



The Comedy of Errors

The Atlanta Shakespeare Company

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Dromio of Syracuse: Matt Felton

Antipholus of Ephesus: Andrew Houchins

Dromio of Ephesus: J.L. Reed

Adriana: Jenny Lamourt

Luciana: India Tyree

Abbess, Ensemble: Gina Rickicki

Egeon, Balthasar: Steve Hudson

Duke Solinus, Dr. Pinch: Chris Hecke

Courtesan, Ensemble: Amanda Lindsey

Angelo, Ensemble: Matt Nitchie

Nell, Ensemble: Dani Herd

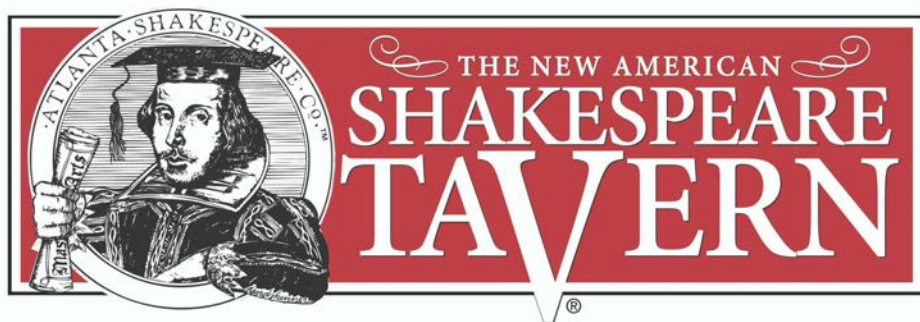




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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare (1564-1616) wrote thirty-seven plays, which have become staples of classrooms and theatre performances across the world.

The son of a glove-maker, Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, where he received a strong education in Latin and rhetoric at the local school. He married Anne Hathaway in 1582, and they had three children: Susanna, Hamnet, and Judith.

By 1592, Shakespeare had journeyed to London, where he became an extremely successful playwright and actor in the Lord Chamberlain's Men. He profited from being a shareholder in the Globe after its construction in 1599.

Shakespeare's plays were popular with all types of people, including the two monarchs who ruled England during his lifetime: Elizabeth I (1533-1603) and James I (1566-1625).

Shakespeare found both artistic and commercial success through his writing. He amassed a sizable fortune, acquired valuable real estate in Stratford, and purchased a coat of arms, which gave him and his father the right to be called gentlemen. Shakespeare was well-known in England at the time of his death in 1616, and his fame only increased following the publication of his plays in *The First Folio* in 1623.

2016 was the four hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare's death, and celebrations honoring Shakespeare's contribution to literature took place around the world.

“He was not of an age, but for all time.”
- Ben Jonson on Shakespeare

Shakespeare: Did You Know?

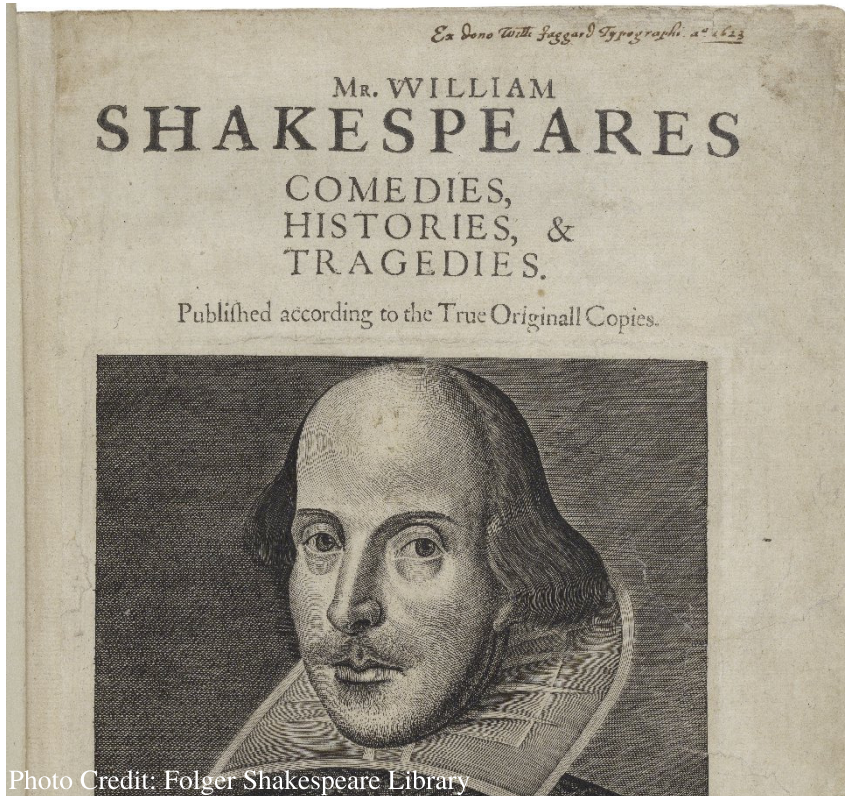


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Shakespeare's Reception and Legacy

While Shakespeare enjoyed great popularity in his time, he did not escape some criticism. Robert Greene, a jealous contemporary writer, warned Shakespeare's fellow playwrights, Thomas Nashe, George Peele, and Christopher Marlowe, that Shakespeare "supposes he is well able to bombast out blank verse as the best of you; and...is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in the country" (Dunton-Downer 11). While Shakespeare received some criticism in the following centuries for the inconsistent quality of his plays, most critics have looked on Shakespeare very favorably. Similarly, while his popularity has risen and fallen over the years, Shakespeare has been predominantly popular and well-loved by readers. Shakespeare was so popular in certain eras like the Victorian era that critics came up with the word *bardolatry* to describe intense admiration of Shakespeare. Shakespeare is proving very popular in modern times as well. His plays are performed across the world and they have been adapted into successful films and television series.

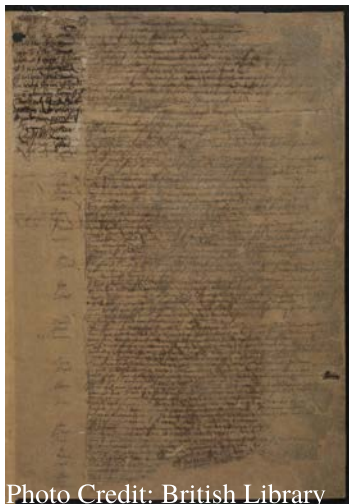


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**Shakespeare penned
884,647 words and
118,406 lines.**

Did Shakespeare write his own plays?

Yes. Over the years, people have made arguments that Shakespeare's plays were actually written by Sir Francis Bacon, Christopher Marlowe, and Edward de Vere. However, scholars firmly believe that Shakespeare wrote his own plays, citing at least fifty references in Elizabethan and Jacobean texts that connect Shakespeare to his plays. Scholars also cite the fact that the actors John Hemminge and Henry Condell, who put together the First Folio, and Ben Jonson, a contemporary playwright who wrote the dedication of the First Folio, all credit Shakespeare with authorship of his own plays.

Did Shakespeare get along with his wife?

Probably, but we'll never know for sure. Shakespeare spent a lot of time away from his wife, Anne, but that was because he needed to spend time in London to build his career. In his will, Shakespeare left Anne the family's "second best bed" ("Shakespeare FAQ"), but he was not snubbing his wife because that bed would have been the one that he and Anne shared.

Shakespeare's Handwriting

The only record that we have of Shakespeare's handwriting is a play script of *Sir Thomas More* (above), which Shakespeare helped revise in 1603. Shakespeare added at least 147 lines to the play. His handwriting was not necessarily bad but it is hard to decipher for modern-day readers who are not experts in Elizabethan *paleography*, the study of old handwriting.

Shakespeare's Last Wish

Shakespeare was buried in 1616 at Holy Trinity Church in Stratford. His grave reads "Good friend for Jesus sake forebeare, to dig the dust enclosed here: blesete be [the] man [that] spares these stones, and curst be he [that] moves my bones" ("Shakespeare FAQ"). However, a recent radar scan suggests that Shakespeare's head might have been stolen by grave robbers.

Understanding the Elizabethan Era

"I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too..."

- Queen Elizabeth I to troops at Tilbury facing the Spanish Armada in 1588

The Elizabethan era refers to the period of time in which Queen Elizabeth I ruled England from 1558–1603. The Elizabethan era is often referred to as the Golden Age of England. Elizabeth's reign saw a substantial decrease in the political and religious turmoil that defined the decade before she assumed the throne. Under her rule, England asserted its power, famously triumphing over the invading Spanish armada in 1588. While Elizabethans did endure plague and some unrest, conditions of the era were reasonably favorable.

Playwriting flourished under Elizabeth's reign; Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare found great success during this time. Theatre during the Elizabethan era was a touchy subject; theatres themselves were not allowed to exist within the city limits and moralists decried the frivolity of theatrical outings and the numbers of unsavory characters and pickpockets attending public theatres. However, Queen Elizabeth enjoyed theatrical performances when the actors came to her court. Moreover, she actively involved herself in theatre of the age by forming and serving as the patron of The Queen's Men in 1583. Elizabeth I died in 1603 and was succeeded by her Scottish nephew James I.



ELIZABETHAN LONDON WAS...

HIERARCHICAL

A sense of hierarchy dominated the Elizabethan worldview. Elizabethans believed in the Great Chain of Being, in which God and the angels were superior to humans, who in turn were superior to animals and the natural world. On earth, the English monarch was superior to all his or her subjects, and nobles were superior to people of lesser socioeconomic stations. Everything from the clothing that people wore to where they sat in a playhouse--if they attended public theatres at all--showed their status.

PATRIARCHAL

Despite having a female queen, the world was very patriarchal, with men controlling many if not all of the actions of their female relatives.

CROWDED AND DIRTY

200,000 people lived in London when Elizabeth took the throne. Without modern conveniences, the city was overflowing in certain places and ripe with the smell of people and animals.

Playing Shakespeare Through the Ages



The Globe, built in 1599 on the south side of the Thames, was an open-air theatre where many of Shakespeare's plays were performed. The Globe likely was able to hold up to 3,000 tightly-packed audience members. Poorer spectators paid a penny to stand during the performance while richer theatre-goers paid two pennies for a seat and another penny for a cushion. Audience members, especially those standing in front of the stage, were loud and opinionated, often talking to each other or even voicing their thoughts on the play to the actors onstage. Performances took place at 2:00 or 3:00 p.m. to take advantage of the day light, but the time of day meant that many people skipped work to attend the plays, which contributed to conservative politicians' dislike of theatre. While the original Globe does not exist today, a reconstruction, seen in the picture to the left, was built in 1997 in Southwark, London.



The Shakespeare Tavern Playhouse, built in 1990 on Peachtree Street in Atlanta, Georgia, features a stage with similar features to the Globe's stage. ASC strives to create productions that are also very similar to the ones that Shakespeare's audience would have seen. All ASC productions incorporate Original Practices, which involve the active exploration of the Elizabethan stagecraft and acting techniques that Shakespeare's own audiences would have enjoyed nearly four hundred years ago. Performances at the Playhouse feature period costumes, sword fights, sound effects created live by the actors rather than pre-recorded sounds, and live music played on the stage. ASC's actors are trained to speak Shakespeare's words directly to the audience instead of using the more modern acting convention of ignoring the audience's presence as if there was an imaginary "fourth wall" separating the actors and audience. Audience members at the Shakespeare Tavern Playhouse should gain a better understanding of Elizabethan style, language, and drama by seeing it performed as Shakespeare's own company might have performed it.



The ASC touring set, which is used in ASC touring productions, is a playhouse-inspired unit with three curtained entrances from which actors can enter and exit. Like a production at the Shakespeare Tavern Playhouse, all touring productions employ Original Practices. However, the connection between ASC's productions and the performances Shakespeare's contemporaries would have seen is not limited to period-inspired costumes and direct address to the audience. The act of taking a performance on tour echoes the Elizabethan practice of actors touring the countryside when outbreaks of the bubonic plague forced theatres, which fostered the spread of disease by enclosing many people in a small area, to close. Elizabethan theatre companies often brought a condensed set, props, and costumes to perform at country estates for noble families or at inns for the common people when the London theatres were closed. In bringing productions on tour, ASC strives to carry on this Elizabethan tradition of bringing live theatre to people outside the city.



Characters

Antipholus of Syracuse: Antipholus of Syracuse arrives in Ephesus on a quest for his long-lost twin brother. His great confusion over why so many of the townspeople recognize him is ameliorated when he is reunited with his twin at the play's conclusion.

Antipholus of Ephesus: A well-to-do citizen of Ephesus, Antipholus of Ephesus is married to Adriana. The confusion that ensues when the townspeople mistake Antipholus of Syracuse for him is resolved when he is reunited with his brother.

Dromio of Syracuse: Servant to Antipholus of Syracuse, Dromio bears the brunt of his master's displeasure about the perplexing events of the day.

Dromio of Ephesus: Servant to Antipholus of Ephesus, Dromio of Ephesus is married to Nell and, like his master, gets embroiled in the great confusion that develops from people confusing him with his twin brother.

Adriana: The often jealous wife of Antipholus of Ephesus, she mistakes Antipholus of Syracuse for her husband for much of the play until the day's bewildering events are explained at the play's end.

Luciana: Adriana's sister, she becomes Antipholus of Syracuse's object of affection.

Duke Solinus: The Duke of Ephesus, he mercifully releases Egeon from the threat of execution for breaking the law banning people from Syracuse in Ephesus.

Egeon: The father of the two Antipholi, Egeon is given a day to raise a sum of money to avoid being put to death for breaking the law banning anyone from Syracuse to travel to Ephesus. He is ultimately reunited with his wife, Emilia, and his sons at the end of the play, and Duke Solinus spares his life.

Abbess: The abbess, named Emilia, is the mother of the two Antipholi and the wife of Egeon, with whom she is reunited.

Balthasar: He is a merchant and friend of Antipholus of Ephesus.

Angelo: He is a goldsmith who needs to use the money that Antipholus of Ephesus owes him for a chain to pay his own debts.

Merchant: He is a merchant.

Second Merchant: He is the merchant to whom Angelo is indebted.

Doctor Pinch: He tries to cure Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus of their supposed madness.

Nell: A kitchen maid working in the house of Antipholus of Ephesus, she is married to Dromio of Ephesus.

Courtesan: She is a prostitute and acquaintance of Antipholus of Ephesus.



Plot of *The Comedy of Errors*

The Duke of Ephesus, Duke Solinus, interrogates Egeon, a merchant from Syracuse, about why he is violating the law banning anyone from Syracuse to travel to Ephesus. Egeon explains that he came to Ephesus in search of his son, Antipholus of Syracuse, and his son's servant, Dromio of Syracuse, who have been on a quest for five years to find their long-lost twin brothers and Antipholus' mother, Emilia, from whom they were separated many years ago in a shipwreck. Duke Solinus pities Egeon's plight and gives him a day to raise a sum of money to prevent his execution for breaking the law.

Antipholus of Syracuse, unaware that his father is in the same city, explores the streets of Ephesus, where he is cautioned by a merchant to say that he is from a city other than Syracuse to avoid being punished by Duke Solinus. Antipholus of Syracuse instructs his servant, Dromio of Syracuse, to take some money back to the inn where they are staying. His long-lost twin brother, Dromio of Ephesus, appears and, believing that Antipholus of Syracuse is actually his master, Antipholus of Ephesus, relays a message from Antipholus of Ephesus' wife, Adriana, to come home to dinner. Protesting that he does not have a wife, Antipholus of Syracuse is incredibly confused by the conversation and demands that the perplexed Dromio tell him where he left his money.

Meanwhile at Antipholus of Ephesus' house, his wife, Adriana, complains to Luciana, her sister, that her husband is so late. When Dromio of Ephesus returns with the news that his master, who had no recollection of his house or wife, must be crazy, Adriana demands that Dromio go back to search for him again. The always jealous Adriana worries that her husband might be unfaithful to her.

After finding that his money is safe at the inn, Antipholus of Syracuse berates Dromio of Syracuse, telling him he did not

appreciate his joke about not knowing the location of the money with which he had been entrusted. Dromio, who dutifully deposited his master's money at the inn as he had been instructed to do, is baffled by his master's ill-humor. Believing Antipholus of Syracuse to be her husband, Antipholus of Ephesus, Adriana accuses him of infidelity when she meets him in the street. Antipholus of Syracuse declares that he is a stranger to her, and Dromio of Syracuse claims that he never talked to Adriana before. Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse are both thoroughly perplexed and wonder if they are dreaming. Despite their confusion, they return with Adriana to her house.

Approaching his house, Antipholus of Ephesus speaks with Angelo, a local goldsmith, about purchasing a piece of jewelry for his wife, Adriana. When Antipholus of Ephesus finds the door to his house locked and Dromio of Ephesus calls for someone in the house to let them in, they are met, to their confusion, with chastisement from Dromio of Syracuse, who says he is not to let anyone enter the house. When Antipholus of Ephesus protests, explaining that he is the master of the house, Adriana refuses them entry, saying that her husband is already at home. Antipholus of Ephesus' friend Balthazar convinces him not to break down the door, and Antipholus reluctantly agrees to go have dinner elsewhere and return to his house later to seek Adriana's answer regarding her strange behavior. Antipholus vows that he will give the chain he had made for his wife to a courtesan instead of Adriana.

Within the house, Luciana admonishes Antipholus of Syracuse for being a bad husband, imploring him to treat his wife with more kindness and respect. Antipholus of Syracuse protests that Adriana is not his wife and tells Luciana that he, in fact, loves her. A harried and confused Dromio of Syracuse flees from Nell, the kitchen maid, who claims that he is her husband. Shortly



Plot of *The Comedy of Errors*

Afterward Angelo gives Antipholus of Syracuse, believing him to be Antipholus of Ephesus, the chain for Adriana. Eager to leave a town that is full of so much confusion, Antipholus of Syracuse sends Dromio of Syracuse to book passage on a ship to leave Ephesus as soon as possible.

Angelo, who owes money to a merchant, promises to pay his debt as soon as he receives payment for the chain he made for Antipholus of Ephesus. Antipholus of Ephesus, still angry at his wife for not letting him enter his own house, orders Dromio to go buy a rope that he will give to Adriana in place of the chain to spite her. When Angelo meets Antipholus of Ephesus in the street, he requests payment for the chain that he gave him earlier, but Antipholus explains that he never received the chain. Since Angelo actually gave the chain to Antipholus of Syracuse, Antipholus of Ephesus asserts he never received the chain, and an officer soon arrests him for not paying Angelo. Dromio of Syracuse brings word that he has booked passage on a ship that will soon leave Ephesus. Angered and confused by Dromio's babbling, Antipholus of Ephesus sends Dromio to Adriana to retrieve money to pay his bail. Although Dromio is incredibly confused, he sets forth to do his master's bidding.

Meanwhile, Luciana tells her sister that Antipholus professed his love to her. Although Adriana is angered by this news, she confesses that she still loves her husband. Dromio of Syracuse hurriedly implores Adriana to send money to pay the debt for which Antipholus has been imprisoned.

Wandering the streets of Ephesus, Antipholus of Syracuse ponders why everyone in the town seems to know him. When Dromio of Syracuse brings his master the money from Adriana, Antipholus of Syracuse is, of course, confused, for it is really Antipholus of Ephesus who is imprisoned. A courtesan

approaches Antipholus of Syracuse, believing him to be Antipholus of Ephesus, and asks for the chain he promised to give her earlier in exchange for one of her rings. When he replies that he never talked to her about a chain, the courtesan assumes he has lost his senses and goes to fetch Adriana.

Antipholus of Ephesus, still guarded by an officer, is dismayed when Dromio of Ephesus arrives with a piece of a rope and not the money that he had actually sent Dromio of Syracuse to retrieve from Adriana. Adriana and Luciana arrive with a doctor, who attempts to cure Antipholus of his supposed madness. Under the doctor's orders, Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus are shepherded away. Shortly afterwards, Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse appear, frightening everyone and causing the growing crowd to disperse.

Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse seek shelter at an abbey. When Adriana demands that the abbess, Emilia, release her husband, Emilia replies that it is her duty to protect him and cure him of his madness. While Adriana appeals to Duke Solinus, imploring him to make the abbess release her husband, Antipholus of Ephesus reappears, causing a great deal of confusion. Believing Antipholus of Ephesus to be Antipholus of Syracuse, Egeon appeals to his son to pay Duke Solinus so he will not be executed, but Antipholus of Ephesus does not recognize Egeon. When the two sets of twins—Antipholus of Ephesus and Antipholus of Syracuse, Dromio of Ephesus and Dromio of Syracuse—all appear before Duke Solinus, everyone is shocked. Their surprise turns to joy when Egeon recognizes that Emilia is his long-lost wife, the two Antipholi and the two Dromios are their twin sons and their sons' servants, finally reunited decades after the shipwreck that parted them. Duke Solinus frees Egeon from the threat of execution, and everyone celebrates the joyful resolution to the day's confusion.



Original Performance and Sources

Shakespeare wrote *The Comedy of Errors*, his earliest comedy and shortest play in 1594, and he showed great skill in incorporating elements from other literary sources while making creative changes that made his play more compelling and entertaining. For this play, which was first performed as the final entertainment for an evening of merriment for a group of lawyers at Gray's Inn, Shakespeare drew primarily from the Roman playwright Plautus' play, *Menaechmi*. Despite Ben Jonson's claim that Shakespeare knew "small Latin and less Greek," Shakespeare certainly read the entirety of *Menaechmi* in Latin because there was no English translation available in England in 1594. The preface to *Menaechmi* explains that a merchant from Syracuse took one of his seven-year-old twin boys on a business trip abroad but was tragically separated from him during a festival. The merchant died from grief over his lost child, but the boy was found by a trader and raised in Epidamnum. The surviving twin boy, still living with his mother in Syracuse, was renamed Menaechmus to honor his lost brother. The plot of *Menaechmi* centers on the confusion that is created when Menaechmus of Syracuse comes to Epidamnum to search for his lost twin. Menaechmus is perplexed when he arrives in Epidamnum and is greeted warmly by the townspeople, and he is delighted but befuddled when he is embraced by two women claiming to be his wife and mistress. Meanwhile, Menaechmus of Epidamnum is immensely frustrated that his friends and family, who have all been interacting with his long-lost twin, believe he is mad. *Menaechmi*'s influence on *The Comedy of Errors* is evident in the plot of the two separated Antipholi, their experiences in Ephesus, and their reunion.

However, Shakespeare showed his incredible skill in choosing what to take from another literary source and what to create himself in his additions to the *Menaechmi* plot that make *The Comedy of Errors* the hilarious, touching, sometimes madcap play that it is. Shakespeare drew on the use of identical slaves in Plautus' play *Amphitruo* in addition to the *Menaechmi*-inspired plot two identical twin slaves, both named Dromio. Shakespeare's decision to name both slaves Dromio was his own invention, and his choice led to the amusing moment in which the two Dromios are situated on opposite sides of a door, both protesting that they are the rightful Dromio. Dromio of Syracuse announces he is "The porter for this time, sir, and my name is Dromio" (4.1.41-42), to which Dromio of Ephesus replies "O villain, thou hast stol'n both mine office, and my name" (3.1.43-44). Shakespeare also changed the setting for the play from Epidamnum to Ephesus, which is a city that Shakespeare's audience would have associated with exorcism, cults, and sorcery. The audience's knowledge of Ephesus would have let them appreciate when Dromio exclaims "This is the fairy land: O spite of spites!/We talk with goblins, owls and sprites" (2.2.189-190). Finally, Shakespeare added a touching element to the play by adding the characters of Egeon and Emilia; their reunion at the play's conclusion makes the reassembled family complete.

Analyzing Themes in *The Comedy of Errors*

Seeking Wholeness

A major theme of *The Comedy of Errors* is a quest for wholeness that can only be achieved by the reunion of a family that had been separated at sea many years before the play begins. Egeon and Antipholus of Syracuse best articulate the emotional toll of being separated from their family. Egeon describes the shipwreck that separated him, one of his sons, and one of the Dromios from his wife and the other set of children as an “unjust divorce” (1.1.104). Egeon concludes his depiction of the shipwreck for Duke Solinus by saying “you heard me severed from my bliss” (1.1.118). The words “divorce” and “severed” emphasize the painful separation Egeon endured from his family, which makes the eventual reunion of the family more meaningful. Antipholus of Syracuse explains the deep need to find his twin, which led him to begin his long quest many several years ago: “I to the world am like a drop of water/That in the ocean seeks another drop,/Who, falling there to find his fellow forth,/Unseen, inquisitive, confounds himself” (1.2.35-38). In an era without easily accessible census records, phones, or computers, Antipholus stood a slim chance of finding his twin, and his statement highlights both the difficulty of his quest and the discouragement it has engendered in him. The play’s conclusion neatly explains the confusion of the day—the mistaken identities and the unpaid goldsmith—but it more importantly features a reunion of parents and children who, lacking their other halves, were incomplete.



Questions of Identity and Selfhood

The Comedy of Errors is frequently dismissed as a simple, madcap, farcical play that is used as a benchmark to measure just how far Shakespeare had come when he wrote his more nuanced comedies like *Much Ado About Nothing* and *As You Like It*. While it is true that the plot of *The Comedy of Errors* is not terribly complex and the comedy relies sometimes too much on slapstick humor, the play also prompts the audience to ask questions about self and identity. As the editors of the *Norton Shakespeare* note, the play makes the viewer ask, “What is the self? What are the guarantees of identity? Who possesses a name and by what right? How is individuality secured?” (Greenblatt 718).

As you watch the play, listen for moments in which the confusion of mistaken identities makes the main characters question who they are, as when Antipholus of Syracuse questions, “Am I in earth, in heaven, or in hell?/Sleeping or waking? mad or well-advised?/Known unto these, and to myself disguised!” (2.2.212-214) and later when Dromio of Syracuse asks his master, “Do you know me, sir? Am I Dromio? Am I your man? Am I myself?” (3.2.73-74).



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