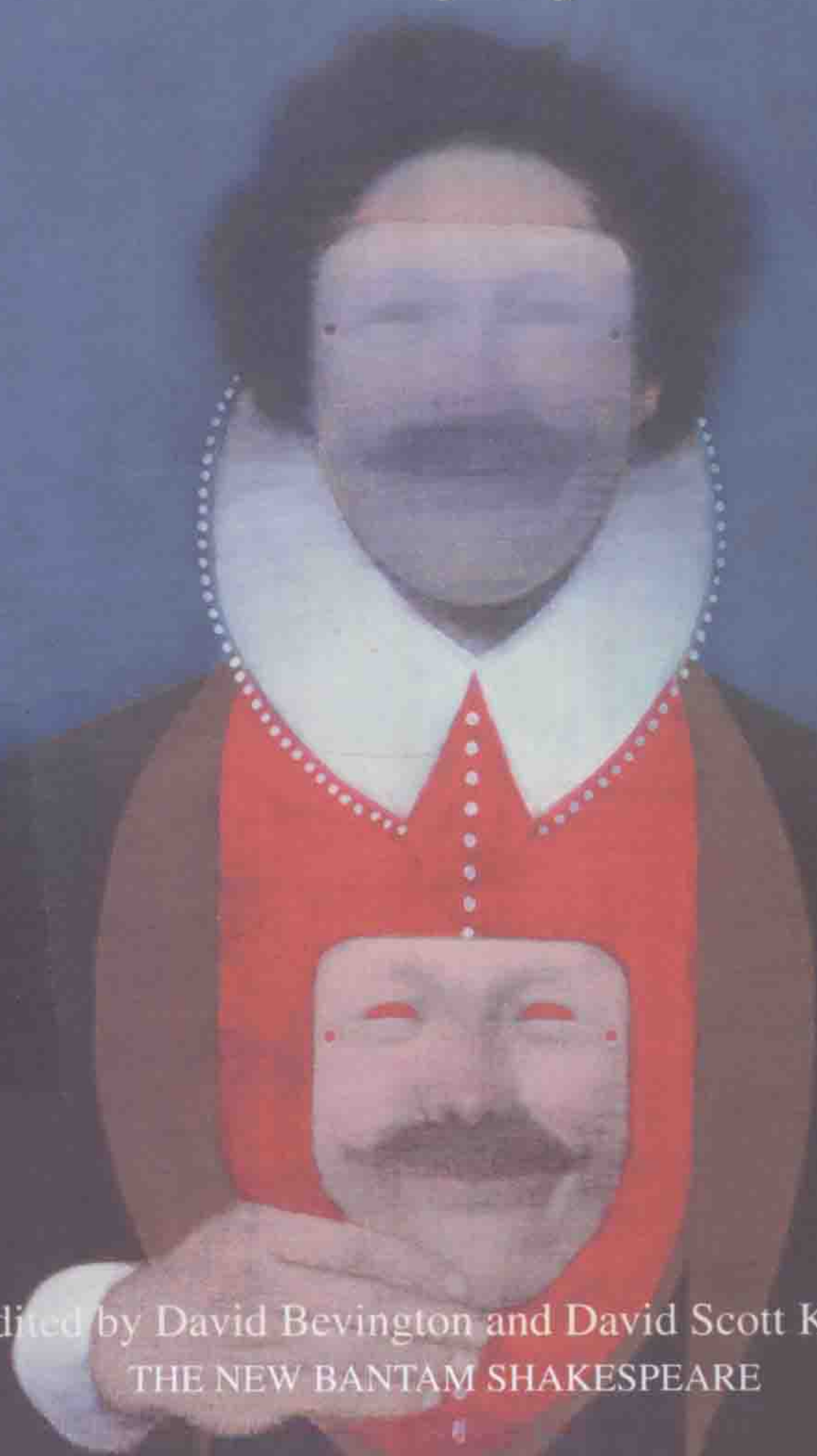


B A N T A M C L A S S I C

SHAKESPEARE

The Comedy of Errors



Edited by David Bevington and David Scott Kastan
THE NEW BANTAM SHAKESPEARE

William Shakespeare



THE COMEDY
OF ERRORS

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and
David Scott Kastan



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William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon in April 1564, and his birth is traditionally celebrated on April 23. The facts of his life, known from surviving documents, are sparse. He was one of eight children born to John Shakespeare, a merchant of some standing in his community. William probably went to the King's New School in Stratford, but he had no university education. In November 1582, at the age of eighteen, he married Anne Hathaway, eight years his senior, who was pregnant with their first child, Susanna. She was born on May 26, 1583. Twins, a boy, Hamnet (who would die at age eleven), and a girl, Judith, were born in 1585. By 1592 Shakespeare had gone to London, working as an actor and already known as a playwright. A rival dramatist, Robert Greene, referred to him as "an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers." Shakespeare became a principal shareholder and playwright of the successful acting troupe, the Lord Chamberlain's Men (later, under James I, called the King's Men). In 1599 the Lord Chamberlain's Men built and occupied the Globe Theatre in Southwark near the Thames River. Here many of Shakespeare's plays were performed by the most famous actors of his time, including Richard Burbage, Will Kempe, and Robert Armin. In addition to his 37 plays, Shakespeare had a hand in others, including *Sir Thomas More* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and he wrote poems, including *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*. His 154 sonnets were published, probably without his authorization, in 1609. In 1611 or 1612 he gave up his lodgings in London and devoted more and more of his time to retirement in Stratford, though he continued writing such plays as *The Tempest* and *Henry VIII* until about 1613. He died on April 23, 1616, and was buried in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford. No collected edition of his plays was published during his lifetime, but in 1623 two members of his acting company, John Heminges and Henry Condell, published the great collection now called the First Folio.

INTRODUCTION



The Comedy of Errors is a superb illustration of Shakespeare's "apprenticeship" in comedy. It is more imitative of classical comedy, especially of Plautus, than is Shakespeare's mature work. Its verbal humor, including the scatological jokes about breaking wind, the bawdy jests about cuckolds' horns, and the overly ingenuous banter (as in 2.2), is at times adolescent. The play abounds in the farcical humor of physical abuse, so endearing to children of all ages. It is perhaps the most uncomplicatedly funny of all Shakespeare's plays. Yet the softening touches of Shakespeare's maturity are unmistakably present as well. Shakespeare frames his farce of mistaken identity with old Egeon's tragicomic story of separation, threatened death, and eventual reunion. He adds characters to his chief sources, Plautus's *Menaechmi* and *Amphitruo*, in order to enhance the love interest and to reconcile Plautus with English moral conventions. He touches upon themes of illusion, madness, and revelry that are to figure prominently in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and in *Twelfth Night*, a later comedy of mistaken identity. In these respects, *The Comedy of Errors* is both a fascinating prelude to Shakespeare's later development and a rich achievement in its own right. On stage, it has not attracted the greatest Shakespearean actors, since it offers no complex or dominating roles, but it has seldom failed to delight audiences.

We cannot be sure precisely how early the play was written. A performance took place on December 28, 1594, at Gray's Inn, one of the Inns of Court, before an unruly assembly of lawyers, law students, and their guests. This was probably not the first performance, however. Topical allusions offer hints of an earlier date. When Dromio of Syracuse speaks of France as "armed and reverted, making war against her heir" (3.2.123-4),

he clearly is referring to the Catholic League's opposition to Henry of Navarre, who was the heir apparent to the French throne until 1593, when he became king. Another allusion, to Spain's sending "whole armadas of carracks" (lines 135–6), would possibly have lost its comic point soon after the Invincible Armada of 1588. The play's style, characterization, and imitative construction are all consistent with a date between 1589 and 1593.

Whatever the exact date, Shakespeare's youthful fascination with Plautus is manifest. Shakespeare's command of Latin, though sneered at by Ben Jonson, was undoubtedly good enough to have let him read Plautus with pleasure. He must have been drilled in Latin for years as a student in the town of Stratford-upon-Avon. Indeed, the influence of not only Plautus but also Ovid and Seneca (together with touches of Horace, Catullus, etc.) is a prominent feature of Shakespeare's early work, dramatic and nondramatic. Shakespeare may have consulted Plautus both in the original and in a contemporary translation, as was frequently his custom with non-English sources. From Renaissance Latin editions of Plautus, he apparently took the odd designation "Anti-pholis Sereptus" (i.e., "surreptus," snatched away), which appears in the Folio text in a stage direction at 2.1.0 to indicate the twin who was separated from his father. On the other hand, a translation of the *Menaechmi* by "W. W." (? William Warner), published in 1595, was registered in 1594 and might have been available earlier to Shakespeare in manuscript.

Plautus had much to offer Shakespeare and his fellow dramatists, especially in the way of tightly organized and complex plot construction. Native English drama of the sixteenth century tended to be episodic and panoramic in its design. Shakespeare's apprenticeship in neoclassical form can be seen in his precise observation of the unities of time and place—those unities which he openly disregarded in most of his later plays. At the play's beginning, Egeon is informed that he has until sundown to raise his ransom money, and the play then moves toward that point in time with periodic observations that it is now noon, now two o'clock, and so on. (At one point, time even seems to

go backwards, but that is part of the illusion of madness.) The action is restricted to the city of Ephesus; events that have happened elsewhere, at an earlier time (such as the separation of the Antipholus family), are told to us by persons in the play, such as old Egeon. Although Shakespeare's company did not employ the sort of painted scenery drawn in perspective used by continental neoclassicists, with fixed locations for houses facing on a street, the original production of this play may nonetheless have used one stage "house" or door to represent the dwelling of Antipholus of Ephesus (the Phoenix) throughout the drama. The entire play can be staged as if all the action occurs in the vicinity of this single "house," with the Courtesan's establishment and abbey near at hand. Never again does Shakespeare utilize such a neoclassical stage.

These unities of time and place are mechanical matters, but they do also harmonize with a more essential unity of action. The story moves, as though in perfect accord with neoclassical five-act theory, from exposition and complication to climax, anagnoresis (discovery), and peripeteia (reversal of fortune). The brilliance of the plotting is decidedly Plautine. Shakespeare pushes to its limit the interweaving of comic misunderstandings only to unravel all these seemingly tightly woven knots with ease. Yet the imitation of Plautus, even in matters of construction, is by no means slavish, for Shakespeare borrows both from Plautus's farce on the mistaken identity of twins (*Menaechmi*) and from Plautus's best-known comedy (*Amphitruo*), in which a husband and his servant are excluded from their own house while a disguised visitor usurps the master's role within. Such ingenious adaptations and rearrangements were common among neoclassical dramatists like Ludovico Ariosto, and, although Shakespeare seems not to have used any of the sixteenth-century analogues to this play, he does reveal an acquaintance with neoclassical comedy and an ability to compete with the best that Europe had to offer in this vein. Such versatility is noteworthy in a young dramatist who was to reveal himself in time as far less of a neoclassicist than a native English writer. Moreover, even if his self-imposed neoclassical training was only an

apprenticeship, it was to prove invaluable to Shakespeare. Despite his later tendency toward "romantic" plotting—toward the depiction of multiple actions extending over widely separated spaces and extended periods of time—Shakespeare's greatest comedies continue to point toward the same gratifying resolution of dramatic conflict in a single and well-structured denouement.

For all its Plautine skill of design, *The Comedy of Errors* is quite far removed from *The Menaechmi* in tone and spirit. Gone are the cynicism, the satirical hardness, and the amoral tone of the Roman original. The characters, though still recognizable as types, are humanized. The familiar Plautine parasite is excluded entirely. The usual clever servant happily becomes the Dromio twins. Plautus's quack doctor, Medicus, is hilariously transmuted into Dr. Pinch, a pedantic schoolmaster. The Courtesan's role is no longer prominent. Instead, Shakespeare creates Luciana, the virtuous sister of Adriana, who pleads the cause of forbearance in marriage and who eventually becomes the bride of Antipholus of Syracuse. *The Comedy of Errors* does not end, as do most of Shakespeare's later comedies, with a parade of couples to the altar, but the marriage of Antipholus and Luciana is at least one important step in that direction. Besides, we are told of yet another marriage still to come—that of Dromio of Ephesus to Luce, the kitchen wench. This belowstairs parody of wedded affection is thoroughly English in character and recalls a similar mirroring of courtship among the comic servants of Henry Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucrece* (c. 1497). The motif is not sufficiently stressed to threaten the unity of the main plot, but the potentiality for double plotting is unmistakable.

An even more significant contrast to Plautine farce is to be found in the romantic saga of old Egeon and his long-lost wife, the Abbess. Their story is one not of mistaken identity (though that contributes to the denouement) but of painful separation, wandering, and reunion. Indeed, the note struck at the beginning of the play might seem tragic were we not already attuned to the conventional romantic expectation that separated members of a family are likely to be restored to one another again.

Egeon, threatened with immediate execution, unfolds to us a narrative of wedded bliss interrupted by the malignancy of Fortune. In contrast to the tightly controlled unity of time of the farcical action, the romantic narrative extends (by recollection) over many years of error and suffering. Egeon's tragicomic story of testing and of patient endurance is very much like that of *Apollonius of Tyre*, a popular tale used by Shakespeare in his late romance *Pericles* (c. 1606–1608). The conventions of this sort of romance, ultimately Greek in origin, stress improbability: identical twins who can be told apart only by birthmarks, a storm at sea splitting a vessel in half and neatly dividing a family, and so on. The sea is emblematic of unpredictable Fortune, taking away with one hand and restoring with the other. The wife who is lost at sea, like her counterpart in *Apollonius* or *Pericles*, takes to a life of cloistered devotion, suggesting a pattern of symbolic death, healing, and ultimate rebirth. The ending of *The Comedy of Errors* has just a hint of death restored mysteriously to life: "After so long grief, such nativity!" (5.1.407).

Egeon's story of endurance counterpoints the farce in yet another way. His arraignment before the Duke of Ephesus introduces into the play a "tragic" world of law, punishment, and death. Egeon's date with the executioner is not illusory. His predicament is the result of the bitter "mortal and intestine jars" (1.1.11) between two cities caught in a frenzy of economic reprisals. The law cannot be merciful, even though the unfairness of Egeon's plight is manifest to everyone, including the Duke. These potentially tragic factors must not be overstressed, for the first scene is brief and we are reassured by the play's hilarious tone (and by our surmising that Egeon is father of the Antipholus twins) that all will be well. Still, Shakespeare's addition of this romance plot suggests his restlessness with pure farce. As in his later comedies, which are virtually all threatened by catastrophes, the denouement of *The Comedy of Errors* is deepened into something approaching miraculous recovery. Moreover, the backdrop of a near-tragic world of genuine suffering heightens our appreciation of comic unreality in the self-contained world of Plautine farce and stresses the illusory nature of the dilemmas

arising out of purely mistaken identity. Such delusions are all the more comic because they are the delusions that supposedly sane people suffer: contentiousness and jealousy in marriage, concern for respectable appearances among one's neighbors, and the suspicion that one is always being cheated in money matters. These are the chimeras that, by being made to look so plausible and yet so patently insane, are farcically exploited in Shakespeare's comic device: the inversion of madness and sanity, dreaming and waking, illusion and reality.

What happens when the behavior of one twin is mistaken for that of the other? The situation is, of course, amusing in itself, but it also serves as a test of the other characters, to discover what mad hypotheses they will construct. Adriana, faced with her husband's seeming refusal to come home to dinner, launches into a jealous tirade against husbands who neglect their wives for courtesans. The illusory situation, in other words, brings out her latent fears. We understand better now why she acts shrewishly: she fears rejection and the fading of her beauty, and she imagines that her fading beauty may be the cause of her husband's neglect. Actually, even as she speaks, her husband is busy making arrangements about a chain he means to give Adriana; but, when subsequently he is locked out of his own house and jumps to the conclusion that Adriana is being faithless, he resolves in his fury to bestow the chain on a courtesan in order to "spite my wife." He would actually do so were he not saved from this destructively revengeful impulse by the beneficently comic action of the farcical plot: through mistaken identity, the chain is delivered into the hands of his twin. Once again, illusion has prompted a character to assume the worst, to reveal his suspicions of a plot against him. And so it goes when Antipholus of Ephesus is arrested for nonpayment of the chain (he assumes that all merchants are thieves) or is denied his bail money by the servant he thinks he sent to fetch it (he assumes that all servants are thieves). We laugh at the endless capacity of the human mind for distortions of this self-punishing sort.

The metaphor used most often to convey this sense of bewilderment, even a confusion about one's own identity, is that of

metamorphosis. All have drunk of Circe's cup (5.1.271) and have been transformed into animals—most of them into asses. All have hearkened to the mermaid's song and are enchanted. Ephesus, they conclude, must be haunted by sorcerers, witches, goblins, and spirits (4.3.11 ff.). Ephesus is, in fact, associated in the Bible with exorcism (Acts 19:13 ff.), and "Circe" suggests that Antipholus of Syracuse is a becalmed Odysseus. In such a mad world, the characters assume a license to embark on Saturnalian holiday. The experience of transformation thus leads to various forms of "release" from ordinary social behavior, but the experience is also disturbing and continually reminds the characters of exorcism, hell, and devils. The threat of incest hovers over the comic business of two brothers sharing a wife, and indeed there is a dark subtext to the twinning that is unavoidably present throughout the play: the twinned cities of Ephesus and Syracuse, the twinned brothers, the twinned servants, all of whom are trying to discover their identities amid the paradoxes of singleness and doubleness. The play's farcical action is never far from violence. Witches and fat kitchen wenches suggest a fascination with unruly women. The characters can explain their inverted world only by assuming that all men are lunatic, all honest women whores, and all true men thieves. "Do you know me, sir? . . . Am I myself?" "Am I in earth, in heaven, or in hell? / Sleeping or waking, mad or well-advised?" (3.2.73–4, 2.2.211–2). Perhaps, as Barbara Freedman suggests, the whole play can be looked at as Egeon's dream. It is both reassuring and hilariously anticlimactic that these questionings can finally be dispelled by the most mundane of explanations: there are two Antipholuses and two Dromios.

Contained within this framework of madness and waking is a playful yet serious examination of the dynamics of courtship and marriage. The two most important women in the play are meaningfully paired and contrasted. Adriana, the shrewish wife, frets at social custom that allows her husband Antipholus to roam abroad while she is domestically confined. Her unmarried sister Luciana endorses the traditional view that husbands enjoy a precedence found everywhere in nature: males "are masters

to their females, and their lords" (2.1.24). What Luciana calls obedience (line 29) her married sister calls "servitude" (line 26). Who is right? The debate, left unresolved, nonetheless raises skeptical questions about marital hierarchies. The plot also probes and tests through fantasies of inversion. A wife, believing herself rejected for having aged in her wifely obedience, locks her husband out of the house and dines with a stranger. Luciana meantime finds herself courted by what appears to be her own brother-in-law and thus must face a conflict between desire and loyalty to her sister. Of course, Adriana does not know that she is inverting authority by excluding her husband from his own hearth, but the plot of mistaken identities does allow her to act out her self-assertiveness without being, in fact, guilty of disloyalty. Her husband's role is to play the wandering male and to be eventually forgiven by his wife; presumably his exposure in act 5 will make him a more tolerant husband, like Count Almaviva in Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*. The discovery of identities in act 5 allows Luciana to marry the man she has learned to love, but without the guilt of her fantasy experience. Patriarchal values are restored by the play's conclusion, yet the partners in love and marriage have been, to some extent, liberated by their role playing in a plot of metamorphosis. These issues of domestic relations will be further explored in *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Othello*, and other plays.

The playfulness about illusion should not be overemphasized, for the play expends most of its energies in farce. The Dromios, with their incessant drubbings, are often the center of interest in performance, and rightly so. Shakespeare employs no behind-the-scenes manipulator of illusion, such as Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or the Duke in *Measure for Measure*. His interest in the metaphor of the world as a stage is discernible only as the foreshadowing of greatness to come. Nevertheless, Shakespeare's alterations of Plautus amply reveal the philosophic and idealistic direction that his subsequent comedy is to take.

THE COMEDY OF ERRORS

ON STAGE



The Comedy of Errors was performed at Gray's Inn, one of the Inns of Court, on December 28, 1594. It appeared at the court of King James I on December 28, 1604. Almost certainly it was acted in public as well, at the Theatre or a similar playhouse. How different were the playing methods called for in these various locales? At Gray's Inn, it has been suggested, Shakespeare's company may have used fixed locations throughout to represent the three houses of Antipholus of Ephesus, the Courtesan, and the Abbess. If so, this is the only time Shakespeare adopted such a staging plan for the entirety of a play. Such uniqueness urges caution in accepting the hypothesis, though it is true that *The Comedy of Errors* is an early play with an unusually direct indebtedness to the classical drama and especially to Plautus's *Menaechmi*. Like its source, *The Comedy of Errors* preserves the unities of place (Ephesus) and time (one day).

The arguments in favor of fixed locations are as follows. The play requires only an open place, called a "street" or a "mart," as is often the case in classical and neoclassical drama, together with three houses or doors facing onto it. The houses have names, as if they were labeled: Antipholus of Ephesus's house is the Phoenix, the Courtesan's is the Porcupine, and the Abbess's place of residence is the Priory. The use of stage houses with doors was common in performances at court and at the Inns of Court; there, audiences familiar with neoclassical staging would understand the use of a conventionalized facade in arcades, each compartment of which could be used to represent a house. The dialogue and stage directions of Shakespeare's play refer to the three houses as

though they are recognizable locations: Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus enter "*from the Courtesan's*" at 4.1.13, Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse exit "*to the priory*" at 5.1.37, and a servant exits "*to the Abbess*" at 5.1.282. Dromio of Syracuse's entrance "*from the bay*" (4.1.85) could suggest that one side entrance is understood to lead to the bay, while the other side leads to the town, though with only one such stage direction we cannot be at all sure that the convention was rigorously followed throughout the play.

Against the hypothesis of fixed location is the consideration that Shakespeare's actors would have been hampered in arranging their many exits and entrances not specifically to or from the Phoenix, Porcupine, or Priory. The Priory doorway, not employed until act 5, would have been unavailable to them for most of the action. The play begins with the Duke of Ephesus and others in a location (the Duke's palace? some public place?) that makes no use of the three supposed houses. Quite possibly, even if doorways were marked by placards for a segment of action, the labels could be shifted, letting the middle door for instance represent the Phoenix in act 2, scene 1, and the Porcupine in act 4, scene 1; with rearrangements of this sort, three doorways would suffice. Public theaters such as the Swan, of which a drawing survives, do not seem to have provided the number of doorways called for by neoclassical staging plans. Certainly Shakespeare never limited his acting company this way in any other play.

Moreover, the first scene of act 3 calls for staging effects that seem especially suited to a public theater. Throughout this scene, the theater facade represents the house of Antipholus of Ephesus, into which Antipholus of Syracuse, Adriana, and Luciana have exited at the end of act 2, scene 2, in order to dine "above" (line 206). (The word "above" may or may not refer to a gallery or upper acting area.) Dromio of Syracuse is posted at the door as porter, and need not exit at all as act 2 draws to a close; certainly the sense of location remains continuous as Antipholus of Ephesus and his friends arrive at his door, intending to dine, only to find themselves locked out. Dromio of Syra-

cuse, at the door, may be visible to the audience as he refuses entrance to the irate houseowner and his guests, though they presumably cannot see him. When the maid Luce and then Adriana enter to see what the fuss is about at the door, they probably enter above, in the gallery looking down on the stage, where they can be seen and heard by the audience while presumably invisible to the group at the door. To be sure, this scene must have been staged in some way at Gray's Inn and at court, as well as in the public theater. We are left finally with conflicting indications of *mise-en-scène* in a play flexibly designed for performance wherever opportunity provided. Still, that very condition of flexibility must have dictated that the play not be staged in too rigorously neoclassical a mode.

However it was originally staged, *The Comedy of Errors* has been the victim ever since of directors who regard it as too inconsequential to survive without adaptation and embellishment. A revival of sorts in 1716, the first recorded since the early seventeenth century, took the form of a farce called *Every Body Mistaken*. The Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, staged in 1734 a comedy in two acts from Plautus and Shakespeare called *See If You Like It; or, 'Tis All a Mistake*. Although something resembling Shakespeare's own *The Comedy of Errors* was performed five times in 1741 at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, with Charles Macklin as Dromio of Syracuse, it was in the "improved" versions that the play was generally seen. Thomas Hull was responsible for an adaptation called *The Twins* that was performed again and again at Covent Garden in the late eighteenth century. Hull added songs, intensified the love interest, and elaborated the recognition scene in act 5, trimming the wordplay meanwhile to make room for the improvements. Adriana was provided with a cousin, Hermia, who sang a plaintive song about the love of "forsaken Julia" and her faithless Lysander. W. Woods's *The Twins, or Which Is Which?* (1780, at the Theatre Royal in Edinburgh) reduced the play to a three-act farce lest Shakespeare's "similarity of character, and quick succession of mistakes" should "pall upon an audience." John Philip Kemble retained and further extended the Hull version in 1808

and used this script for many years. All of these adaptations aimed at reducing or concealing the improbability of incident and the occasionally vulgar wit-combat that eighteenth-century taste evidently found indecorous.

Frederic Reynolds carried the idea of musical elaboration to its logical conclusion by turning the play into an opera (Covent Garden, 1819). With lyrics from various Shakespeare plays and sonnets set to the music of Thomas Arne, Mozart, and others, this production sought to repair the deficiencies of a short play. In the process, it restored to the theater a number of songs from *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It*, *Love's Labor's Lost*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Measure for Measure*, *The Tempest*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Othello*, and *King Lear* that had long been neglected in the performance of those plays. Reynolds added characters with such names as Cerimon and Ctesiphon, and provided a climactic scene of drunkenness in the handsomely furnished house of Balthasar with a spirited rendition of the chorus from *Antony and Cleopatra*, "Come, thou monarch of the vine." The scenery evidently made quite a hit: the last scene of act 3 offered the viewer "a river surrounded by mountains" with snow-covered tops, in front of which Balthasar, Cerimon, and others were seen in hunting costume, crossing a rustic bridge and pausing to sing "When icicles hang by the wall" from *Love's Labor's Lost*.

Samuel Phelps brought back something much closer to Shakespeare's play at the Sadler's Wells Theatre in 1855 and at the Princess's Theatre in 1864, the year of Shakespeare's tercentenary. Phelps's Dromios at the Princess's, the Irish brothers Charles and Harry Webb, with the help of their family resemblance, were able to solve the visual problem of representing identical twins, and the performance without intermission followed all of Shakespeare's scenes in order, though with some cutting. The American actors J. S. Clarke and Harry Paulton were famous as the Dromios in an 1883 production at London's Strand and Opera Comique theaters. In 1895 William Poel with his Elizabethan Stage Society performed the play at Gray's Inn, approximating the conditions of its original staging and delighting George Bernard Shaw: "I am now beginning to cling to

[Poel] as the saviour of theatrical art.” Frank Benson played Antipholus of Syracuse in his own production at Stratford-upon-Avon and at London’s Coronet Theatre in 1905.

Since then the play has enjoyed a number of successful productions, usually swift-paced and aiming at hilarity, as in the joyous slapstick of Andrew Leigh’s version at the Old Vic in 1927, and in Theodore Komisarjevsky’s fantastic farce at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1938 with the Antipholus brothers dressed as toreadors in plumed Napoleonic hats and with officers outfitted in tunics and pink bowlers. At the Old Vic, on April 23, 1957, Walter Hudd produced a double bill of *Titus Andronicus* and *The Comedy of Errors* in cut versions edited by John Barton. Both plays were performed in sixteenth-century costume and were presented as the offerings of Elizabethan traveling players at a country inn. In 1962 Clifford Williams’s production at Stratford-upon-Avon was energetically played in the manner of the *commedia dell’arte*, while Jean Gascon’s 1963 production at Stratford, Ontario, was, as one reviewer called it, a “Punchinello pantomime affair,” with five Punchinellos enthusiastically directing the action on stage. *The Boys from Syracuse*, a musical-comedy version of 1938 (subsequently filmed), still draws large audiences when it is revived (as at Stratford, Ontario, in 1986); even today, the hoary device of musically updating, popularizing, and vulgarizing Shakespeare’s play seems irresistible. *A New Comedy of Errors, or Too Many Twins* (1940), another musical adaptation put together out of parts of Plautus, Shakespeare, and Molière, was staged in modern dress at London’s Mercury Theatre.

The play has been done as Victorian musical comedy (Arts Theatre, Cambridge, England, 1951), as Brechtian folk opera (Arts Theatre, London, 1956), and as a two-ring circus (Delacorte Theater, New York, 1967). It has been set in the American West at the end of the nineteenth century (Stratford, Ontario, 1975); in a provincial Italian town in the 1930s, with the Duke “a broad-bellied Mafioso in a white suit,” as the *New York Post* noted (New York, Delacorte Theater, 1975); and in a modern Greek seaside resort (Stratford-upon-Avon, 1976). It has been propped up with a carnival midway complete with ferris wheel