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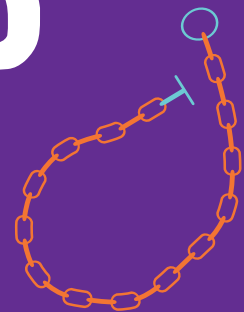
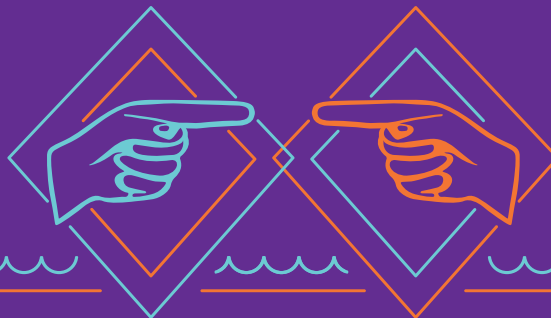
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PRESENTED BY SSC'S DRUM AND COLOURS COMPANY



THE COMEDY OF ERRORS



BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE | DIRECTED BY JIMMY SHIELDS

EDUCATOR RESOURCE GUIDE

THE COMEDY OF ERRORS

Educator Resource Guide

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Production still of *The Comedy of Errors* (2024)
Photo by Giao Nguyen

Dear Educators,

Hello and Happy New Year! It is an honor to welcome you back into the audience for our first show of 2024 and our third season of Drum and Colours.

In writing this welcome, I took some time to reflect on the year gone by and look forward to the year ahead. I asked myself, what do I want to see on the stages across America? What do we need as humans? What kind of stories are important for us to tell? So many answers to these questions flooded my brain, but one in particular stuck out to me: I wanted to laugh, I needed to laugh, and to see stories full of laughter.

Live performance can do so much. It takes us on heavy journeys, it takes us to fantastical lands. We can feel like we are watching something out of our own lives, or the lives of our neighbors. We are surprised, we learn, we are challenged, and we grow.

I've also reflected on how often the BIPOC community is asked to educate audiences. Regularly, the stories we get to tell deal with pain, loss, prejudice, racism, and death. But these are not the only stories we know, nor are they the only stories we should be telling. The BIPOC community is full of joy, wonder, and magic. When we chose to produce *The Comedy of Errors* with the Drum and Colours Company, we hoped to invite you into that wonder and magic. Invite you to laugh with us, to take a little break away from the cold and dark Seattle winter, to feel joy in the theater.

We invite you to take a step inside this world – away from the scary and tumultuous world we live in every day – to let go and laugh. Even if only for a moment. Let the world these artists have created hold you close, let it make you chuckle. Come join our community (We got you!) and we are here to bring a smile to your face.

"Humor is your own unconscious therapy. Like a welcome summer rain, humor may suddenly cleanse and cool the earth, the air, and you."
– Langston Hughes

Thank you for joining us and sharing your laughter.

Best,
Pilar O'Connell

Drum and Colours Lead Producer

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Production still of *The Comedy of Errors* (2024)
Photo by Giao Nguyen

The Plot of *The Comedy of Errors*

In the ancient Grecian city of Ephesus, amidst an ongoing war with a rival city, a Syracusan merchant named Egeon faces the Duke Solinus after being caught trespassing. Egeon shares that 23 years ago his wife gave birth to a set of identical twins, both named Antipholus. In addition, the family took in a pair of lower-class identical twins to be the servants of each brother; these twins were also given the same name, Dromio. A shipwreck caused Egeon and his wife to be separated, each of them left with one half of each pair of twins. Egeon raised his boys in Syracuse. When Antipholus of Syracuse turned 18, he set off with Dromio of Syracuse in search of his long-lost brother. For five years, Egeon has been searching for his sons, which landed him on the shore of Ephesus. Moved by this tale, the Duke gives him until the end of the day to procure a ransom, or else be executed. Unbeknownst to any of them, the other Dromio and Antipholus reside in Ephesus.

In another part of Ephesus, Antipholus of Syracuse arrives with Dromio of Syracuse, swiftly sending him to drop their luggage and money at the Centaur Inn. A merchant explains to Antipholus that, as a Syracusan, he should exercise caution in Ephesus, and leaves Antipholus to explore the city. Antipholus of Syracuse is approached by Dromio of Ephesus. Mistaking Dromio for his own servant, Antipholus asks where his money has gone, while Dromio (believing this is his master, Antipholus of Ephesus) insists he was never given any, but instead that Antipholus needs to come home to his wife for dinner. Antipholus reprimands Dromio who flees back to his residence.

At the home of Antipholus of Ephesus, Adriana, his wife, and her sister, Luciana, await the return of Antipholus, who is late for dinner. Dromio of Ephesus enters and explains the previous events. Dismayed, Adriana sends Dromio back out to once again beckon her husband home.

Back out on the streets of Ephesus, Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse finally reunite. Antipholus questions Dromio about the earlier “jest” regarding a wife and gold, to which Dromio expresses confusion. Adriana and Luciana enter, demanding them home for dinner. Despite initial suspicions about the women knowing them, Antipholus and Dromio eventually agree to accompany them.

Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus arrive at the gate of their home with Balthazar, a merchant, and Angelo, a goldsmith from whom he buys a chain for his wife. Upon realizing the door is locked,

Dromio of Syracuse and Adriana communicate from within that no one may enter. Unaware that the two at the door are identical to those inside, all remain indoors. Antipholus of Ephesus says he will take everyone to the Courtesan's house to dine, and asks Angelo to get the gold chain to be presented to the Courtesan rather than his wife.

Inside the house, Luciana rejects Antipholus of Syracuse, who has developed feelings for her and is expressing his affection. Luciana accuses Antipholus of Syracuse of being mad, as she still believes he is her sister's husband, a claim he consistently denies. Dromio of Syracuse informs Antipholus that a servant in the house approached him as if he were her husband. Both Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse conclude that they are in a strange land inhabited by witches. Antipholus sends Dromio to arrange for a boat for their departure.

After Dromio exits, Angelo approaches Antipholus of Syracuse, mistakenly identifying him as Antipholus of Ephesus, and gives him the chain. Antipholus claims he didn't ask for a chain, which Angelo brushes off, saying he will return at suppertime to receive payment.

Later, Angelo assures an unnamed Merchant he will settle his debt as soon as he receives money from Antipholus. Antipholus of Ephesus enters, and after sending Dromio to get a rope, is approached by Angelo who demands payment for the chain. Antipholus of Ephesus vehemently denies receiving the chain, leading to a heated exchange that culminates in Angelo having



Production still of *The Comedy of Errors* (2024). Photo by Giao Nguyen.



Production still of *The Comedy of Errors* (2024).
Photo by Giao Nguyen

Antipholus arrested. As Antipholus of Ephesus is being escorted away, Dromio of Syracuse enters and, mistaking him for Antipholus of Syracuse, informs him the boat is ready. Antipholus of Ephesus, mistaking this Dromio for his servant, scolds him for not getting a rope and gives him a key to deliver to Adriana for bail money.

Back at the house, Adriana asks Luciana about her husband's odd behavior, and Luciana recounts her exchange with Antipholus. Dromio of Syracuse enters with the key and informs the women Antipholus has been arrested and requires bail. After retrieving the purse, Adriana instructs Dromio to quickly bring her husband home.



Production still of *The Comedy of Errors* (2024). Photo by Giao Nguyen.

Wearing the chain, Antipholus of Syracuse walks the streets of Ephesus and muses about the peculiar recognition from everyone he encounters. Dromio of Syracuse enters with the bail money, leaving Antipholus preplexed. Inquiring about boats to depart, Antipholus is interrupted by the Courtesan. She confronts him about the chain, insisting it was promised to her by Antipholus of Ephesus the previous night. Refusing, Antipholus of Syracuse faces demands for a ring given to the other Antipholus at dinner. Convinced the Courtesan is a witch that inhabits this strange place, both Antipholus and Dromio hastily flee from her. Perceiving decides to inform Adriana of the encounter.

Antipholus of Ephesus awaits his bail money in jail and is enraged when Dromio of Ephesus returns with only a rope. The Courtesan, Adriana, and Luciana accompanied by the schoolmaster Dr. Pinch, enter with the intention of curing Antipholus of his insanity. Amidst contradictory stories and

confusion, Dr. Pinch accuses both Antipholus and Dromio of being possessed by insanity and has them bound and taken away. Shortly thereafter, Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse enter brandishing swords, scaring everyone who assumes they are the deranged Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus attempting to escape. Believing they have driven away the supposed witches, Dromio and Antipholus of Syracuse resolve to leave as soon as possible.

Angelo offers apologies for still not settling his debt to the merchant when Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse enter. Seeing the chain on Antipholus, Angelo questions him for denying possession earlier. Antipholus becomes angry and draws his sword, prompting the merchant to do the same. Adriana, Luciana, and the Courtesan enter, causing Dromio and Antipholus to flee and seek refuge in a church.

An abbess emerges and Adriana, Luciana, and Angelo explain the peculiar behavior of the two. However, the abbess refuses to surrender them. The Duke arrives with Egeon, facing execution. Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus join the scene, leading to confusion with conflicting memories of the day. Egeon, believing they are Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse, approaches them, but both deny knowing him. The Abbess enters with Dromio and Antipholus of Ephesus, bringing both sets of twins onstage for the first time.

The explanation unfolds, revealing that the Abbess is the mother of both Antipholus of Syracuse and Ephesus, Emilia. With the family reunited and confusion dispelled, the brothers meet and connect for the first time.



Production still of *The Comedy of Errors* (2024). Photo by Giao Nguyen.



Characters

(specific to the Seattle Shakespeare Company professional production, Fall 2023)

Egeon

a merchant from Syracuse

Solinus

Duke of Ephesus

Jailer

First Merchant

a citizen of Ephesus

Antipholus of Syracuse

a traveler

Dromio of Syracuse

Antipholus of Syracuse's servant

Antipholus of Ephesus

a citizen of Ephesus

Dromio of Ephesus

Antipholus of Ephesus's servant

Adriana

Antipholus of Ephesus's wife

Luciana

Adriana's sister

Balthasar

Luce (also called Nell)

a kitchen maid

Angelo

a goldsmith

Second Merchant

a citizen of Ephesus

Officer

Courtesan

Dr. Pinch

Lady Abbess

head of a priory in Ephesus



Production still of *The Comedy of Errors* (2024). Photo by Giao Nguyen.



Gloria Alcala
Dromio of Syracuse / Dromio of Ephesus



Brandi Birdsong
Adriana/1st & 2nd Merchant



Rhys Daly
Duke Solinus / Luciana



Kathy Hsieh
Egeon / Officer / Pinch



Jesse Calixto
Courtesan / Gaoler / Angelo / Emilia



Ayo Tushinde
Antipholus of Syracuse / Antipholus of Ephesus



Mike Wu
Full Cast Understudy



Biography of William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare, widely regarded as the greatest dramatist in the English language, was born in the month of April of 1564 to John Shakespeare, a city councilman and glove maker, and Mary Arden. He was the eldest son in a family of eight.

Not much is known about William's childhood or education. The local school in Stratford would have provided him with a foundation in classical Latin authors, as was standard in Elizabethan curriculum. In 1582, at eighteen years old, William was married to Anne Hathaway (not the same one from *The Princess Diaries*). The marriage was apparently a hasty one, as Anne gave birth to a daughter, Susanna, six months later. Two years later the couple had twins, a son Hamnet and a daughter Judith. After the birth of the twins, records of William cease for several years.

These "lost years" have caused speculation among historians and suggestions about his vocation during this time vary greatly. Some say William began his theatrical career minding the horses at the theatre's stables. Regardless of what he was doing, William must have been honing his skills as a writer. No one knows when he began writing exactly, but we do know when people began to take notice.

In 1592, theatre records show that William Shakespeare's plays started being performed in London. William joined an acting company called Lord Chamberlain's Men. This company, co-owned by William and several other actors, became a favorite of Queen Elizabeth I and of her successor, James I. Records from the period show that William acted in his own plays, usually as minor characters, as well as in other productions. William Shakespeare's earliest plays were largely comedies and histories. In 1596, William's son, Hamnet, died of an unknown illness.

In 1599, the Lord Chamberlain's Men had gained enough success to fund the construction of their own theater venue, the Globe Theatre. As Shakespeare's career grew, the Lord Chamberlain's Men became one of the most popular theatre groups in London. William's writing also matured as he began writing his great tragedies.

In 1603, with James I's succession to the throne following the death of Elizabeth I, the new king became the official patron of the Lord Chamberlain's Men and the group changed their name to the King's Men. In 1608, the King's Men expanded to purchase the indoor Blackfriars theatre. Shakespeare himself became quite wealthy due to his career success; he made numerous property purchases, including New Place, the second largest house in his hometown of Stratford. He divided his time between London and Stratford, eventually retiring to Stratford. Shakespeare died on April 23rd, 1616. The cause of his death is unknown.

"Richard Brinsley Sheridan" Encyclopædia Britannica. 03 July, 2018. <<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Richard-Brinsley-Sheridan>> Encyclopædia Britannica, 11th Edition, Volume XXIV. John George Robertson. Cambridge: University Press, 1911. pp. 845-7.

Themes in *The Comedy of Errors*



Production still of *The Comedy of Errors* (2024). Photo by Giao Nguyen.

The Comedy of Errors by William Shakespeare explores several themes, combining humor, mistaken identities, and familial relationships. Here are some key themes in the play:

Mistaken Identity

Central to the plot, mistaken identity creates a chain reaction of confusion and comedic situations. The play revolves around the misidentification of the twin brothers and their servants, leading to a series of amusing misunderstandings.

Family and Reunion

The theme of family is at the heart of the play. The reunion of the twin brothers, separated in infancy, serves as a central narrative arc. The exploration of familial bonds, forgiveness, and reconciliation adds depth to the comedic elements.

Identity and Self-Discovery

The characters' quest for self-discovery is woven into the fabric of the play. Antipholus of Syracuse, in particular, embarks on a journey of identity exploration as he navigates the unfamiliar city of Ephesus. This play serves as an argument of nature versus nurture, and what happens to identical brothers raised almost 1000 miles away from each other.

Fate and Coincidence

Fate and coincidence play significant roles in the unfolding events. The twins' accidental reunions and the fortuitous circumstances that lead to the resolution of conflicts highlight the unpredictable nature of fate.

Mercy and Forgiveness

Themes of mercy and forgiveness are evident in the resolution of the play. Despite the chaotic events and misunderstandings, the characters ultimately embrace forgiveness, emphasizing the importance of compassion in human relationships.

The Comedy of Errors seamlessly weaves these themes together, creating a vibrant tapestry of comedy and human experience. The interplay of these themes contributes to the enduring appeal and enjoyment of the play.



Production still of *The Comedy of Errors* (2024). Photo by Giao Nguyen

Shakespeare's Genres

SHAKESPEARE'S GENRES

While occasionally dissected further, Shakespeare's plays are typically divided into three categories: **Comedy, Tragedy, and History.**

COMEDY: A Shakespearean comedy is not necessarily what a modern audience would expect when they hear "comedy". Whilst there may be some laugh-out-loud moments, the most commonly identifiable traits of a Shakespearean comedy are:

- Young lovers struggling to overcome problems (often thanks to their strict elders)
- Mistaken identities, often involving disguise
- Complex, interwoven plot-lines
- Frequent use of puns
- A happy ending (often involving a wedding)



Actors in Seattle Shakespeare's Wooden O production of *The Comedy of Errors* (2021). Photo by John Ullman.



Gretchen Hahn and Stephanie Roman as Friar Lawrence and Romeo in Seattle Shakespeare's educational tour production of *Romeo and Juliet* (2023). Photo by Giao Nguyen

HISTORY: Shakespeare's histories are focused on English monarchs, and were often used to perpetuate Elizabethan propaganda, and influence the perception of royalty. Many historians have suggested there are inaccuracies in the depictions, but the plays have proved influential for centuries in shaping how we view these historical figures.

TRAGEDY: While they may feature comedic moments, Shakespearean tragedies boast high-stakes storylines that often involve the death of main characters. The main features of a Shakespearean tragedy are that:

- Characters are impacted heavily by social or societal turmoil
- Themes of inescapable doom
- A noble, but flawed central character that suffers a terrible downfall
- Ends in death



Kathy Hsieh, Rhys Daly, and Rachel Guyer-Mafune as King Henry IV, Prince Hal, and Poins in Seattle Shakespeare's production of *Drum and Colours: Henry IV* (2023). Photo by Robert Wade

Shakespeare's Audiences

Audiences in Shakespeare's time behaved differently than what we think of today when we go to the theatre. In general, audiences were much more rowdy and directly involved in the show than modern audiences.

Shakespeare is often associated with the Globe Theatre in London, which was a wooden stage constructed in 1599, and hosted many of Shakespeare's world premieres, including *As You Like It*; *Hamlet*; *Othello* and *Macbeth*. On June 29th, 1613, the Globe Theatre went up in flames during a performance of *Henry VIII*. A modern reconstruction of the theatre, named "Shakespeare's Globe", opened in 1997, and is located approximately 750 feet from the site of the original theatre.

London theatres like the Globe could accommodate up to 3,000 people watching popular plays. With theatres running most afternoons, that could mean as many as 10,000–20,000 people could see a play every week! Shakespeare's audiences included the very rich, the upper-middle class, and the lower-middle class. People sought entertainment just as we do today and could afford to spend money going to the theatre. To get into the Globe Theatre cost a penny. In Elizabethan England, one penny would buy a loaf of bread, a pint of ale, or a ticket to the theatre. Those who paid just one penny were known as "groundlings," because they stood on the ground in what was known as "the yard," which is the area closest to the stage. For another penny, they could sit on a bench just behind the yard. For a penny more, they could sit more comfortably on a cushion. To get into the upper galleries, which were covered and had seats, cost would start at 6 pence.

Since there was no electricity, both performances took place in broad daylight, allowing actors and audience members to see each other and interact. Shakespeare's soliloquies would be spoken directly to the audience, who could potentially answer back! The audience would clap for the hero, boo the villain, and cheer for the special effects. They might even dance at the end of a comedy along with the characters onstage. However, in the case where an audience didn't like a play, they caused a ruckus, and had been known to throw furniture and damage the theatre.

Shakespeare used several tricks to gain and hold his audience's attention. His plays rarely begin with main characters onstage; instead a minor character typically begins the first scene. Without lights to dim at the beginning of a play, the performance simply started when actors walked onstage and started to speak, usually over the noise made by the audience. Because of this, the first scene would usually set the mood of the play, but the opening dialogue wasn't vital because it might not be heard.

Another trick that Shakespeare used was to break up the main action of the play with comedy. In most of his plays, there is comic relief in the form of "clown" or "fool" characters sprinkled throughout the show, making jokes or clowning around onstage. This ensured that even during a 3-hour history play, there would be something that appealed to everyone.



A performance of *King Lear* at the new Globe Theatre in London.

Audiences today can learn from Elizabethan audiences about how to watch a Shakespeare play. Here are some tips:

- Remind yourself that the first scene mostly sets the mood of the play and rarely has vital dialogue, so if you miss some of the words at the beginning, that is okay. It can take a couple minutes to adjust to Shakespeare's unusual language. It's a little bit like listening to someone with a heavy accent; at first it can be difficult to understand, but after a minute or two it becomes easier. Don't be discouraged if it doesn't make sense right away. Our actors are professionally trained to make sure that you understand the words, so you'll catch on!
- Enjoy the play and feel free to express your enjoyment. Laugh at the clowns, clap for the heroes, gasp at important revelations, and applaud for the actors at the end to thank them for their work. This will keep you engaged in the show and help let the actors know that the audience is paying attention and enjoying the play.
- Remember that in a play, unlike in a movie, the actors can see and hear you too! Even with more sophisticated theatre lighting that keeps the stage lit and the audience dim, the actors are often very close to the first few rows, and they can definitely hear the audience. That means please don't talk to your neighbor during the show, and keep your phones silent and away for the duration of the performance (it lights up your face!) — these can all be very distracting to the performers and your fellow audience members.
- And finally, remember that the theatre exists for everyone. Theatre is not meant to be only for the upper class, college graduates, and old people. In Shakespeare's day theatre was an affordable form of entertainment that had something any person could enjoy. Shakespeare's plays have something for you, whether you have seen one hundred plays or no plays at all, if you're rich, poor, young, old, or if you enjoy jokes, speeches, banter, or battles. Shakespeare wrote his plays with a diverse audience in mind, and that is part of the reason they are still significant today.

Twinnem (noun): Your ride-or-die, the friend whose vibe syncs with yours on a whole other level. It's like you're telepathically connected, picking up on each other's moods, energy, and pain. Basically, the closest thing to having a twin without sharing DNA.

#TwinnemGoals #TelepathicTwinning

Twins are obviously a crucial plot point in *The Comedy of Errors*, a Shakespearean comedy written in the 1590s. The entire conflict of the show hinges on the fact that two sets of estranged twins are both inhabiting the same space. From as early as theater in antiquity, media representation of twins was varied. In some works of a similar time, such as *The Duchess of Malfi* by John Webster (written in 1612, and published in 1623), twins are stigmatized and misrepresented, with the general view of twinship being considered “unnatural” due to the prevailing lack of understanding about how twins occurred at that time. Other plays like *The Comedy of Errors*, used twins as a comedic device, seen in works by Thomas Middleton and James Shirley.

Shakespeare introduced an additional layer of confusion and comedy to his twins by assigning them shared names, a practice inspired by Plautus's *The Menaechmi*, which was likely a direct influence on Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*, evident in plot similarities and Shakespeare's education in classics. This theme of twins continues to be incredibly important in Shakespeare's later comedy, *Twelfth Night*. Given the focus on twins in all of these plays, it comes as no surprise that they are not simply a literary device employed by Shakespeare; rather, they also symbolize a continuous presence in his personal life as a father.

Shakespeare and his wife Anne Hathaway were parents to a pair of fraternal twins, Judith and Hamnet. Unfortunately, Hamnet passed away at the age of 11, coinciding with the period when it is believed that Shakespeare began writing his much loved comedy, *Twelfth Night*. This particular story not only centers around a pair of fraternal twins, but in the play the sister believes her brother is

dead and assumes his identity. It is widely agreed upon by Shakespearean scholars that Shakespeare wrote *Twelfth Night* with his own children in mind, potentially using the play as a means to process grief by creating a direct mimesis of his twins onstage. On the other hand, *The Comedy of Errors* was written and performed before Shakespeare's son's death, although he did have twins. This raises the question: what do the twins signify to Shakespeare in *The Comedy of Errors*? Are they merely a comedic device inspired by Mananda, or was Shakespeare attempting to convey a deeper meaning?

Although a comedy, *The Comedy of Errors* weaves a narrative against the backdrop of war between neighboring countries. This play, which was believed to have been written around 1589-94, exists in a period marked by political conflict and war in Europe, with the Long Turkish War underway, the Cambodian-Spanish war in progress, and the Nine Years War looming, directly involving British forces. In this era, identities of nationalism were burgeoning in England, with a growing commitment to the idea of prioritizing one's country above all others. It is plausible that Shakespeare, in crafting a comedic play featuring twins amid a war-torn setting, is offering commentary on the heightened individualism of one's country during times of conflict. By portraying two individuals from different nations who look exactly the same and are mistaken for each other on stage, Shakespeare may be illustrating to the audience how trivial the differences insisted upon between two national populations can be.



Production still of *The Comedy of Errors* (2024). Photo by Giao Nguyen.



Production still of *The Comedy of Errors* (2024). Photo by Giao Nguyen.

Shakespeare ingeniously utilizes twins to challenge a common standard of politeness theory prevailing in Elizabethan England. Through the device of mistaken identity, made possible by identical twins sharing the same name, Shakespeare portrays characters engaging in actions deemed unacceptable by polite society without any guilt or sense of wrongdoing. A striking example of this device in *The Comedy of Errors* is Antipholus of Syracuse's flirtation with Luciana. In an era when adultery was sternly frowned upon, pursuing the sister of one's wife was an even greater taboo. However, since Antipholus of Syracuse is unaware of the mistaken identity, he attempts to woo Luciana without hesitation, creating comedic opportunities and challenging social norms. This dual reality, where Antipholus is simultaneously right and wrong, adds complexity to the narrative, showcasing Shakespeare's penchant for exploring shades of gray and challenging black-and-white thinking. By employing twins in his work, Shakespeare effectively presents two sides of a situation, providing a tangible representation of life's intricate gray areas on stage.

Shakespeare also skillfully utilizes a recurring theme of characters questioning their own reality throughout the play, creating a surreal atmosphere and exploring themes of personal identity and absolute certainty. Dromio of Syracuse, in bewilderment, questions, "Am I in earth, in heaven, or in hell? / Sleeping or waking, mad or well-advised?" as he encounters characters who seemingly know him. Antipholus of Syracuse similarly expresses perplexity with, "How many fond

fools serve mad jealousy!" Both characters, while initially attributing the confusion to others' mistakes, later entertain the possibility of madness or witchcraft at play, saying, "There's none but witches do inhabit here." This exploration of identity and self-questioning serves as a direct response to twinship, possibly reflecting Shakespeare's own children's experiences of individuality and defying ideals. Moreover, it serves as a broader commentary on the human experience, delving into the expectations imposed on individuals by those in their lives and questioning whether understanding others is genuine or merely an assumption. Throughout the story, the characters grapple with uncertainties about their memories and morals, a natural consequence of the hyper-specific situation involving two twins sharing the same names in *The Comedy of Errors*.

Overall, it can't be guaranteed if there was a deeper reason for Shakespeare's twins beyond comedy and an interest in his own children. Whether true or not, it's always intriguing to delve a little deeper into Shakespeare's work and explore potential underlying meanings.

TL;DR: Shakespeare turned twin troubles into a comedic extravaganza with *The Comedy of Errors*. Inspired by classic works and his own twin children, the play weaves confusion and laughs with shared names and mistaken identities. It's not just about funny mix-ups, though. In the backdrop of political chaos, Shakespeare sneaks in a commentary on national pride and challenges societal norms. As if that's not enough, the characters in the play are on an identity crisis rollercoaster, questioning reality and making us ponder deep stuff about individuality. It's like Shakespeare is saying, "Hey, life's not just black and white; it's a whole colorful mess!" While we can't be sure if he had a secret agenda, one thing's for sure: Shakespeare's twins keep us laughing through the centuries, and twins in real life still rock—although these days, they usually have their own unique names!

Go Big AND Go Home: Commedia Dell'arte, Telenovela, and Movement in Storytelling

by *Tatyana Emery*

Educator, speaker, and writer bell hooks likens the process of storytelling to that of traveling, writing that telling a story means, "...journeying to countries where we may not speak the native tongue," adding that "most of us communicate by creating a story, one we may tell without words." Theatre as a storytelling medium holds within it a great multiplicity. It is an artistic medium all its own while carrying within it many different expressions of other genres such as dance or music. Similarly, storytelling structures such as Commedia Dell'arte and the Telenovela can combine to create a harmonious blend between movement and sound. Seattle Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* is one such combination. It is technicolor misadventure filled to the brim with camaraderie, confusion, and calamity—compassed by the brilliant lodestar found in the shared vision of director Jimmy Shields (he/his) and choreographer Lexi Warden (she/her).

The Comedy of Errors follows two identical twin brothers whose separate upbringing and deceiving likeness bring about hilarious consequences. In Seattle Shakespeare's 2024 production, this delightful chaos is brought to life by the Drum And Colours company. Across Director Jimmy Shields' many talents and artistic endeavors, Shields focuses on a variety of different aspects to begin work on a piece—whether it be movement, music or setting. In the room, Shields shares that the "driving force of what we do is play." He looked to the heightened, exaggerated body language of the Telenovela to inform his interpretation of Shakespeare's comical farce. Inspired by the title credits that air before an episode, actors often find themselves in a private aside with the audience transformed from inside the story alongside each character. This is, of course, thematic as well as intentional. Shields maintains part of his theatre philosophy must always include the people watching the show. To Shields it is imperative "the youngest person in the room has to understand and the oldest person in the room has to understand," the story

ARTICLE: GO BIG AND GO HOME



Production still of *The Comedy of Errors* (2024). Photo by Giao Nguyen.

told on stage. Naturally, this idea blends seamlessly into the rest of his directing style. As a creative, he searches for the "real, human moments" between actors in order to create a more intimate and engaging theatre experience. Contrasting with the stylized, melodramatic nature of a soap opera, Shields' *The Comedy of Errors* elevates each character's multiple facets into the spotlight.

Dramatic, electric and kinetic, choreographer Lexi Warden's contribution to the *The Comedy of Errors* team translates stunning pictures on stage. All sculpted under the thoughtful dancer's keen and watchful eye, Warden emphasizes a sense of play through movement. As Warden affirms, inspiration for the choreography came from the exaggerated movement styles of the daytime soap operas and telenovelas of the 80's. This means that for Warden, the work began prior to the first day of rehearsal as she pulled from her ballet background in order to carve out dynamic sculptures moving in and out of the wings. Warden maintains that "dance was [her] first art language." As such, her choreography combines slow, intentional gestures with the finality of a ballet gesture. In doing so, Warden, borrowing from the balletic tradition, communicates a clear beginning and an end to each movement. Balancing precision with passion, Warden is able to successfully compose instantly recognizable, memorable moments of physical comedy. With the clarity and sage insight provided by intimacy and fight coordinator Francesca Bentacort, *The Comedy of Errors* careens from devastating blows to outrageous jests with deft and ease.

Traveling back in time to the early 1500s to the late 1700s, Commedia Dell'arte was one of the dominant forms of storytelling in many European countries. Codified in Italy as a playmaking format, Commedia Dell'arte "... emphasized ensemble acting; its improvisations were set in a firm framework of masks and stock situations, and its plots were frequently borrowed from the classical... literary drama." Here, the absurdity of Shakespeare's central conceit in a *The Comedy of Errors*, serves the production. A classic misunderstanding tumbles out of control and spirals into absurdity. Consequently, the respective direction and choreography of Shields and Warden yield spectacular results. In embracing the risible aspects of the plot, *The Comedy of Errors* employs tenets of classical theatre in its ensemble's collaboration.

Fast forwarding a little to the 1970s, the art of the Telenovela was born out of analogously structured radio plays. The added element of film recording paradoxically allowed for a more theatrical exploration of the characters and plots historically revered in telenovelas. Some notable titles include *Los ricos también lloran* ("Rich People Cry Too") popularized in Mexico and *Simplemente María* ("Simply Maria") which originated in Peru. Reminiscent of the telenovela style, SSC Drum and Colours' *The Comedy of Errors* moves cinematically from scene to scene, giving the audience members insight into quandaries of Ephesian citizens. This conversation with the audience proves ideal in moments of levity and especially rich in moments of distress. Seattle Shakespeare Company is not the first theatre company to celebrate the decadent medium's theatricality. Recently performed at the Old Globe in San Diego, Karen Zacarías' *Destiny of Desire* is a musical centered on the standard plot conventions of a Telenovela—family secrets, hidden affairs, and unexpected surprises.

While "melodrama" or acting that is "melodramatic" carries with it a negative connotation, the melodrama that defines soap operas or telenovelas is founded in something deeply human. Melodrama, whether it be juicy gossip or earth shattering news, is part profound emotional truth and part real, raw lived experience. It is a lens through which to view truly stupefying moments of life with love and with humor.

Whether illuminating a monologue's meaning through dance or exaggerating a petty brawl for comedic effect, *The Comedy of Errors* marries two distinct styles of dramatic play into one. In no small part due to the work of Jimmy Shields and Lexi Warden, *The Comedy of Errors* is an incandescent flame stoked by the dramaturgical fires of the past and present. Dealing in improvisation and replicable story arcs, Commedia Dell'arte lends this story a firm structure off which to build a unique interpretation of a classical piece. Conversely, the Telenovela offers excitement, intrigue, and a dramatic backdrop in front of which to tell a spell-binding tale. Although they differ in artistic medium, geographical origin, and relationship to spoken language, the points of connection between Commedia Dell'arte practices and the storytelling conventions of the Telenovela encourages audiences and storytellers alike to seek theatre practices in a variety of traditions. As bell hooks reminds us, "We may show by gesture what we mean."

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Production still of *The Comedy of Errors* (2024). Photo by Giao Nguyen.

Pre-Show Reflection Questions

These questions will help students to think about some of the big ideas behind the play before watching it. Have students discuss these questions in partners or small groups, or write journal entries based on these prompts.

***The Comedy of Errors* is a play about misunderstandings and miscommunication. Think of a time in your life where a misunderstanding got way out of hand. Was it funny, or stressful? How long did it take you to figure it out?**

At the heart of *The Comedy of Errors* are two pairs of identical twins frequently mistaken for one another. Can you recall a time when you were misidentified as someone else? Share the details of that experience and how it unfolded.

The opening of *The Comedy of Errors* introduces Aegeon, a Syracusan Merchant who finds himself in Ephesus, immediately treated as if he doesn't belong. Have you ever traveled to a place where you felt out of place? What circumstances contributed to that sense of displacement?

Post-Show Discussion Questions

Did you notice any significant changes or developments in the characters throughout the play? How did they contribute to the overall narrative?

Example Responses:

- Antipholus of Syracuse, the more rational and observant of the twins, experiences a transformation in his understanding of identity and relationships. His journey involves self-discovery as he navigates the confusion caused by mistaken identities.
- Adriana, the wife of Antipholus of Ephesus, initially believes her husband has gone mad. Her character development involves a shift in perception as she comes to understand the confusion caused by the twin's identical appearances.

Envision the adaptation of *The Comedy of Errors* into a contemporary context. How would you interpret the story through a modern lens? What elements of the narrative might require modification to resonate with today's audiences and make the storyline more relatable?

Example Responses:

- I would update the characters' professions to align with modern occupations, like technology, which would provide a fresh take on societal roles and expectations.
- I would reinterpret gender dynamics to reflect contemporary attitudes, and highlight the importance of communication and consent in relationships.

Did you find any personal connections to the characters or themes in the play? How did these connections enhance your engagement with the story?

Example Responses:

- I often use humor as a way to deal with the stresses of everyday life. The characters' ability to navigate challenging situations with humor is relatable to me and the way I interact with the world.
- I have a really strong bond with my family, so I appreciated the way the play explored family dynamics, loyalty, and reconciliation.

In the play, Adriana initially believes her husband has gone mad, but her perspective shifts when she sees both twins, realizing her mistake. Did Adriana handle the situation rationally and appropriately? If you were in Adriana's position, what alternative actions might you have considered?

Example Responses:

- Adriana's initial reaction to believe her husband has gone mad without thoroughly investigating the situation is irrational. She should've asked more questions to try to get to the root of the problem before jumping to conclusions.
- Adriana's concerns about her husband's well-being and loyalty are genuine. Her actions are driven by love and worry and serve as a reflection of her commitment to the relationship.

Do you think Dromio was treated fairly in the play? Why or why not?

Example Responses:

- Yes. Dromio, like other characters in the play, is subject to the comedic misunderstandings and mistaken identities that drive the plot. The treatment he receives is part of the overall farcical nature of the play, and his experiences contribute to the humor without malice.
- No, Dromio faces a disproportionate amount of physical and verbal abuse throughout the play. His mistreatment, especially at the hands of Antipholus of Ephesus, is excessive, even within the comedic context.

Activity: Gibberish Scenes

The world of the *The Comedy of Errors* is just that—a series of misunderstandings that breed absurdity, hilarity, and Seattle Shakespeare's 2024 production is no exception. Inspired by the theatrical world of the Telenovela, the relationship actors have to movement is crucial to the story telling of this piece. In this game, students will work together to tell a story in a small ensemble, emphasizing the use of facial expressions, body language and positioning to effectively communicate meaning without the use of words.

To begin, students will split off into small groups to create a scene (3-5 students each, depending on the total number of students). Each person in the group is assigned a character and together, those characters will perform a scene entirely in Gibberish.

For example, potential characters might include:

- **An unimpressed bus driver, an overambitious student, and a chicken**
- **A stressed waiter, an impatient customer and their child**
- **A demanding client, an eager real estate agent, and a person who doesn't know the home showing is today**
- **A computer hacker, a cafe owner, and a wifi technician**
- **A bored soccer player, the sassy coach, an overenthusiastic parent and an annoying little sibling**
- **An argument between someone who likes soda and someone who likes juice...and the third friend who is too nervous to mention that they don't like either**

Each character has some kind of relationship to another in order to introduce building blocks of a scene to students. When creating their scene, students should keep in mind what each of their objectives might be as they progress through the scene.

After students have worked on a scene for 15-20 minutes, ask the group to share their work and let the rest of the class guess who and what their group was doing!

If you would like to add another round, ask students to then perform a translation of their Gibberish scene into a real-life language without changing their original scene.*

As they progress through the game, encourage students to make big, bold choices. This means expressing themselves through emotion, gesture, and movement. What can they communicate when not speaking? How does the addition of language then change the scene?

Helpful Hints:

- **If you need help creating a shared definition for the students to use, this game uses the following definition of gibberish... Gibberish is a language that has no consistent grammar, spelling or written conventions and is inconsistent in its sound. It is truly unique to each individual that speaks it!**
- ***Students who speak multiple languages are welcome to incorporate one or more in a translation of their scene. However, they should first perform a sketch using a "nonsensical" language before moving onto this next step.**

Activity: Secret Drawing

Materials needed:

Paper

Writing utensils in multiple colors

This is an exercise based in creativity and collaboration and a fair bit of confusion. Students will try to replicate a drawing of an object based only on an auditory description. The leader will choose an animal or object to draw (ex: a bird, a frog, a cat, etc..) and distill the drawing process into a few simple steps. As much as possible, the instructions should leave room for interpretation.

1. Draw a large oval
2. Draw a smaller oval above the first oval
3. Add two triangles
4. Add four small circles to the large oval
5. Add one upside triangle inside of the small oval
6. Add two very small circles inside of the small oval
7. At the bottom of the large oval, add a squiggly line

Be sure not to reveal what you are drawing to your students until you have finished all your instructions. Afterwards, reflect with your students:

8. Did you figure out what we were drawing before we were finished? How? What clues helped you figure it out?
9. When you felt unsure of what to draw, what did you do?
10. Would you change anything about my instructions? How could we avoid confusion?

After the instructor has finished modeling this activity, students can take turns trying to lead a drawing session of their own and incorporate new strategies to instruct (or confuse) their fellow artists.

If time permits, this activity can preface a discussion about the events of the play and how the characters handled the many instances of conflict, confusion and misunderstanding.

Activity: Word Scramble

When the world is turned upside down, can you make things right again? Unscramble these letters to discover the names of people, places and perhaps.. PLAYWRIGHT playing a hand in the mix-ups in *The Comedy of Errors*.

R O D I O M

C U E S S R Y

W I N T S

E S K P E A R S E H A

O L H P U T S I A N

S U S H E E P

U A A I N C L

G N E E O

C H A N T M E R

K U E D

D R I A A A N

O L I S U N S

Answer Key
1. Dromio 2. Syracuse 3. Twins 4. Shakespeare 5. Antipholus 6. Luciana
7. Egeon 8. Merchant 9. Duke 10. Adriana 11. Solinus 12. Ephesus

Activity: Ephesus or Syracuse

In *The Comedy of Errors*, although the twins share identical faces and names, their personalities and approaches to the world are distinctly different. In this activity you'll be presented with a list of famous twins, and you'll be asked to categorize each as either Ephesus or Syracuse.

Consider the following categorization:

In Ephesus: The twin who exhibits a more impulsive and energetic demeanor, often engaging in chaotic situations. This twin thrives in the lively and bustling atmosphere of Ephesus, where confusion and mistaken identities abound.

Adjectives: Impulsive, Reactive, Stern, Rigid

In Syracuse: The twin characterized by a calmer and more rational disposition, navigating challenges with a level-headed approach. This twin adapts to the more tranquil and orderly environment of Syracuse, providing a counterbalance to the comedic chaos unfolding in Ephesus.

Adjectives: Reflective, Inquisitive, Wary, Resourceful

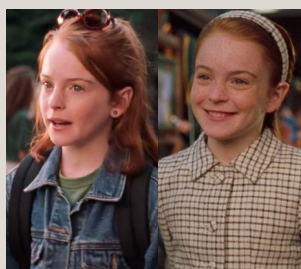
Famous Twins:



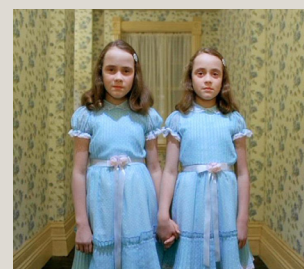
Mary-Kate and Ashley Olson
The Adventures of Mary-Kate & Ashley



Tia and Tamera Mowry
Sister, Sister



Annie James and Hallie Parker
The Parent Trap



Alexie & Alexa Grady
The Shining



Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum
Alice in Wonderland



Zack and Cody
The Suite Life of Zack & Cody



Luke Skywalker and Leia Organa
Star Wars



Fred and George Weasley
Harry Potter



Liv and Maddie Rooney
Liv and Maddie



Viola and Sebastian Hastings
She's The Man



Scarlet Witch and Quicksilver
Avengers: Age of Ultron



Vincent and Julius Benedict
Twins

...Feel free to add any twins you think of, or twins in your own life!



MISSION STATEMENT

With the plays of William Shakespeare at our core, Seattle Shakespeare Company engages our audiences, our artists and our community in the universal human experience inherent in classic drama through the vitality, immediacy and intimacy of live performance and dynamic outreach programs.

ABOUT US

Seattle Shakespeare Company is the Puget Sound region's year-round, professional, classical theatre. The company's growing success stems from a deep belief in the power and vibrancy of the time-tested words and ideas of Shakespeare and other classical playwrights along with a commitment to artistic excellence on stage. The results have been provocative performances that both challenge and delight audiences while fostering an appreciation for great stage works. Our combined programs — which include indoor performances, free outdoor productions, regional tours, educator and youth programs — reach across barriers of income, geography, and education to bring classical theatre to Washington State.

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EDUCATION PROGRAMS

In-School Residencies, Matinees, and Workshops

- In-School Residencies bring active, customized curriculum into schools across Washington State. Professional teaching artists plan with teachers to tailor each residency to fit the needs and objectives of the classroom. Seattle Shakespeare Company residencies inject vibrant, active exercises into lessons that unlock the text, themes, and actions of a Shakespeare play.
- Student Matinees bring over 3,000 students annually to our mainstage productions in the Seattle Center. Teachers are provided free study guides, and student groups are invited to stay after the show for a free Q&A session with the cast.
- Pre-show and post-show workshops can be booked to accompany mainstage matinees. These workshops include an introduction to the play itself, student activities, and insights into direction and design choices of our specific production.

Touring Productions

- Fresh and accessible 90-minute productions tour across Washington State each Spring, reaching more than 14,000 students and adults. These nimble productions perform as easily in school gymnasiums as professional theatre facilities. Teachers are provided free study guides and students enjoy free post-show Q&A sessions with the cast.
- Schools have the opportunity to book accompanying in-school residencies with touring productions, led by members of the touring cast and additional teaching artists.

Camps and Classes

- Our summer "Camp Bill" series in Seattle and Edmonds offers young actors a variety of camps to choose from or combine. Camps range from a One-Week Introduction to a Three-Week Production Intensive, with many options in between.
- In our Fall and Spring after-school "Short Shakes" programs, young actors develop their skills and gain hands-on performance and production experience.
- Seattle Shakespeare Company occasionally offers adult classes and workshops to our community featuring guest artists who work on our stage.