys a characteristic of a person or else encapsulates the predicament that has led a character to change their name in the first place.

Aliases are thus what could be referred to as "latent descriptions": they denote a character and they also connote an idea the attentive spectator or reader is able to grasp thanks to his/her knowledge. Historical and cultural knowledge is needed to fathom nicknames: Viola is Cesario, or "little Cesar," because, just like the Roman emperor, she came, saw, and conquered, albeit the Duke of Illyria's heart rather than a nation. Her alias hints at the kind of battle she is fighting. In *Twelfth Night*, the fool Feste pretends to be a curate to trick Malvolio into thinking he is mad. He introduces himself as "Sir Topas the curate, who comes to visit Malvolio the lunatic" (4.2.21-22). The very role Feste wants to play is shown through his new name because a topaz was a stone believed to cure insanity, or in Reginald Scot's words, "a Topase healeth the lunatike person of his passion of lunacie" (294).

A second set of skills is required from the spectators: the understanding of foreign languages. As opposed to the proper names whose meaning is overshadowed, most of the self-bestowed nicknames have a semantic motivation that one needs to find in another language (Rigolot 12). I have already mentioned Aliena – the stranger, Fidele – the faithful one, and Harry Leroy – the king, names which have a meaning in Latin and French. We should also focus on *The Taming of the Shrew*: in order to woo Bianca, Lucentio becomes her schoolmaster and takes the alias Cambio. This nickname is a comment on Lucentio's pseudonym: "Cambio" means "change" in Italian. The etymology of the word points at the existence of the new name as a linguistic device used for disguise purposes. Aliases may be compared to codes to be deciphered: if one realises that a mask (i.e., a nickname) is being worn, one can try to remove it (i.e., unravel its meaning) in order to see who is hiding behind it.

From personal protection to protection of the state, the alias goes hand in hand with a change of identity. In Shakespeare's plays, female characters use male nicknames in order to protect themselves from aggressions and to gain the kind of power and agency usually only afforded to men. The adoption of a new name leads to a temporary reversal of values as women are not subjected to the rules imposed by the dominant patriarchal authority when they assume a male name. Male characters, by contrast, use aliases to spy on others, to gain knowledge and gather reliable information with their own eyes and ears. The alias, hiding the secret identity of its bearer through simulation and dissimulation, enables a character to be someone else and to travel without being noticed, which corresponds to the original Latin meaning of "alias": "at another time, elsewhere" (OED). Like clothes, self-bestowed names are props characters exploit, linguistic masks that tell the story, situation, or actions of their bearers. Aliases offer both secrecy and surveillance to characters who assume them and they may be considered better identifiers than proper names. On top of having a referential function, the semantic motivation of the term constituting the new name creates harmony between the signifier (the name) and the signified (the bearer), something proper names do not always achieve. The apparent ontological dilemma of nicknames may thus be seen as a meta-theatrical trick played by Shakespeare, a trick designed to draw attention to the pretence of the theatre by inviting the audience to delight in cases of mistaken identity and confusion. Indeed, spectators are aware of the linguistic disguise; they are in on the secret, since the characters announce the masquerade and explain their intentions. The audience is also able to survey – in the sense of observing – and is invited to question the iden-

ity politics at play in both the theatre and the world in which they live. This is all the truer for early modern spectators since they inhabited “a world where talk of fraud and deception was omnipresent” (Eliav-Feldon 181).

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