

Xavier University

Exhibit

Honors Bachelor of Arts

Undergraduate

2021-11-23

Roman New Comedy in the Renaissance: The Influence of Plautus in Shakespearean Comedy

Nick Minion

Follow this and additional works at: <https://www.exhibit.xavier.edu/hab>



Part of the Ancient History, Greek and Roman through Late Antiquity Commons, Ancient Philosophy Commons, Classical Archaeology and Art History Commons, Classical Literature and Philology Commons, and the Other Classics Commons

Roman New Comedy in the Renaissance:
The Influence of Plautus in Shakespearean Comedy

Nick Minion

Classics and Philosophy Honor's Bachelor of the Arts Program

23 November 2021

Introduction

Undoubtedly the most well-known playwright in the English language, Shakespeare's influence can be felt in most every genre in most every era. Allusions to his work can be found anywhere, from horror novels to sci-fi. Beyond allusions, most strongly felt is his stylistic influence in theatre. Names, plot devices, and images have all been taken from Shakespeare's greatest works and implemented and transformed in new art forms. However, not all elements of Shakespearean drama originated with the bard himself. Shakespeare drew inspiration from the dramatists that preceded him, especially Roman playwrights.

In his earlier works, these similarities are apparent. *The Comedy of Errors* is Shakespeare's most direct adaptation, based primarily on the plot of the *Menaechmi* and supplemented by the *Amphitruo*, both by Plautus. The play consists of two sets of comic twins, separated at birth, with one of the twins journeying to the city of the other where mistaken identity causes all sorts of comedic events. As aforementioned, this play is one of his earliest, with the first known performance in December 1594. There are many theories about the date of composition, spanning as early as 1589. While some dates are more likely than others, the only certainty is that the play was written sometime between 1589 and 1593, making it one of Shakespeare's earliest plays.¹

The most significant difference between the Plautine model and *The Comedy of Errors* is the addition of another set of comic twins. In the *Menaechmi*, there is only one set of Menaechmi, Menaechmus of Epidamnus and Sosicles, also known as Menaechmus, of Syracuse. *The Comedy of Errors* has two sets, Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus and Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse. This addition is from the *Amphitruo*, where Jupiter and Mercury

¹ R.A. Foakes and William Shakespeare, "The Comedy of Errors," in *Arden Shakespeare Second Series*, ed. R.A. Foakes (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1968).

impersonate Amphitryon and his slave Sosia. Shakespeare also derives several scenes from the *Amphitruo*, i.e., when Dromio of Syracuse bars Antipholus of Ephesus from entering his own house. *The Comedy of Errors* is a direct adaptation of Plautus's works.

However, what Shakespeare takes from these works is not just in the plot, but other elements that drive the comedic engines at work in the play. Countless authors have done literary analysis on *The Comedy of Errors* and the *Menaechmi*. They've uncovered much of how Shakespeare went about building his adaptation of Plautus, but how do these plays differ in dramatic analysis? What insights can be gleaned from approaching these plays in dramatic terms? The goal of this paper is to answer this question. Using formalist analysis as described by James Thomas, this paper will address how these productions differ. A formalist analysis focuses on categorizing information provided by the script as much as possible. It is more extreme than simple Aristotelian divisions, and its many specific criterion make it ideal for comparison. Thomas describes this type of analysis as "A systematic collection of close-ups to form at last the big picture."² Another benefit of this type of analysis is its generality. Other types of script analysis tend to focus on the script from one particular perspective, such as from the position of an actor or a director. Formalist analysis is applicable to all, not varying one aspect of a script over another.

Dissecting a script into basic components allows for ease of comparison; attempting to compare the entirety of these two plays would be herculean, but the analysis of individual aspects is more manageable. These components are the given circumstances, the background story, characters, idea, mood, and atmosphere. By viewing how these differing elements interact and supplement one another, the style of these two plays can be properly defined and compared

² James Thomas, *Script Analysis for Actors, Directors, and Designers*, Fifth (Waltam, WA: Focal Press, 1992).

to show that through the implementation of tragic and dramatic elements, Shakespeare subverted farce and Plautine style to comment on familial duty and marriage.

Chapter One:

Given Circumstances and Background Story

Given circumstances and background story are the most useful components to address first for many reasons. Given circumstances deal with the past and present of the play, providing the social and cultural context in which the characters exist. It is the backdrop upon which the show is set.³ The given circumstances may seem mundane in comparison with other elements, such as character and idea, but they are critical in establishing all the other elements that make up the play. As a progenitor from which all the other elements take shape, the given circumstances are the foremost point of analysis.

Background story is often referred to as exposition in literature, and it is primary in two ways. Firstly, it encompasses events that take place prior to the beginning of the play. These events are not seen on stage but described through the words and actions of the characters. They are indelibly connected to the events of the present, i.e., the plot of the script. Before we begin to understand the onstage action, appropriate consideration must be given to the offstage action. The second way that it is primary is in its dispersal. Background story is traditionally described in the first few scenes of the show. There are exceptions of course.⁴ Modern productions tend to experiment with less straightforward techniques of conveying the background story, but for the plays in question, *The Comedy of Errors* and the *Menaechmi*, traditional techniques are used.

Given circumstances is still a rather broad category, so it will be necessary to divide it into subcategories: time, place, and society. Time refers to three different aspects: the time that the author wrote the play, the time that the action takes place, and the amount of time that transpires over the course of the play. Place is the next. The locale where the action takes place

³ Thomas, 42.

⁴ Thomas, 73.

dictates the actions that the characters take. The general locale applies broadly to the decisions of the characters and the experience of the audience. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for instance, the action that takes place in the woods outside Athens is chaotic and obscene. The woods are a surreal environment that, through the actions of Puck and Oberon, destroys the established relationship between the lovers. A specific locale has much more concrete associations for the audience. However, these concrete associations vary for different societies and time periods. For a 21st Century audience, setting a play in Paris would create expectations of romance, high-end fashion shows, and extravagant restaurants. Ephesus and Epidamnus are the locales for *The Comedy of Errors* and the *Menaechmi*, respectively, and the associations they evoke for their audience will be explored later in this chapter.

The final major subcategory of given circumstances is society. This includes a plethora of human institutions that play a role in the characters' understanding of the world around them. Hierarchical structures, whether familial or occupational, dictate social rank and the relationships between individuals. Politics also falls under the wide umbrella of society; a strong government may serve to create a sense of order, while the absence of such a government denotes an absence of order. Spirituality is the final category. Whether they follow an organized religion or have superstitions, belief in the supernatural is how characters make sense of the inexplicable.⁵ All these elements make up the given circumstances of the play. We'll begin with looking at how time affects the world of the play.

⁵ Thomas, 43–63.

Given Circumstances

Time of Composition:

The time of composition goes outside the scope of the play, understanding how the author's life and circumstances shaped the play and how this work fits into the rest of the author's writings. A play is informed by the time of its writing; playwrights use concurrent events and contemporary artists as a backdrop for their work, either consciously or subconsciously. An understanding of the circumstances of the author can also give insight into the goals of an author. Theatre is a vehicle for sociopolitical change. Subversions by an author of their time of composition can act as critiques of those aspects of society. Although outside of the script itself, the time in which an author is writing is foundational for the circumstances and idea of the play.

Plautus lived from ~250 to 184 B.C.E. and, together with Terence, composed the vast majority of extant Roman New Comedy.⁶ As Wilson and Goldfarb write in their history of theatre, "Plautus was born in Umbria but went to Rome at an early age and became an actor. When he began writing his own plays, he took song, dance, and native Italian farce—with which he was very familiar—and combined these elements with characters and plots from the New Comedy of Hellenistic Greece."⁷ His twenty-one extant works are all *fabula palliata*, one of the four main branches of Roman New Comedy.⁸ *Fabula palliata* takes place in a Greek setting. Plays that take place in a Roman setting (*Fabula togata*) must take account the structure of

⁶ Robert S. Miola, "Roman Comedy," in *Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Comedy*, by Alexander Leggatt (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 18.

⁷ Edwin Wilson and Alan Goldfarb, *Living Theatre: A History of Theatre*, Seventh (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2018), 77.

Costas Panayotakis, "Native Italian Drama and Its Influence on Plautus," in *Cambridge Companion to Roman Comedy*, by Martin Dinter (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

Panayotakis gives an in-depth exploration of the role of Native Italian drama and Oscanism in Plautus, tempering this somewhat spurious claim by Wilson and Goldfarb.

⁸ Miola, "Roman Comedy," 18.

Roman life. Greek settings are not beholden to such structures, so they are often more whimsical.⁹

Although we will be looking to Plautus as the source of Shakespearean comedy, the comic does not exist in a vacuum. Plautus drew on many of his predecessors (Naevius for instance), whose influence can be clearly felt even if extant primary evidence is scant.¹⁰ The two playwrights to compare Plautus against are Terence and Menander. Menander acts as the sole extant Greek New Comic, and, with Plautus writing *fabula palliata*, many similarities between Plautus's work and this prior comic style can be found. Although Terence is not the only Roman comic to compare Plautus against, he is by far the most noteworthy in large part because of his influence on early modern comedy. Latin dominated education during the 16th Century in England, so Terence and Plautus were used in lectures and grammar lessons.¹¹ One major addition to Plautus's writing is his use of ensemble scenes. An ensemble scene is a scene where there are four or more concurrent speakers. These scenes are not seen in Greek New Comedy, but prevalent in Roman New Comedy, so in adapting Menander, Plautus must have altered the original in some way. George Franko proposes two ways in which Plautus accomplished this. He either shifted scenes or gave voices to silent characters, in particular female characters, to create these ensemble scenes.¹² These female characters manipulate the men of the play to direct the players towards a more harmonious end. Ensemble scenes can enable more complex eavesdropping as well as indicate boisterous occasions, such as symposia, which were not shown onstage in Greek New Comedy.¹³ These large ensemble scenes tend towards the denouement of

⁹ Robert S. Miola, "Roman Comedy," 23.

¹⁰ Gesine Manuwald, "Plautus and Terence in Their Roman Contexts," in *Cambridge Companion to Roman Comedy*, by Martin Dinter (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 18.

¹¹ Robert S. Miola, "Roman Comedy," 19.

¹² George Fredric Franko, "Ensemble Scenes in Plautus," *The American Journal of Philology* 125, no. 1 (2004): 29.

¹³ George Fredric Franko, "Ensemble Scenes in Plautus," *The American Journal of Philology* 125, no. 1 (2004): 29–30.

the show, reminiscent of the extravagant marriages that are characteristic of the final scenes of Shakespearean comedies.

Although Terence engages in ensemble scenes more often than Plautus, Plautine instances are much more significant to the plot of the show. Terence uses ensemble scenes simply for unimpactful eavesdropping, in cases where three characters would be sufficient. Often two of the characters in these scenes fulfill similar roles and might have easily been combined into a single character. Plautus on the other hand adds ensemble scenes only when they might have significant impact to the plot. As Franko states, “While the addition of a fourth speaker sometimes makes little dramatic impact in scenes of Terence, the impact in a given Plautine ensemble scene is readily discernible.”¹⁴ Terence’s ensemble scenes are also not as great in scale. While Plautus’s scenes, containing large parties of individuals, greatly contrast the rest of the play with their boisterousness, Terence’s scenes are only slightly greater in scope than the rest and do not greatly shift the dynamic of the production. Ensemble scenes are thus a uniquely significant element of Plautine New Comedy.

Menander, and Greek New Comedy as a whole, also retained the chorus from Greek Old Comedy. His plays were broken into five act breaks, with choral interludes between them. These choral interludes are not seen in Roman New Comedy, another convention that Plautus dismisses. Some roles, like the *advocati* and the fishermen, seem to resemble a chorus, “but they differ from Menander's choruses in almost every respect”¹⁵ as Lowe puts it. The *advocati* do not resemble an interlude in any way, as they enter following the speech of Agorastocles and respond to his speech. The fishermen may well have been as few as two or three individuals,

¹⁴ Franko, 37.

¹⁵ J. C. B. Lowe, “Plautus’ Choruses,” *Rheinisches Museum Für Philologie* 133, no. 3/4 (1990): 275.

which is much smaller than a typical chorus. They also interact with the dramatic action, so they clearly do not function as an interlude.

Another feature of Plautine works is the inclusion of stock characters. Traits recur in certain characters, such as the parasite, the shrewd slave, and the greedy miser.¹⁶ The slave is one of the more relevant stock characters as there is a great deal of parity in the representation of this archetype across these two plays. Stace delineates the various types of Plautine slaves and the roles that they fulfill in these comedies. The insolent tricksters are the architects of schemes and deceptions. They gain sympathy from the audience for their wit and imagination and are the driving forces of the comedic situations that arise. The deceived type are as they are named; they are deceived by others to create an environment in which comedy can arise. They are comical because of their low status and made even more low by these situations. The third type is a catch-all for the major characters who do not fit in the other categories. These include Gripus, who is a cynic whose pathetic nature is a point of comedy, and Truculentus, who protests against his master's immorality but doesn't fulfill a clear comic role. Stace defines two groups of minor slaves. Protactic ones mainly contribute to exposition. They either explain the central conflict of the drama or bring suspenseful news that incites the onstage action. Plot developing ones, on the other hand, further the action to a slight extent.¹⁷ These variations on the slave archetype have in common that they serve as paradoxical figures that are involved in deception. Shrewdness and morality aren't characteristics that one would typically apply to a lowly class, so such a paradoxical nature can be a source of comedy.

The time of composition for Shakespeare, as mentioned, was 1589-1593. He was born in 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon and moved to London sometime after 1585-1590. Educated at the

¹⁶ Edwin Wilson and Alan Goldfarb, *Living Theatre: A History of Theatre*, 78.

¹⁷ C. Stace, "The Slaves of Plautus," *Greece & Rome* 15, no. 1 (1968): 66-69.

King's New School until he was thirteen, he had a sufficient education to synthesize a wealth of previous theatrical devices.¹⁸ He married Anne (or Agnes) Hathaway in 1582 and had three children: Susanna, Hamnet, and Judith. His children may have been an inspiration for a variety of his plays. Hamnet and Judith were twins, a dynamic that is grappled with in many comedies beside *The Comedy of Errors* highlighted with the brother and sister fraternal twins in *Twelfth Night*. The death of his son, Hamnet, is often theorized have also been an inspiration behind *Hamlet*.

In 1590, he lived in London, acting and writing plays. The Lord Chamberlain's Men was the acting troupe he was associated with in 1595 and the rest of his career, renamed as the King's Men in 1603. He wrote plays, staged, and even acted over his extensive career ending in 1613. He died in 1616.¹⁹

Unlike Plautus, there are many contemporary playwrights to compare Shakespeare against. Christopher Marlowe, John Fletcher, and Ben Jonson are among the plethora of early modern dramatists that could be compared with him. With such notability and such an extensive opus, the ability for comparison is immense. What will be relevant to comparison of these two plays will be how he deploys overarching themes.

The Comedy of Errors centers upon a sequence of mistakes and the confusion that follows. In New Comedy, this confusion is lacking in significance to the characters, so "Shakespeare and the learnedly neoclassical Ben Jonson, for example, fill a void at the center of New Comedy plotting in revealingly diverse ways."²⁰ New comedy is simple farce. That is not to say it is inherently worse than other comedic styles, but it is simpler in its construction. Ben

¹⁸ Edwin Wilson and Alan Goldfarb, *Living Theatre: A History of Theatre*, 163.

¹⁹ Edwin Wilson and Alan Goldfarb, 163.

²⁰ John Creaser, "Forms of Confusion," in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Comedy*, by Alexander Leggatt (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 83.

Jonson and William Shakespeare saw these simplicities and took different approaches in developing them. Jonson went towards satire, evolving the role of villainous tricksters in order to produce dynamic dramatic stakes. Good and evil, as cliché as it may seem, are at odds in his works, and the tension for the audience takes the admittedly farcical nature to another level.²¹ Shakespeare, on the other hand, enhances the role of the hero, having them engage society as an antagonist.²² The community has deep-rooted problems that must be solved. *Measure for Measure* has Isabella experiencing the corruption of the Vienna and of Angelo in particular. The flaws in society become the dramatic stakes of the comedy. Shakespeare's brand of comedy divulges heavily from basic farce later in his career, as he continues to add darker themes and more pressing social commentary.

Another shift by Shakespeare from ancient models occurs in his deployment of relationships. Marriage and courtship are an engine of plot that existed for millennia, so Shakespeare is not inventing anything new. Marriage produces a measurable goal for the show. The play begins with the promise of some marriage, the marriage is disrupted by confusion, the confusion is resolved, and the marriage caps the play.²³ *The Comedy of Errors*, even though it is one of the few Shakespeare plays that analyzes a marriage from the start, adds the subplot of Antipholus of Syracuse and Luciana to the script. Antipholus's wooing of Luciana sets a secondary resolution to the play: marriage. The docile farce of New Comedy takes many forms in Early Modern Comedy; Shakespeare adds in stakes and dramatic tension that aren't found in Plautine works.

²¹ Creaser, 83.

²² Creaser, 84.

²³ Catherine Bates, "Love and Courtship," in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Comedy*, by Alexander Leggatt (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 102–5.

Time of Action:

The time of action, what specific era the play takes place, is relatively simple for the *Menaechmi*. It is the time of composition: late 3rd century or early 2nd century B.C.E. There is no information in the script that points to any particular day, month, or season. Perhaps, this is to make the play feel more universal. Either way, the specific time of action was not of enough importance to Plautus for him to make specific mention of it in the script. The time of action for *The Comedy of Errors* is much more difficult to explain. Ephesus was abandoned in the 15th century, so it is not the same case as it was with Plautus. The several mentions of Christianity, especially medieval imagery, and the embargo between Syracuse and Ephesus points to a first *post terminus quo* after the fall of the Roman empire, late fifth century C.E. Beyond that, Shakespeare does little to specify the year. The season however is loosely mentioned with allusions to the cold. “Let him walk from whence he came, lest he catch a cold on’s feet” (3.1.37). says Syracusan Dromio to the doppelgangers outside. And Ephesian Dromio says to his master, “You would say so, master, if your garments were thin. / Your cake here is warm within; you stand here in the cold” (3.1.70-71). It is undoubtedly in the colder half of the year that this play takes place, but any definitive determination on the specific year proves fruitless.

Dramatic Time:

Dramatic time is the final aspect of time to be addressed. Plautus’s play takes place in real time, so the amount of time that transpires in the world of the characters is equal to the run time of the show. The action is continuous, with scenes flowing seamlessly into one another. Shakespeare has been known to break the conventions of Neoclassical drama, such as the unity of time that dictates that a play should take place over the period of 24 hours, but surprisingly he

abides by them in this play. Egeon is tried by the Duke in the first scene at dawn and his execution is set at dusk. Shakespeare also updates the audience most every scene on the amount of time that has transpired. In Act 1, Scene ii, Syracusan Antipholus mentions that “within this hour it will be dinner time.” (1.2.11) referring not to an evening meal, but rather to a midday meal. Act II, Scene I, takes place at 2:00 p.m., as Adriana notes, “Sure Luciana, it is two o’clock.” (2.1.3). The following scene takes place somewhere from 2:05-2:30 p.m., because Antipholus of Syracuse claims that he spoke to Dromio not even half an hour ago and he flogged Dromio of Ephesus before the previous scene which was determined to take place at 2:00. Act III does not have any indication of time for the majority of it, but the final exchange between the Syracusans and Angelo takes place 30 minutes before Act IV, Scene i., as Angelo says, “you know I gave it you half an hour since” (4.1.65). This scene takes place at 5:00 p.m., again by Angelo’s account, so the previous scene occurred at 4:30 p.m. Act IV, Scene ii, takes place at 6:00 p.m., but the information is harder to follow. “It was two ere I left him, but now the clock strikes one.” (4.2.54). Dromio says to Adriana. While this seems to indicate that we have traveled backwards in time to 1:00 p.m., this is a comedic moment. ‘On’ and ‘one’ used to be homophones under some dialects, and this causes the confusion of Adriana.²⁴ Dromio is simply saying that the clock strikes on and it is the next hour: 6:00 p.m. The only specific time left is at the end of the comedy, when Egeon’s execution is halted at dusk as we learned in the first scene. Shakespeare’s chronology is more difficult to follow and less continuous than the *Menaechmi*, but it similarly takes place over the course of one day. This adherence to act breaks allows Shakespeare to rapidly shift between different events rather than confining the play to a single place.

²⁴ R.A. Foakes and William Shakespeare, “The Comedy of Errors,” 71.

Place

Both of these comedies take place in a coastal Hellenistic city, but they differ in specific locale. Plautus's *Menaechmi* takes place in Epidamnus, while Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* takes place in Ephesus. Both these locales have similar significance. Plautus describes the location of Epidamnus

...in Epidamniis
 uoluptarii atque potatores maxumi;
 tum sycophantae et palpatores plurumi
 in urbe hac habitant; tum meretrices mulieres
 nusquam perhibentur blandiores gentium.
 propterea huic urbi nomen Epidamno inditum est,
 quia nemo ferme huc sine damno deuortitur.

(*Men.*, 259-262)

(A)mong the Epidamnians, there are the greatest hedonists and drinkers. Then lots of imposters and cajolers live in this city. And then the prostitutes are said to be the most coaxing anywhere. This city is called Epidamnus because practically nobody puts up here without being damnified.²⁵

While we have no way of knowing whether the prologue speaker is describing the city accurately, Plautus paints the city as a tricky and uncertain place, a reputation used by the visitors to justify the irrational events that occur later on. Sosicles will account being offered dinner, valuables, and other things as the tricks of a wanton city rather than realizing that he is finally in the city where his twin brother resides. Location is used to prolong the series of errors and to ease the disbelief of the audience.

In Shakespeare, the function of the location is much the same, but he opts for a location more suited for 16th century England. Living in an overwhelmingly Christian society, Shakespeare turns to St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians to inspire supernatural explanations for the events that occur for the Syracusans. Antipholus of Syracuse states,

²⁵ Plautus, *The Two Menaechmuses*, trans. Wolfgang de Melo (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), 1.

They say this town is full of cozenage,
 As nimble jugglers that deceive the eye,
 Dark-working sorcerers that change the mind,
 Soul killing witches that deform the body,
 Disguised cheaters, prating mountebank,
 And many such-like liberties of sin:

(*Errors*, 1.2.97-102)

The Letter to the Ephesians describes them saying,

...who having become callous gave themselves up to lust, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you did not learn Christ that way; if indeed you heard him, and were taught in him, even as truth is in Jesus: that you put away, as concerning your former way of life, the old man, that grows corrupt after the lusts of deceit.

(*Ephesians*, 4:19-22)

Shakespeare's audience would most certainly be aware of this allusion. Riehle in considering Plautine influence in Shakespeare notes these similarities. As mentioned earlier, Plautus wrote nearly exclusively *fabula palliata*, or Roman New Comedy set in Greece. This serves two purposes: enabling freedom from presenting rigid Roman life and using preconceived notions of his audience to influence the course of the play.²⁶ Shakespeare does much the same with Ephesus. Ephesus is not England. It is not a place his audience members would have been to at all. However, every single one of the audience members would have heard of Ephesus and had deeply seated associations with it. Riehle notes this change of location, claiming that "Shakespeare's audience was familiar through St Paul with Ephesus as a city replete with sorcerers and exorcists."²⁷ Much like Sosicles, Antipholus and Dromio forget that they are

²⁶ Robert S. Miola, "Roman Comedy," 9.

²⁷ Wolfgang Riehle, "Shakespeare's Reception of Plautus Reconsidered," in *Shakespeare and the Classics*, ed. Charles Martindale and A. B. Taylor (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 119, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511483769.007>.

searching for their twins and repeatedly blame the surreal events that befall them on the witchcraft of the town.

Location functions much the same between these two comedies, but the cultural significances for their contemporary audiences are much different. Plautus does invoke a Greek location, setting it up in his prologue to be a tenable explanation for his audiences. However, this location doesn't achieve much beyond that. No effort is made by the characters to fix the harmful views that cause these errors, and no effort is made by the playwright to comment on the society of Epidamnus. Shakespeare on the other hand invokes a location that has religious significance for 16th Century Christians, already focusing the audience's attention on the roots of the problems in society. The characters are a microcosm of the larger issues in the world of the play, which Shakespeare from the start alludes to.

Society

Social context informs how we approach the interactions and problems we face each day. Another's social rank determines how we will speak to them and what we expect from them. Society also instills goals into its members, whether it be upward social mobility, family, political status, education, or spiritual fulfillment. such, the society of a play is our best way of understanding the actions that characters take and the reasoning behind why events play out as they do. Society is often also the object of theatre. Theatre analyzes and demonstrates issues with our society, in all eras and across all conditions. Medieval and Renaissance Europe limited theatre's capacity for outright criticisms of institutions through censorship laws, but theatre artists still subverted these laws in order to comment on these institutions. Our understanding of the society within a play is critical for understanding the idea, or guiding concept, of a play.

Societal expectations are even more important in comedies of mistaken identity as the subversion of those expectations is the primary engine of the show's comedy. Morrison, in "Surrealism, Politeness Theory, and Comic Twins in Plautus and Shakespeare", applies politeness theory as a way of measuring how much these comedies subvert societal expectations. Politeness theory refers to the expectation between two interlocutors that they will work together or collude to achieve their individual goals. It is called such because it relies upon the assumption that the interlocutors have the objective of being polite and societally acceptable in mind, as Morrison puts it, "The idealized paradigm for politeness theory posits a model speaker, who is rational and wishes to maintain face in conversation."²⁸

In *Comedy of Errors* and the *Menaechmi*, however, that is seldom the case. Morrison uses politeness theory to establish a control, in this case, an expected conversation. Three values are used to determine how close to normal a conversation is: rationality, cooperation, and distance.²⁹ The first, rationality, is how much the interlocutors agree on the facts. The second, cooperation, is how much the interlocutors take on a spirit of reciprocal goodwill. The third, distance, is how well the interlocutors know each other. Extreme distances occur in cases of mistaken identity, when characters don't agree on how well they know each other. Throughout these plays, rationality is the most consistently askew value. Mistaken identity is the core of the plot after all, so, when Dromio of Ephesus meets Antipholus of Syracuse, neither one agrees on what their previous interaction entailed. Then, Antipholus of Syracuse is reunited with Dromio of Syracuse following an interaction with Dromio of Ephesus. They disagree on the facts, as one believes that they had a previous interaction, and the other does not. Distance is askew when the

²⁸ James V. Morrison, "Surrealism, Politeness Theory, and Comic Twins in Plautus and Shakespeare," in *Engaging Classical Texts in the Contemporary World: From Narratology to Reception*, by Louise H. Pratt and C. M. Sampson (University of Michigan Press, 2018), 181.

²⁹ James V. Morrison, 174–75.

Syracusans meet people who think they know them, such as when Adriana and Luciana invite them into the house for dinner assuming that they are her husband and his servant. The dissolution of societal expectations is a major source of comedy in this play.

The result of these subversions is a surreal environment, where facts are uncertain. Morrison “loosely refer(s) to such apparently irrational situations as surrealistic from the characters’ perspectives.”³⁰ This ties in with the locations chosen by our two authors, Epidamnus and Ephesus. One is a place of cheats and hedonistic seduction, the other of sorcery and witchcraft. Both are places that encourage little trust. The air of surrealism within the play will be more thoroughly explored in chapter three: Mood and Atmosphere. For now, let us turn towards society itself, beginning with the aspects most immediate to the everyman: family, love, and friendship.

Family, Friendship, and Love:

Personal relationships form the primary social groups we engage with. Although concepts such as romance and friendship are common throughout most all societies, the expectations within them differ. Marriages for love rather than rank or power may be standard in some cultures, but unheard of in others. Analyzing how these dynamics are structured by the world of these plays will inform the complications in their interactions.

The Comedy of Errors is rare among Shakespeare’s comedies in that it centers upon a married couple rather than a courting one. Most comedies end with a grand wedding or, in some cases, three weddings (as we see in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*). *Merry Wives of Windsor* is the only other Shakespearean comedy that develops and explores the complications that occur

³⁰ Morrison, 173.

after marriage.³¹ In *The Comedy of Errors*, this strict family structures allows for the characters create comedy by not fitting into these molds. Seeing a character like Antipholus of Ephesus fail at his role as a husband

The family of Egeon and Emilia forms a frame for the play, being highlighted in the prologue and in the resolution. Egeon expresses the binding duty of a father, which later would lead him on his search for years,

For what obscured light the heavens did grant,
 Did but convey unto our fearful minds
 A doubtful warrant of immediate death,
 Which though myself would gladly have embrac'd.
 Yet the incessant weepings of my wife [...]
 And the piteous plainings of the pretty babes[...]
 Forc'd me to seek delays for them and me.

(*Errors*, 1.1.66-74)

Egeon claims that his actions to survive were not born of his own self-preservation, but for the preservation of his whole family. The role of a father and spouse is to protect his wife and family. His happiness is second to theirs, which is why his separation from them is so damaging to him and leaves him resigned to his fate.

Compare this attitude with that of Antipholus of Ephesus, who is habitually late for dinner and engaged in extramarital affairs, the former of which Adriana tells us at the start of the second act, “Neither my husband nor the slave return’d, / That is such haste I sent to seek his master? / Sure Luciana it is two o’clock.” (*Errors*, 2.1.1-3). Antipholus of Ephesus, even prior to the mistaken identities, is not acting as a good husband. This functions to temper the disbelief of the other Ephesians once both Antipholi are acting irrationally. Adriana later uses Antipholus of Ephesus’s prior behavior as justification for his “madness” to the abbess, saying “This week he hath been heavy, sour, sad, / And much, much different from the man he was;” (*Errors*, 5.1.45-

³¹ C. L. Barber, “Shakespearean Comedy in the Comedy of Errors,” *College English* 25, no. 7 (1964): 497.

46). The confusion resulting from the introduction of Syracusan Antipholus is attributed to Ephesian Antipholus's failures as a husband.

The dynamic between Syracusan Antipholus and Luciana also serves to demonstrate the emphasis of family in the show, both in Luciana's idealistic attitude and in Syracusan Antipholus's noble courtship. For the former, take this passage, where Syracusan Antipholus attempts to woo Luciana, but she, assuming that this is her brother-in-law, reminds him of the office of the husband,

And may it be that you have quite forgot
 A husband's office? shall, Antipholus,
 Even in the spring of love, thy love-springs rot?
 Shall love in building grow so ruinous ?
 If you did wed my sister for her wealth,
 Then for her wealth's sake use her with more kindness;
 Or if you like elsewhere, do it by stealth,
 Muffle your false love with some show of blindness.
 Let not my sister read it in your eye;
 Be not thy tongue thy own shame's orator [...]

(Errors, 3.2.1-28)

Luciana is disgusted at the idea of Ephesian Antipholus's youthful love so quickly disappearing, lamenting the downfall of love that should be most treasured. In spite of her despair, she still makes arguments for amending her newfound suitor's actions toward the societal expectations for married men. Luciana fully admits that men may marry for wealth instead of love, but implores him to at least seem to be a good husband. She also identifies that there is some consequence for the unfaithful husband, i.e. in line 10 of this scene "Be not thy tongue thy own shame's orator". Infidelity reflects poorly on the reputation of the unfaithful husband. This displays Luciana's idealism as more aesthetic than her pontificating would lead the audience to believe. This will be critical to our handling of both the character of Adriana and Luciana in the second chapter.

Antipholus of Ephesus is failing his role as a husband, but most of the fall is given to Adriana. Make no mistake, Adriana might be an outspoken female character, but the world of the play remains deeply patriarchal, as her sister, Luciana, tells her after she questions her husband's liberty, "O, know he is the bridle of your will... (men) are masters to their females, and their lords." (*Errors*, 2.1.13, 24). Adriana is later reprimanded by the abbess, "And thereof came it that the man was mad. / The venom clamours of a jealous woman / Poisons more deadly than a mad dog's tooth." (*Errors*, 5.1.68-70). This follows Adriana's claim that she has indeed been sufficiently reprimanding him for his affair. Furthermore, when Antipholus accuses her of an affair, it is said to reflect poorly on her as well as himself according to Balthasar, who says, "Herein you war against your reputation, / and draw within the compass of suspect / Th'unviolated honour of your wife." (*Errors*, 3.1.86-88). The double standard between husband and wife is clear. Although the husband's reputation is not immune to the rumors of an affair, wives were considered subservient to the husband, and the wife was ultimately culpable for flaws in this relationship.

Quite unusual is the lack of emphasis on love in *The Comedy of Errors*. Love is usually the focal point of Shakespeare's works as it motivates people to acts of passion of dramatic import.³² However, in this play, courting love is more a foil to the married couple, Ephesian Antipholus and Adriana, than a motivator of plot in itself. Antipholus of Syracuse falls in love with Luciana and professes his love in a poem of alternating rhyming couplets. "Transform me then, and to your power I'll yield" (3.2.40), he exclaims to her, much to her bewilderment, supposing this to be Ephesian Antipholus. The line is striking as it reflects Luciana's prior pleas to her sister to yield to her husband, a sentiment that is reversed in the Syracusan's wooing.

³² Bates, "Love and Courtship."

Shakespeare displays how we might imagine Adriana and her Antipholus were prior to this spat. The love from their initial relationship is faded. No longer were they willing to give up their own autonomy for one another, as Egeon had and as Antipholus of Syracuse promises to do.

While Antipholus of Ephesus is struggling to keep his marriage afloat at the start of the play, his friendships are astoundingly stable. As Antipholus of Syracuse remarks,

There's not a man I meet but doth salute me
 As if I were their well-acquainted friend,
 And every one doth call me by my name:
 Some tender money to me, some invite me,
 Some other give me thanks for kindnesses,
 Some offer me commodities to buy.
 Even now a tailor call'd me in his shop,
 And show'd me silks that he had bought for me,
 And therewithal took measure of my body.

(Errors, 4.3.1-9)

Everyone in the city loves Ephesian Antipholus and that comes with benefits. He is given gifts, thanked, and utterly adored in most every way. Friendship in this world comes with myriad benefits as well as commitments as we learn through his friends' discussion of him. Angelo vouches for Ephesian Antipholus to the Second Merchant, saying "Of very reverend reputation, sir, / of credit infinite, highly beloved, / Second to none that lives here in the city; / his word might bear my wealth at any time." (5.1.5-8). Honesty and making good on promises are the groundwork for these professional relationships. Shakespeare uses Antipholus of Ephesus's high reputation to instill more tension into the errors that occur. Antipholus of Syracuse creates questions of his twin's integrity through these mistakes, integrity which is Ephesian Antipholus's highest success in this play. The importance of reputation is put on full display by Syracusan Antipholus, who, despite being in a city he has no apparent plans to revisit, fervently defends his honor, threatening, "Thou art a villain to impeach me thus; I'll prove mine honour and mine honesty / Against thee presently, if thou dar'st stand." (5.1.29-31). Friendship translates quite

clearly to reciprocal gifts and acts of service. It is tied to one's reputation and is worth defending with one's life.

In this way, Shakespeare creates a tense world at the outset of the play, where the familial structure is completely upended. Brothers are separated from brothers, parents from children, and spouses from spouses. The structures teeter on the precipice of dissolution, and the potential for this destruction keeps the audience on the edge of their seats hoping for a resolution. This tension of strained familial structures serves as the engine of the show.

In the *Menaechmi* on the other hand, the ideal family is not found in the prologue. We don't see a husband beholden to his wife or children as the proper family dynamic. We do receive a similarly distraught household, however. Menaechmus leaves his house, crying,

ni mala, ni stulta sies,
 ni indomita imposque animi,
 quod uiro esse odio uideas,
 atute tibi odio habeas.
 praeterhac si mihi tale post hunc diem
 faxis, faxo foris uidua uisas patrem.
 nam quotiens foras ire uolo,
 ame retines, reuocas, rogitas,
 quo ego eam, quam rem agam, quid negoti geram,
 quid petam, quid feram, quid foris egerim.

(*Men.* 110-115)

If you weren't bad, if you weren't stupid, if you weren't unrestrained and unable to control your mind, you yourself would hate what you can see your husband hates. If after this day you do something further of this sort to me, I'll pack you off to your father as a divorced woman. Whenever I want to go out you hold me back, call me back, and ask me where I'm going, what I'm doing, what business I'm carrying out, what I'm seeking, what I'm up to, what I've done outside. I've married a customs officer.³³

Much the same as in *The Comedy of Errors*, a man, according to Menaechmus, should be at liberty to act as he pleases, but a wife should not. Menaechmus complains of his wife's incessant

³³ Plautus, *The Two Menaechmuses*. 436.

questions as an affront to his own freedom. She even could face recourse for her actions: divorce.

This is reinforced by her own father, who takes Menaechmus's side, saying

quotiens monstraui tibi uiro ut morem geras,
 quid ille faciat ne id opserues, quo eat, quid rerum gerat.
 quae haec, malum, impudentia est?
 una opera prohibere ad cenam ne promittat postules
 neu quemquam accipiat alienum apud se. s
 eruirin tibipostulas uiros? dare una opera pensum postules,
 inter ancillas sedere iubeas, lanam carere.

(*Men.* 789, 794-796)

How often did I teach you to obey your husband, not to observe what he's doing, where he's going, and what he's up to!...
 By the same token you could demand to forbid him to accept a dinner invitation or to receive anyone else at his place. Do you demand that men should be your slaves? By the same token you could demand to give him something to spin, to tell him to sit among the slave girls, and to card the wool.³⁴

Her father outlines the expectations of a wife in this rant: obey without question. The simple act of keeping tabs on Menaechmus is made equivalent to emasculating him and usurping his authority. The father even claims that the wife means to make her husband a slave while describing the roles of women, further showcasing the lack of autonomy for women in the society of the show. A fact that is emphasized by the wife never even being named.

Menaechmus's adultery is not of concern, but marriage is not for love at all. The way in which the wife describes Menaechmus reveals this, saying. "By the man you gave me to, my husband." (784). Marriage is an exchange, an exchange that was conducted by the father and Menaechmus; the wife is not even an agent in this decision. There is no necessary attraction between the spouses and, relevant to the current situation of the characters, no duty on the part of the husband to appeal to the wishes of the wife at all.

³⁴ Plautus, 506.

The subject of love is much different in this world. There is no love in this play, at least in the contemporary conventional sense. We don't find a budding romance, but rather a lustful transaction. Erotium, the courtesan, states as much when she acknowledges the nature of her business, "For a lover loveliness leads to loss, for us, to profit." (355) The absence of love in the play reflects a difference between this show and *The Comedy of Errors*. The tension of the relationship between the husband and wife is not the source of drama, but rather the tension between the twins is. The audience wishes for the twins to be reunited and the plights resolved. Sosicles could leave at any point, without resolving the knot that has become Menaechmus's life, and the tension between those two potential results is where dramatic action arises.

Politics:

Speaking of unraveling, the Duke in *The Comedy of Errors* is a Shakespearean addition. The law is not a force that is present in the *Menaechmi*. The inclusion of a governmental system serves to exacerbate the tensions of familial confusion. On top of the family of the show being broken beyond repair, there could be legal ramifications to their actions. The Duke, Solinus, although invoked often, appears only twice: at the beginning and the end of the show.

Although the Duke, Solinus, only graces the stage twice, his presence is felt through the officers. The officers carry out his will or else they are punished for the offence they commit. As the officer charged with retrieving the requisite payment from Antipholus of Ephesus states, "He is my prisoner; if I let him go / The debt he owes will be requir'd of me." (4.4.115-116). The officers raise the stakes from simple stain on reputation to arrest and potential execution. The perverse legal system favors the prosecution, which causes the officers to pursue the Antipholi with the vigor of being accused themselves. However, Solinus is the only one who can truly

remedy these disputes, a fact that has major repercussions for the experience of the political system in this world.

At the beginning, as mentioned, he sentences Egeon to death only to procrastinate his death until the end of the day. This establishes a number of qualities for government in the world of the play. Firstly, Solinus is the sole arbiter. He can change the law based on his own judgment. Secondly, he is prudent. His judgment on Egeon showcases the better of his character; he sees the plight of poor, innocent merchant and takes pity. Finally, Solinus is imperfect. He spared Egeon on that day, but he still ultimately condemns him to die in the evening. The difference between these two sentences is negligible until the introduction of the mistaken identity. There is no promise that the political system will amend the confusion in the play. If he decides, Egeon could still be killed and the Syracusan Antipholus could also be tried for the same crime. It is only by chance that he owes a debt to Antipholus and seeks to help him:

Long since thy husband serv'd me in my wars,
 And I to thee engag'd a prince's word,
 When thou didst make him master of thy bed,
 To do him all the grace and good I could.
 Go some of you, knock at the abbey gate,
 And bid the lady abbess come to me.
 I will determine this before I stir.

(Errors, 5.1.161-167)

The fragility of political salvation is demonstrated full force in his subjectivity, so that, although he has the power to rectify the fracturing family, it is not certain that he will be able to. In this, Shakespeare creates an environment where dramatic tension is able to remain.

Spirituality:

The prevalence of spiritual elements is something that is also unique to Shakespeare's adaptation. There are two main spiritual forces at work in the play. As previously mentioned

Ephesus is a place of witchcraft and hedonism, which is used by the Syracusans to explain away the events that happen to them. This happens rather frequently throughout the play. A few examples: In the first incident of mistaken identity, Syracusan Antipholus remarks after talking with Ephesian Dromio,

They say this town is full of cozenage,
As nimble jugglers that deceive the eye,
Dark-working sorcerers that change the mind,
Soul-killing witches that deform the body,
Disguised cheaters, prating mountebanks,
And many such-like liberties of sin:

(Errors, 1.2.97-102)

After the Syracusans are invited to dinner,

This is the fairy land; O spite of spites,
We talk with goblins, elves and sprites;

(Errors, 2.2.189-19)

After said dinner,

There's none but witches do inhabit here,

(Errors, 3.2.155)

After receiving many gifts from the locals,

Sure these are but imaginary wiles,
And Lapland sorcerers inhabit here.

(Errors, 4.3.10-11)

And after encountering the Courtesan.

Thou art, as you are all, a sorceress:
I conjure thee to leave me and be gone.

(Errors, 4.3.64-65)

These constant invocations of witchcraft flesh out the surreal environment that these two have found themselves in and give justification for their actions that might otherwise seem impossibly illogical.

However, although these invocations of paganism are prevalent, we also have lots of Christian imagery intermingled. Take the final example of Syracusan Antipholus's accusation against the courtesan. After invoking images of witchcraft and sorcery, he threatens

"Satan avoid, I charge thee tempt me not." (*Errors*, 4.3.46). The presence of the priory in the city is another indication of this intermingling of paganism and Christianity. But perhaps the clearest example of this is in Dromio's account of his master's arrest, in which he combines pagan and Christian ideas of the afterlife, recounting "No, he's in Tartar limbo, worse than hell. / A devil in an everlasting garment hath him, / One whose hard heart is button'd up with steel;" (*Errors*, 4.2.32-34). Christianity is ever present in the world of this play.

As with the change of Ephesus from Epidamnus that was discussed in the section on the given circumstance of place, the inclusion of Christian imagery gives a foundation for the audience to experience the play from. Christianity, of course, is a crucial aspect of life in Europe for the past two millennia and that is certainly the case for the 16th century. According to Riehle, "(the location of Ephesus) served his artistic intention of simultaneously 'engaging' as well as 'detaching' the audience; they had some familiarizing information about this city, yet it was basically pagan."³⁵ Christianity is pervasive throughout not only Shakespearean works, but all of early modern drama as well. This particular adaptation serves to "modernize" the classical play, facilitating the early modern audience grasping and understanding the society these characters exist in more easily.

Having compared the societies of these two plays, let us now turn to the other primary element: background story.

³⁵ Riehle, "Shakespeare's Reception of Plautus Reconsidered," 116.

Background Story

As with given circumstances, further subcategories must be made to better delineate the many effects of background story. Before we delve into the contents of the background story, it would be fruitful to examine how it is dispersed. Plautus opts for a prologue, which explains everything that happened before the play begins. Shakespeare's exposition is similarly deployed, but as the testimony of Egeon before the Duke of Ephesus. While Plautus's exposition stands apart from the rest of the drama, Shakespeare's exposition connects to the action of the comedy. Egeon is a character of relevance to the plot, while the prologue speaker is an adjacent. That is the primary difference between the dispersal of background story in these two shows as their technique is by and large the same. This technique is known as historical technique.³⁶ It involves compacting the background story to extended passages at the beginning of the play. While this can be advantageous as events that happen before the onstage action can seem dull, the density of exposition can be burdensome to convey naturally. As the name would imply, this technique became less popular as realism became more prevalent, and playwrights sought more realistic ways of conveying this information. Both shows opt for historical techniques, but Shakespeare's exposition is slightly more integrated into the onstage action.

It should be noted that in the context of Shakespeare's works, this exposition is much more condensed. This is indicative, firstly, of his reliance on Plautine models to construct this play and, secondly, of his inexperience at the time of writing. As his work matures, he becomes more experimental and seamless with his deployment of exposition. Changes in Shakespeare's handling of exposition is a subject ripe for investigation, but, for the purposes of this comparison between Plautus and Shakespeare, it illuminates Shakespeare's dependence on earlier models.

³⁶ Thomas, *Script Analysis for Actors, Directors, and Designers*, 76–77.

Background story can contain events, character descriptions, and feelings. In Plautus, the first is what we primarily see in these expository scenes. The speaker of the prologue explains that, when the twins were seven years old, one of them was separated from the rest at a festival in Tarentum; that this twin was stolen, taken to Epidamnus, and inherited a great deal of wealth; that the other twin eventually took on the name of the Menaechmus after the stolen child; and that this other twin has come to Epidamnus in search of his brother. In Shakespeare, Egeon's account is more detailed but covers the same main events. Egeon testifies that he had twins and bought another pair of twins from a poor woman to care for his own; that, while on the sea, a terrible storm tore the ship asunder, separating himself and one of each of the sets of twins from his wife and the remaining twins; and that, many years later, his son and his slave set out in search of their brothers, and that he followed them. These bursts of expository information consist primarily of events.

Background story that does not relate to events comes later in the show. The main instance of these are the character descriptions and feelings of the married couple. Menaechmus berates his wife, saying, "If you weren't bad, if you weren't stupid, if you weren't unrestrained and unable to control your mind, you yourself would hate what you can see your husband hates." (*Men.*, 110-112). Later, he lists all the ways in which his wife is nosy. This short exchange gives us a character description of the wife of Menaechmus and Menaechmus's feelings toward his wife. There are other instances of character descriptions and feelings, but this is the most significant instance of this type of background story.

In *The Comedy of Errors*, this exchange between Menaechmus and his wife is transferred to exchanges between Luciana and Adriana in Act II, Scene 1. Luciana describes her sister, the wife of Antipholus of Ephesus, as impatient and headstrong, someone who is shackling her

husband with her overbearing nature. Luciana gives us a character description of Adriana in this scene. The character of Antipholus of Ephesus is not lost in this adaptation, as Adriana complains paint much the same picture that we glean from the outburst of his Plautine counterpart. Luciana also states that women must be beholden to their husbands and justifies the common tardiness of Antipholus. This parallels Menaechmus's rant against his wife in the Plautine original and is the most significant character description that we get in the form of background story.

There are many similarities between these two comedies in their given circumstances and background story. The differences in time between the writing of the two effects some of the major forces at work in the show, as the prevalence of Christianity pushes Shakespeare to shift locations and include corresponding allusions to these images in his adaptation. The dramatic time, dispersal of background story, and content of the background story are roughly identical with some minor changes. Plautus's continuous action, lacking scene and act breaks, serves to enhance the believability of a production, while Shakespeare relies on suspension of disbelief in the breaks between scenes. But, in background story, Shakespeare gives immersion paramount importance and conveys this information in the context of the plot, rather than apart from it as Plautus does. These two elements of drama serve as the basis of a script, so, in adapting Plautus, Shakespeare kept them consistent with minor adaptations to better suit his audience.

Chapter Two: Character and Ideas

While the given circumstances and background story form the environment of the play, the agents of the play, the characters, are the ones upon which dramatic tension is reliant. Without characters, there is no anchor from which the audience can understand and immerse themselves in the play. Our ability to empathize with other human beings is what makes stories of all kinds so engaging, and characters are the means through which the audience achieve that empathy and investment. However, there is a limit to what we can achieve from analyzing characters through the script. Acting is the art of bringing those characters to life, and engaging in that subjective and unique craft removes us from the script itself in some way. In reference to psychoanalysis, Thomas admonishes, “Sometimes such methods can be useful in artistic circumstances, but character analysis is an artistic (artificial) enterprise, not a medical one.”³⁷ Actors, under the direction of directors, interact with their characters on stage and justify their every decision or action with their own internal ideas. That is why individual performances are able to have their own notoriety. Laurence Olivier’s performance of Hamlet was so influential that most modern re-imaginings of the character adopt his Oedipal interpretation of the scene with Hamlet and Gertrude.³⁸ Because of this, it is easy to fall into psychoanalysis and subjective interpretations of these characters, so we must take measures to avoid doing so. This falls under the realm of production and character work. Extrapolating on the given information takes the analysis outside the realm of the script, so, while it may be useful for a director, designer, or actor, it overtly subverts the authorial intent of these two plays, which is the goal of this particular analysis.

³⁷ Thomas, 173.

³⁸ Lars Kaaber, *Staging Shakespeare’s Hamlet: A Director’s Interpreting Text through Performance*, Studies in Performance: V. 1 (Edwin Mellen Press, 2005),

Idea is an aspect of a play that is difficult to grasp. Thomas puts its nature best, “By using selection and compression, playwrights transform ideas into concrete human experience. They do this by putting the characters through a controlled series of events intended to illustrate a specific view of the world.”³⁹ Idea is the primary instigation for a script and is the perception of the world that the playwright wants to show to the audience. The idea of a show is able to be conveyed through the plot, the diction, and the character, but, for these particular comedies, character is the predominant means. Playwrights tend to choose a select few moments in which to disperse this main idea, and these choices are critical to our understanding of the style of the play and of the playwright.

We will continue with the same compartmentalizing that we engaged with in given circumstances. Characters have many different aspects that make them unique in their approach to the world of the play. They have their own individual objectives and goals, their own tactics for achieving those goals, and their own personality traits and values. How extensive the details are in these categories dictates their complexity as characters, and these characteristics inform the relationships and conflicts that are born out of the interaction of two or more characters. Idea, on the other hand, can be broken up into two aspects: dispersal and content. Through what means an idea is presented can be just as, if not even more, informative to the style of a show than the idea itself. Some of the primary methods of dispersal include words, characters, and plots. Thomas supplies four ways to present main idea itself: as a super-objective, an action summary, a thesis statement, or a theme.

³⁹ Thomas, *Script Analysis for Actors, Directors, and Designers*, 222.

Character

Antipholus of Ephesus:

Unlike with given circumstances, where we addressed each element of the circumstances in sequence, character will be best approached by addressing all the elements of a specific Shakespearean character and then comparing them to their Plautine counterpart. The twins of both scripts are the central characters. They are the most complex characters in the play and the subjects of the central problem: will the brothers reunite. As such, it will be best to approach these characters first and work our way through the supporting cast.

Antipholus of Ephesus is the twin who resides in the town the story takes place in. As such, he is primarily a reactive force in the context of the play: his status quo is thrown out of balance by the arrival of his twin, and he must deal with the consequences of these mistaken identities. He is also a much-anticipated character for the audience. He is said to be the goal of the Syracusans' search and is thoroughly discussed by his wife and sister-in-law, but he does not enter until the third act, unlike his Plautine counterpart who is with us from nearly the beginning.

A character has many different objectives from scene to scene, in line with the constantly varying circumstances. While going through each individual objective that the Ephesian Antipholus has throughout the play would be a means of getting at his character's motivations, we can instead condense all these various objectives into a super-objective. The term, coined by Stanislavski, refers to the main goal of a character from which all the minor objectives follow.

To find this super-objective, we need only to look at Ephesian Antipholus's first words:

“Good signior Angelo, you must excuse us all, / My wife is shrewish when I keep not hours; / Say that I linger'd with you at your shop / To see the making of her carcanet, / And that tomorrow you will bring it home.” (*Errors*, 3.1.1-5). Of immediate concern to Antipholus is the

avoidance of a scolding from his wife. To extend this to a super-objective, we might say that Antipholus's goal is to maintain his comfort and liberty in spite of his marriage.

This is reinforced by his response to being locked out of his house. He commissions a gold chain for the courtesan simply to spite his wife. His tactics for enacting the objective are to spite his wife and to flaunt his liberties to her. This reflects his values and personality traits. He is temperamental and rash. He has a lot of will power and will enact his mind at the cost of his own wealth. He values his independence and his honor above all.

The primary relationships for Antipholus are his relationship to Angelo and his relationship to his wife. The latter we have begun to explore; his marriage is a combative one. His values fundamentally prevent him from allowing the fulfillment of Adriana's, his wife, objective, as he desires independence and separation from her. That is the source of their conflict. His relationship with Angelo is a microcosm for his relationship to the rest of the town. Antipholus is attached to his reputation and high social rank within the community, and he will engage in reciprocity with them, commissioning jewelry from the goldsmith while asking for an alibi for his absence.

Menaechmus:

Menaechmus is the Plautine counterpart to Antipholus of Ephesus. His objective is quite similar as he works against his marriage, but with a more directly licentious route, to enjoy the pleasures of Erotium's house. The mantle he steals from his wife is not out of vitriol primarily, but rather out of desire to get into Erotium's house and feast. He states as much, saying *nunc ad amicam deferetur hanc meretricem Erotium. mihi, tibi atque illi iubebo iam apparari prandium* (*Men.* 172-174) | "Now this (mantle) will be brought to my girlfriend, the prostitute Erotium here.

I'll now have a lunch prepared for myself, you, and her."⁴⁰ His primary concern is getting lunch and sex, not simply spiting his wife. Antipholus of Ephesus is a much more complex character than Menaechmus, primarily because of the definition in his relationship with his wife. The wife in the *Menaechmi* is not even given a name, and her lack of development reflects on their relationship. The simplicity of his character reflects the simplicity of his values: he values pleasure. He is not especially strong willed, though he has a combative personality.

The counterparts to Antipholus of Ephesus's relationships with Adriana and Angelo are Menaechmus's relationships to his wife and Peniculus. As previously mentioned, his relationship to his wife is at its core the same conflict as the adaptation. The wife's comparable lack of voice simply dilutes the nuances in that conflict. The relationship between Peniculus and Menaechmus is different than the relationship of Antipholus and Angelo, but still has the same function. Peniculus is a client of the patron, Menaechmus. The patron-client relationship is disparate from contemporary types of relationships, but, simply put, Peniculus goes to Menaechmus for money and gifts. Menaechmus gives him these things because his entourage is indicative of his social rank. Menaechmus's relationship to Peniculus demonstrates the importance of his reputation and social rank in the town, as Angelo demonstrates with Antipholus.

Antipholus of Syracuse:

Antipholus of Syracuse's objective is interesting in that it seems to fall to the sidelines fairly quickly as the play goes on, but his opening statement quite powerfully states his primary dilemma:

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,

⁴⁰ Plautus, *The Two Menaechmuses*, 436.

(Unseen, inquisitive) confounds himself.
 So I, to find a mother and a brother,
 In quest of them, unhappy, lose myself.

(*Errors*, 1.2.35-40)

He is existentially incomplete without the rest of his family and that is his primary objective in coming to Ephesus. As the story unfolds, he finds himself in situations that distract him from this goal, but he expresses this as a fundamental longing of his being.

Beyond his existential longing for his twin, Antipholus of Syracuse places much importance on his own reputation. As mentioned earlier, even when accused in a foreign city that he has no plans to revisit due to the embargo, he still challenges the accuser. “Thou art a villain to impeach me thus; I’ll prove mine honour and mine honesty / Against thee presently, if thou dar’st stand.” (*Errors*, 5.1.29-31). He values his reputation to the same degree as his brother and has no qualms defending it, verbally and physically. The temper that is so characteristic of his twin can also be seen in Syracusan Antipholus, who frequently resorts to violence.

Sosicles:

Sosicles is far removed from the character of Antipholus of Syracuse. The plot with Luciana is completely removed from the show, so the noble love of the foreign twin is completely removed. That leaves someone who is quite avaricious and greedy. His super-objective is the same, as he says, *uerum aliter uiuos numquam desistam exsequi. ego illum scio quam carus sit cordi meo.* (*Men*, 245). / “But on no other condition will I give up looking for him while I live. I know how dear he is to my heart.”⁴¹ He does not express this goal as forlorn as his counterpart, but the intrinsic importance is still there. As stated earlier, he is much more infatuated by the goods he receives and plans to take advantage of them as much as possible, only to leave the

⁴¹ Plautus, 454.

city as soon as possible. He is hostile towards Messenio occasionally, but other than that presents no temperamentality akin to Antipholus of Syracuse.

Dromio of Ephesus and Dromio of Syracuse:

These two are not as distinct from one another as the Antipholi are. The objectives of these two would be to avoid harm from their masters. The Antipholi are prone to beating them as is Adriana. The Dromios do not have overarching goals of their own, but rather obey the commands of their masters. They are clever with their words and talk back frequently to the Antipholi, but they are not very strong-willed. They are not primarily motivated by any specific values except the avoidance of pain. This simplicity of character mainly is a result of the stock character of the slave. Slaves take a variety of different positions, but most often they are either the trickster who dictates the plot or they are abused by others.⁴² The Dromios most certainly fall into the latter category. The humor of their position is sourced in their unflinching wit at their own misfortune, as Fitzgerald points out, “The slave’s wit derives from his experience of punishment and from the need to avoid it, or perhaps from the fact that he is inured enough to beating that he is prepared to risk his back.”⁴³ The Dromios’ simplicity is a font of comedic action.

While the two are overwhelmingly similar, there are some distinctions. The relationship between Antipholus of Syracuse and Dromio of Syracuse is the most developed of these master-servant pairings. Antipholus may frequently beat Dromio, but there is an interesting scene that humanizes their relationship. Following the dinner, Antipholus and Dromio spend sixty lines

⁴² Stace, “The Slaves of Plautus.”

⁴³ William Fitzgerald, “Slaves and Roman Comedy,” in *Cambridge Companion to Roman Comedy*, by Martin Dinter (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 119.

simply bantering about the kitchen wench who wants to marry Dromio (*Errors* 3.2.93-154). This reflects Egeon's statement that the Antipholi and the Dromios have been companions from birth, as they engage in a purely witty exchange as equals or brothers. Although there is a clear power dynamic, this scene shows the lighter side of their relationship as well as helps to develop the personality of both of these characters. Despite being nearly identical, there are some distinctions which serve to expand upon their individual personalities.

Messenio:

Messenio is the servant of Sosicles, and his objective is more interesting than in Shakespeare's adaptation. As he is not a twin, he is not involved in the mistaken identity crises that lead to the beatings. Instead, he is hoping to earn his freedom through helping out Sosicles, a goal which he eventually achieves. Messenio is a minor character in this show, especially comparatively to the Dromios, but he is a good example of the slave archetype in Roman New Comedy.

Stace delineates three major types of Plautine slaves and the roles that they fulfill in these comedies. The insolent tricksters are the architects of schemes and deceptions. They gain sympathy from the audience for their wit and imagination and are the driving forces of the comedic situations that arise. The deceived type are as they are named: they are deceived by others to create an environment in which comedy can arise. They are comical because of their low nature and made even more low by these situations. The third type is the special type. This is basically a catch-all for the major characters who do not fit in the other categories. These include Gripus, who is a cynic whose pathetic nature is a point of comedy. Truculentus protests against his master's immorality but doesn't fulfill a clear comic role. Stace defines two groups of minor

slaves. Protactic ones mainly involve exposition. They either explain the central conflict of the drama or bring suspenseful news that incites the onstage action. Plot developing ones, on the other hand, further the action to a slight extent.⁴⁴

Messenio is a minor slave and protactic one at that. Messenio is mainly present in the opening scenes, and he primarily is an interlocutor with which Sosicles can give his motivations and goals. He is not furthering the plot in many ways other than that, save for his interaction with Menaechmus.

Egeon:

The hapless Merchant of Syracuse is quite an antithetical character to the rest of the cast. He takes the place of the prologue providing exposition for the show, but, unlike his Plautine counterpart, he is an existentially despairing old man. The speaker of the prologue in the *Menaechmi* is jovial and witty. Egeon is beside himself with the loss of his entire family with no will to live. That is not to say that there is no comedy in Egeon; a dry, nihilistic old man provides plenty to laugh at. However, Egeon sets a distinctive tone for the show.

It has already been explored how Egeon's familial maturity contrasts with Antipholus of Ephesus, but there is another way in which Egeon serves as a foil, as Riehle describes, "The scope of the drama is given a greater presence, as the pressing sense of time of the father is contrasted with the leisurely approach of his son."⁴⁵ Syracusan Antipholus may be torn at his core without his brother, his twin, but he does not present the same forlorn, pessimistic view as his father. He gallivants about the town, seeing the stores and inns, accepting gifts on his brother's behalf, and bantering with Dromio of Syracuse. Meanwhile, Egeon is on death row,

⁴⁴ Stace, "The Slaves of Plautus."

⁴⁵ Riehle, "Shakespeare's Reception of Plautus Reconsidered," 126.

having already accepted his death. His time is almost up as the means to his release trounce about the town. Egeon is an example of a dutiful father and husband, certainly, but he also serves to create a deliberate contrast with his sons, adding a more dramatic layer to Shakespeare's adaptation.

Erotium:

Erotium is the courtesan of the *Menaechmi* and is a more prevalent character than her Shakespearean counterpart. Despite her prevalence, however, she is not a well-rounded character in the slightest. Her goals are simply monetary. She is the embodiment of Epidamnus. She lures customers in with sweet sounds and carnal pleasures in order to empty their wallets, as she puts it, *amanti amoenitas malo est, nobis lucro est. (Men. 355)*. / "For a lover loveliness leads to loss, for us, to profit."⁴⁶ She preys on the Menaechmus's failure of a marriage for wealth.

Erotium's lack of development does not mean her character is without significance. Plautus broadly does not attempt to create rounded characters in his works. Often times, it is easier to laugh at a lowly character, a morally bankrupt one, rather than a more developed one. We feel more empathy for a character when the playwright attempts to humanize them, and this empathy can cause a hesitancy to laugh. The transition from Erotium and the wife in the *Menaechmi* to the courtesan and Adriana in *The Comedy of Errors* represents a greater shift from hedonism and selfishness to family and community, a shift that is made clear by the character of Adriana.

⁴⁶ Plautus, *The Two Menaechmuses*, 461.

Adriana:

The wife of the resident twin is more significant in *The Comedy of Errors*. The addition of a name is good indicator of her raised importance, but it goes beyond that. The fact that she is the one who introduces the tension in her marriage with Ephesian Antipholus shifts our focus from wanton seeking of pleasure and reputation by the man of the house to the tangible effects of his absence. Adriana discusses with her sister Luciana,

Adriana: Why should their liberty than ours be more?

Luciana: Because their business still lies out o' door.

Adriana: Look, when I serve him so, he takes it ill.

Luciana: O, know he is the bridle of your will.

Adriana: There's none but asses will be bridled so.

(*Errors*, 2.1.10-14)

Adriana questions the establishment of marriage that permits her husband to act the way he does. She equates her expected position to that of a donkey. Luciana's invocation of Christian dogma, particularly Genesis, does give her a superior position in this debate, pontificating,

Why, headstrong liberty is lash'd with woe.
 There's nothing situate under heaven's eye
 But hath his bound in earth, in sea, in sky.
 The beasts, the fishes, and the winged fowls
 Are their males' subjects, and at their controls;
 Man, more divine, the master of all these,
 Lord of the wide world and wild wat'ry seas,
 Indued with intellectual sense and souls,
 Of more preeminence than fish and fowls,
 Are masters to their females, and their lords:
 Then let your will attend on their accords.

(*Errors*, 2.1.15-25)

Luciana brings up the divine right of mankind for mastery over nature to justify the treatment of women. To a primarily Christian audience, Luciana would certainly have the upper hand in this debate. However, the hypocrisy of this outlook is belied by Antipholus of Syracuse's wooing in which he claims to wish to yield to Luciana (3.2.40). In the true and honest love between

Syracusan Antipholus and Luciana, the husband yields. Adriana's position may not be clearly in the right in this interaction, but Luciana is not either.

Adriana also, despite her run in with the Abbess, has more validity given to her concerns. The Antipholi are sought by officers and the wicked Dr. Pinch alike (*Errors*, 4.4.90-120). Her desperation to find him and make sure that he is not in harm's way is utterly warranted in this instance.

Her position however does not go unchecked. Adriana is reprimanded by the Abbess for her "hounding" as the Abbess believes Adriana's constant berating to be the source of her husband's madness. The Abbess postulates thus, "And thereof came it that the man was mad. / The venom clamours of a jealous woman / Poisons more deadly than a mad dog's tooth." (*Errors*, 5.1.68-70). Whether this is meant to invalidate Adriana's position as Menaechmus's father-in-law does to the wife in the *Menaechmi* is not clear. The Abbess is a symbol of authority and spiritual acuity, but she is plainly wrong in this circumstance. She seeks to cure Antipholus's madness, but the audience knows that Antipholus of Syracuse is not mad at all. He's simply being mistaken for the wrong individual. The Abbess also claims that there is no reason for Adriana to be hounding her husband so much, but we are aware that the Antipholi are in serious danger. The winning side of the argument between Adriana and the Abbess is open to discussion; there is no clear winner. In elevating the role of Adriana, the issue of equality in marriage is put at the forefront, not dismissed as in the *Menaechmi*.

Characters in *The Comedy of Errors* tend to be more complex with manifold motivations and values that inform their actions, although at their core they function primarily in the same ways as their counterparts in the *Menaechmi*. The most significant difference between the characters is the emphasis on Adriana in *The Comedy of Errors* rather than Erotium in the

Menaechmi, as it fundamentally shifts the object of the play from desire and hedonism to marriage and family.

Idea

As previously mentioned, the idea of the show can be presented in four ways: super-objective, action summary, thesis, and theme. A super-objective must be in line with all characters, rather than just one. For *The Comedy of Errors*, this is closely tied with the objective of Antipholus of Syracuse: to heal family. For all major characters, this is an ultimate goal of theirs. The Syracusans want to reunite with their twins; Antipholus of Ephesus wants to get his wife to stop hounding him; Adriana wants to get her husband to stop his affair and to spend more time as her husband; Egeon wants to see his whole family once more. All these characters are attempting to fix their skewed family dynamics.

The *Menaechmi* on the other hand does not focus nearly as much on the dynamic of the family. The super-objective of this play is: to seek pleasure. Sosicles wants to get as much as he can out of Epidamnus before fleeing; Menaechmus wants to enjoy the pleasures of Erotium's house; Peniculus wants to feast; Messenio wants to be freed from his servitude. All of these characters act with pleasure in mind over their families.

An action summary would look similar for these shows. Both are about the search of a twin for his other half. This similarity does not serve to delineate these scripts, so it is not as fruitful as other methods may be for the purposes of this cross analysis. Certain productions may choose to highlight this expression of the idea, action summary, but it is not the idea that we will seek in trying to highlight what is distinct about these two plays.

A thesis statement does indeed delineate these two shows, but a thesis statement is more subject to subjectivity than other forms of the idea. For *The Comedy of Errors*, the thesis statement may be that family is paramount. A contemporary production might use this theme as a springboard by which to showcase flaws in the society of the play in order to expose flaws in the society of the 21st century, but this mode of expression is more reflective of a particular production rather than the script itself. For the *Menaechmi*, it is more difficult to come up with a thesis statement, as thesis statements tend to lend themselves to social commentary which is not the foremost concern of Plautus's. A thesis statement is not an ideal expression of the main ideas of these plays.

A theme is similar to an action summary, but more reflective of the characters' interiority, the thinking that guides their goals. It is a summary of the internal action of the show, whereas action summary is focused more so on external action. A theme for *The Comedy of Errors* could be "a quest for actualization through others." Antipholus of Syracuse certainly seeks his brother for his own existential worth. His brother and sister-in-law are also trying to find fulfillment in their relationship with each other. Egeon also needs family to feel a sense of self-worth. The theme of *Menaechmi*, on the other hand, is "a yearning for freedom and pleasure." Menaechmus wants freedom from his wife so he can gain pleasures from Erotium. Messenio wants freedom from his servitude. Sosicles will never be free until he is reunited with his brother. While this does serve to delineate the shows, it is more subject to subjectivity than super-objective is.

The supremacy of the super-objective is also reflected in how the main idea is expressed in both shows. Idea can be expressed in three main ways: diction, plot, and character. Both plays convey their idea in the last of these—character. The plot's primary purpose is as an engine of

the comedy at work, not to convey a perspective to the audience, and, while diction certainly supports the ideas expressed in character, it is not generative of ideas. In *The Comedy of Errors*, Luciana gives a long speech on the importance of love and the duty of the husband, while Egeon's opening prologue gives insight into the importance of family. The father-in-law of Menaechmus, Menaechmus himself, and Peniculus all speak on pleasure and liberty. These longer speeches stand out from the rest of the script and highlight the relationships between characters, not the relationships between individuals and their society nor the internal and external actions of the characters. Characters, and specifically the relationships between these characters, are the primary means by which the script conveys idea. The disintegration of the characters' rationality when interacting with one another and the loss and anger that comes with those episodes of mistaken identity highlight the goals and motivations of our characters and how easily they can be lost in everyday annoyances.

The distinction between the ideas between these two plays is emblematic of a shift in comedy. Farce is not focused on social change. It is a genre that excels at entertainment rather than didactics. Shakespeare begins to take the fundamental, farcical engines of comedy, but deploys them in a completely new direction: social commentary. Being one of his earliest works, he does this only subtly in *The Comedy of Errors*, but, as he develops his unique comedic style, he introduces more tragic and dramatic elements to pursue this direction.

As we draw close to understanding the key differences in these two works, we draw close to identifying what the styles of these two playwrights are. Mood and Atmosphere are the closest elements of a script to the style of a playwright. In fact, they may be understood as the style of a play. By analyzing these we will be able to understand clearly what exactly Shakespeare adapted from Plautus in his rendition of this tale of mistaken identity.

Chapter 3: Mood and Atmosphere

Evaluating mood and atmosphere is our best approach at getting at the style of a play. These two elements help us understand what an audience feels as they experience the scenes and meet these characters. If we were to consider the six Aristotelean elements, these two aspects would fall under Song.⁴⁷ Although Greek Tragedy did most definitely have music in it, this term refers also to the internal rhythms of the script, whether that be in the actual meter or in tempo. Tempo is a measure of information over time. When we get a lot of information in a short scene, we would call that a scene with high tempo. Song is meant to convey a feeling to an audience, and mood and atmosphere do likewise. A slow-moving show, such as *Waiting for Godot* creates a sense of purposelessness and lack of direction, while the triumphant finale to Act 2 of a musical would convey a sense of determination and power. Mood and atmosphere are key in accessing what makes a play unique.

Mood refers to the feeling of a character, the total emotive expression that the audience receives from that character. Atmosphere refers to the feelings evoked by a scene or even by an entire play.⁴⁸ The mood is born solely from the characters themselves and the relationships they have. A character's objectives and personality define a niche for them in the minds of the audience; the audience will expect certain actions and reactions to the stimuli that befall them based on their general perception of the individual. Mood informs the atmosphere of the show as well. Atmosphere may come from the given circumstances, the plot, and the idea primarily, but an individual character's mood can be powerful enough to affect the atmosphere of a scene or even an entire play. Atmosphere is a summation of all the forces at work in a script. A city plagued by war produces a significantly different atmosphere than one enjoying unheard-of

⁴⁷ Thomas, *Script Analysis for Actors, Directors, and Designers*, 271.

⁴⁸ Thomas, 288.

prosperity. In one, uncertainty and distrust are rampant as survival is not always guaranteed. In the other, perhaps higher pursuits and existential purpose plague the minds of our characters and create the conflict from which drama is born. As it is a source for understanding atmosphere, we will first discuss mood.

Mood

Our two plays begin with two different introductions. One is delivered by Egeon and the other by an unnamed narrator. Egeon is a character of utter despair. He is melancholic to the point of being suicidal, as he resigns himself to death without the slightest resistance. His depression at the loss of his wife and son leaves him unwilling to tell the story of their separation, even in order to lessen his sentence. For a comedy, the show begins with a sense of utter hopelessness and dread that contrasts both with the rest of the characters on stage and with the Plautine counterpart. The narrator of the prologue there is jovial and sarcastic. He sets up an air of wordplay and points to the absurdity of this situation. One such instance of this comedy can be found in the end of his speech,

si quis quid uestrum Epidamnum curari sibi
uelit, audacter imperato et dicito,
sed ita ut det unde curari id possit sibi.
nam nisi qui argentum dederit, nugas egerit
qui dederit . . . magis maiores nugas egerit.

(*Men.*, 50-55)

“if anyone of you wants any business sorted out in Epidamnus, let him command me boldly and speak out, but in such a way that he gives the money from which this business can be sorted out; if anyone doesn’t give me the money, he’s behaving like a fool. But if he does give me the money . . . he’s behaving even more like a fool.”⁴⁹

The speaker of this prologue sets up the distrustful nature of Epidamnus, where someone is always trying to rob you blind, while also pointing out the complete ridiculousness of the

⁴⁹ Plautus, *The Two Menaemuses*, 432.

situations that are about to unfold. The differences in these two prologues will come back as we define the atmosphere of these two shows.

Antipholus of Syracuse starkly contrasts his father, Egeon, in that he is quite leisurely approaching the town. As Lyne puts it, “The scope of the drama is given a greater presence, as the pressing sense of time of the father is contrasted with the leisurely approach of his son.”⁵⁰ He is in no rush to search for his brother, while his father is on death row. He is an idealist as we see in his love of Luciana and in his existential attachment to his twin, but easily distracted by the gifts and utterings of those around him. He banters with his slave, Dromio, for long stretches of time about the silliest and basest of topics and enjoys the feasts and gifts and praise he receives from the people of the town. This Antipholus is a true idealist with his head in the clouds, subject to influences of those around him. His carefree mood juxtaposed with the severity of the surrounding circumstances creates a comedy of opposites.

Antipholus of Ephesus on the other hand is a prideful and temperamental figure. His reputation is grandiose in the town, and he relishes in the company of those who owe him and give him praise. His pride is such that he cannot stand to be monitored so closely by his wife. Adriana’s interrogation is an attempt to subvert his authority as the man of the house, something he does not stand for. Antipholus of Ephesus is an accomplished, but prideful character. His many successful exploits and ventures make him a remarkable figure in his community, but his pride causes rifts in his personal relationships. The mood his character invokes is a volatile one. There is no way to gauge how extreme the characters’ reaction will be to the interrogations of his wife or the accusations of the other Ephesians.

⁵⁰ Raphael Lyne, “Shakespeare, Plautus, and the Discovery of New Comic Space,” in *Shakespeare and the Classics*, ed. Charles Martindale and A. B. Taylor (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 126, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511483769.008>.

Menaechmus and Sosicles are much more like one another than their Shakespearean counterparts. They both are hedonistic, base pleasure seekers. While Sosicles does seek his other half, he is ultimately caught up in the material pleasures that fall into his lap. He does not care that he is cheating anyone or taking advantage of another. He does right by himself first and foremost. Menaechmus is the same way. He does not take advantage of his wife for his own pride, but rather for the sake of entering the house of Erotium. These two characters are base and hedonistic; they do not invite a strong mood of any sort. The audience anticipates every action of these simpletons, but their depravity makes the turns that happen against them even more comedic.

The Dromios are clever and witty, despite their low position. Stace describes this as a source of comedy as the juxtaposition of cleverness and low social rank is absurd, it subverts our expectations with its contradictory nature.⁵¹ And the audience senses the unexpected mood of these characters and draws comedic value from that strangeness. There are more complexities to these characters than simple slaves. Dromio of Syracuse had a definitive relationship with Antipholus of Syracuse as they engage in erudite wordplay and banter. We don't get any such personal interactions between Dromio of Ephesus and Antipholus of Ephesus, but they likely have a similar relationship. Messenio is just as clever as his Shakespearean counterparts. Through his shrewdness, he endears himself to the audience, and when he earns his freedom at the end of this play, we are sympathetic to his victory. These characters are shrewd, yet lowly.

The Duke is another figure of important presence in *The Comedy of Errors* through his treatment of Egeon, we see that he is a measured and just ruler. He cannot abandon his laws, but he does show mercy to a hurt person. The presence of his authority in the show is critical. The

⁵¹ Stace, "The Slaves of Plautus," 66.

audience has hope that, although all might seem lost, this just and fair arbiter might resolve these issues. The Duke, Solinus, is the pinnacle of justice: he enacts mercy when it seems necessary, but still maintains the edicts of order. Solinus's authoritative mood shifts the scenes for which he is a part towards more serious and orderly atmosphere, contrasting the surreal and comedic core of the show.

Atmosphere

The differences between the moods of these characters forms the foundation for the differences between atmosphere in the shows. In the first scene alone, Shakespeare differentiates his play from the Plautine original by creating an atmosphere of tension. The play begins as a tragedy might with the looming death of Egeon; dread fills the air and despair is all that we receive from the sympathetic father. This atmosphere is contradicted immediately in the next scene by the nonchalant attitude of his son who seeks a nice supper in this grand new town, unaware of his father's fate. This juxtaposition of light-heartedness and grave consequences enforces a comedy of opposites, and such blatant, ridiculous contradiction incites the audience to laughter.

As the cases of mistaken identity arise, the characters begin to question their reality. How can it be that the Dromio they interacted not even five minutes ago doesn't recall the conversation they just had? Why is it that they are being greeted warmly and intimately by people they've never seen in their lives? The characters are thrown into an absurd world. They must question everything around them. Albert Camus describes the feeling of absurdity saying, "But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger... This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly

the feeling of absurdity."⁵² The world of these characters is devoid of all logic and all sense, and, for the audience members, the dramatic irony in combination with the exaggerated confusion of the characters serve to create a humorous environment.

However, this absurd atmosphere does not remain lighthearted. Antipholus of Ephesus is not the same man as Antipholus of Syracuse, and the introduction of the former in the third act marks a shift in the show from low stakes errors to more tense events with real consequences. Ephesian Antipholus's temperamental and volatile attitude contrasts the inanity of the Syracusan twins and sets in course a sequence of events that puts the two of them in harms way. Ephesian Antipholus involves the courtesan and Angelo into the conflict, leading to the involvement of the officers and the scrupulous Doctor Pinch.

As the tense atmosphere continues to compound, there is no hope in sight. The reentrance of Egeon for execution is the peak of their woes, bifold in that it is rock bottom, utterly devoid of restitution, but also the precursor to a happy resolution. Egeon's looming execution is surpassed by his ability to inform the rest of the characters on the cause of the mistaken identity. From there the tense atmosphere unwinds rapidly, but not to the same place as before. The levity of the misadventures of Syracusan Antipholus is not returned to; the reunion is given the import that both Egeon and Syracusan placed on it with their existential longing. Shakespeare has combined the contrasting frivolity and dramatic tension that the show has alternated between in this final stage picture.

The *Menaechmi*, as one might expect given the trajectory of the previous chapters, is more constant. Arthos describes the world of Plautus as one controlled by both fate and the

⁵² Albert Camus, *Myth of Sisyphus*, 1942.

natural inclination of human beings toward good.⁵³ Every character on stage has basic and simple motivations. Plautus isn't attempting to create a striking atmosphere with his deployment of characters. Rather, the depravity of these characters leads them further into trouble. The characters are at the mercy of fate. Without hard scene or act divisions, the twins always miss each other by mere moments. This tension is what makes the play engaging, as Hardin demonstrates: "Whether in drama or narrative, a plot always takes shape as a result of negotiations between luck and contingency, between happenings by 'hap' or chance and those determined by a plan of events causally linked. Since its Greek beginnings, New Comedy especially depended on the tension between chance and human ingenuity"⁵⁴ If an atmosphere were to be ascribed, it would be one where happenstance holds all power. Whether these characters succeed or fail is entirely up to fate. The winding path that fate takes to lead these characters to a peaceful resolution is how the audience is engaged.

Plautus is quintessential farce. He does not dabble in tragic elements in the slightest, focusing fully on setting up comedic and absurd situations for the sake of comedy. This focus is reflected in the atmosphere on stage. Shakespeare blurs the line between tragedy and drama, slipping grave consequence into the mix of mistaken identity. He constructs an atmospheric arc, building from levity to gravity up to the climax and then descending into the order of the reunion at the end. This change from Plautus is quintessentially Shakespearean, and it serves the other purposes of this adaptation that have been outlined in the previous sections.

⁵³ John Arthos, "Shakespeare's Transformation of Plautus," *Comparative Drama* 1, no. 4 (1967): 247.

⁵⁴ Richard F. Hardin, "The Renaissance of Plautine Comedy and the Varieties of Luck in Shakespeare and Other Plotters," *Mediterranean Studies* 16 (2007): 143.

Conclusion

Shakespeare alters and adapts Plautine conventions for his own purposes in *The Comedy of Errors*. These purposes revolve around presenting, exploring, and analyzing familial structure and societal understandings of those structures. The execution of Egeon is emblematic of this shift, not only placing a foil against the frivolous Antipholus of Syracuse from which comedy is most assuredly gleaned, but also confining the script to a strict timeline with deadly consequences should the complications not be unraveled. Egeon also embodies the duties of the husband and the role of the family in society, making him a compliment to Antipholus of Ephesus who is devoid of fatherly maturity. From the start, *The Comedy of Errors* has invoked a more dramatic circumstance in which it has set out to demonstrate the flaws in our two central characters.

In the *Menaechmus* the wife is foolish, unnamed, and berated by most every character in the show. While these characters doing the berating are not morally lofty characters, the sidelining of the wife shifts focus from the defunct marriage to the simple pleasure seeking of our characters. Contrast this to the role of Adriana and her sister Luciana. While Adriana has much the same position as the wife, she is given much more prevalence and voice. Her position is not utterly devoid of sympathy as in the *Menaechmi*, but rather is tempered through the arguments of Luciana and the Abbess. Luciana, on the other hand, is a noble idealist whose views on marriage serve to echo those of Egeon. She restates the matter *The Comedy of Errors* is so fixated on: duty and the importance of family.

The characters are key to understanding what these two shows are about, that is why the super-objective, the ultimate goals of the characters, so clearly delineates them. Pleasure and basic goods are the goal of each and every character in the *Menaechmi*, while in the *Comedy of*

Errors, our characters are existentially incomplete without other individuals, and so they seek it through the reestablishment of family. Antipholi, Egeon, Dromios, and the Abbess all yearn to be reunited at last. It is what they need for their own actualization. Adriana wants her husband to be present and with her, not canoodling around the port with courtesans and goldsmiths. Luciana wants to have a husband and family of her own. Her idealistic view of marriage causes her to desire it to the most extreme sense.

This is not the only example of Shakespeare experimenting with and defying genre expectations. Shakespeare divulged from the unities of time, place, and action. His most famous revenge tragedy, *Hamlet*, sits in stark contrast to its contemporaries, offering a revenger who is not suited to the job at all. Shakespeare anticipates new forms of theatre that become predominant in future eras, such as how *Merry Wives of Windsor* resembles the later Restoration Comedy in England. In adapting Plautus, Shakespeare adds another, more dramatic layer. This analysis goes to demonstrate that not only was Shakespeare preoccupied with innovating and subverting genre in some of his later works, but this feature can be found even in his earliest works. Certainly, these base characters are to be laughed at and ridiculed for their unfortunate circumstances, but, ultimately, they are multidimensional people who have a deep desire for the actualization that can only be found for them in family. In this way, he subverts the genre of farce in order to more effectively comment on the social structure of familial duty and marriage.

Bibliography

- Arthos, John. "Shakespeare's Transformation of Plautus." *Comparative Drama* 1, no. 4 (1967): 239–53.
- Barber, C. L. "Shakespearian Comedy in the Comedy of Errors." *College English* 25, no. 7 (1964): 493–97.
- Bates, Catherine. "Love and Courtship." In *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Comedy*, by Alexander Leggatt. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Bevington, David. "'The Comedy of Errors' as Early Experimental Shakespeare." *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 56, no. 3 (2003): 13–25.
- Creaser, John. "Forms of Confusion." In *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Comedy*, by Alexander Leggatt. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Fitzgerald, William. "Slaves and Roman Comedy." In *Cambridge Companion to Roman Comedy*, by Martin Dinter. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2019.
- Franko, George Fredric. "Ensemble Scenes in Plautus." *The American Journal of Philology* 125, no. 1 (2004): 27–59.
- Hardin, Richard F. "The Renaissance of Plautine Comedy and the Varieties of Luck in Shakespeare and Other Plotters." *Mediterranean Studies* 16 (2007): 143–56.
- Kaaber, Lars. *Staging Shakespeare's Hamlet: A Director's Interpreting Text through Performance*. Studies in Performance: V. 1. Edwin Mellen Press, 2005.
- Kallendorf, Craig. "Shakespeare and Classical Comedy: The Influence of Plautus and Terence." *Renaissance Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (March 22, 1997): 270.
- Lowe, J. C. B. "Plautus' Choruses." *Rheinisches Museum Für Philologie* 133, no. 3/4 (1990): 274–97.
- Lyne, Raphael. "Shakespeare, Plautus, and the Discovery of New Comic Space." In *Shakespeare and the Classics*, edited by Charles Martindale and A. B. Taylor, 122–38. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Manuwald, Gesine. "Plautus and Terence in Their Roman Contexts." In *Cambridge Companion to Roman Comedy*, by Martin Dinter. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2019.
- Martindale, Charles, and A. B. Taylor. *Shakespeare and the Classics*. Cambridge, 2004.
- Miola, Robert S.. "Roman Comedy." In *Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Comedy*, by Alexander Leggatt. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

- Miola, Robert S. *Shakespeare and Classical Comedy : The Influence of Plautus and Terence*. Clarendon Press, 1994.
- Morrison, James V. "Surrealism, Politeness Theory, and Comic Twins in Plautus and Shakespeare." In *Engaging Classical Texts in the Contemporary World : From Narratology to Reception*, by Louise H. Pratt and C. M Sampson. University of Michigan Press, 2018.
- Orgel, Stephen. "Shakespeare Imagines a Theater." *Poetics Today* 5, no. 3 (1984): 549–61.
- Panayotakis, Costas. "Native Italian Drama and Its Influence on Plautus." In *Cambridge Companion to Roman Comedy*, by Martin Dinter. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2019.
- Perry, Curtis. *Shakespeare and Senecan Tragedy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.
- R.A. Foakes and William Shakespeare. "The Comedy of Errors." In *Arden Shakespeare Second Series*, edited by R.A. Foakes. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1968.
- Riehle, Wolfgang. "Shakespeare's Reception of Plautus Reconsidered." In *Shakespeare and the Classics*, edited by Charles Martindale and A. B. Taylor, 109–21. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Robert B. Heilman. "Farce Transformed: Plautus, Shakespeare, and Unamuno." *Comparative Literature* 31, no. 2 (April 1, 1979): 113–23.
- Shakespeare, William, G. Blakemore Evans, and J. J. M. Tobin. *The Riverside Shakespeare : The Complete Works*. Second edition. Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 1997.
- Stace, C. "The Slaves of Plautus." *Greece & Rome* 15, no. 1 (1968): 64–77.
- Thomas, James. *Script Analysis for Actors, Directors, and Designers*. Fifth. Waltam, WA: Focal Press, 1992.