The Comedy of Errors

by William Shakespeare

a National Arts Centre English Theatre Company / Centaur Theatre Company (Montreal) coproduction

Study Guide

THE NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE ENGLISH THEATRE
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Artistic Director, English Theatre

OTTAWA CITIZEN

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This Study Guide was written and researched by Jane Moore for the National Arts Centre, English Theatre, December 2009. It may be used solely for educational purposes.

The National Arts Centre English Theatre values the feedback of teachers on the content and format of its Study Guides. We would appreciate your comments on past Study Guides, on this current one, or suggestions on ways to improve future Study Guides. Comments may be directed to Martina Kuska either by email at mkuska@nac-cna.ca or by fax at (613) 943-1401.
# Note to teachers

This Study Guide contains articles on *The Comedy of Errors* and its background, an interview with the director of this production, Peter Hinton, as well as some suggested activities for students in Drama or English classes. Teachers should choose whatever topics they and their classes will find useful or fun.

On both NAC websites may be found a Shakespeare backgrounder. See http://www.artsalive.ca/pdf/eth/activities/shakespeare_overview.pdf or http://www.nac-cna.ca/pdf/eth/shakespeare_an_overview.pdf.

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Who Helped Put the Production Together?

Cast
SOLINUS, Duke of Ephesus................................................................. Paul RAINVILLE
AEGEON, a merchant of Syracuse...................................................... Albert MILLAIRE
ANTIPHOLUS of Ephesus  } twin brothers and sons to ........................... Andreas APERGIS
ANTIPHOLUS of Syracuse  } Aegon and Aemelia................................... Marcel JEANNIN
DROMIO of Ephesus  } twin brothers and attendants to ....................... Debra KIRSHENBAUM
DROMIO of Syracuse  } each of the Antipholuses ............................... Danielle DESORMEAX
ADRIANA, wife of Antipholus of Ephesus......................................... Danette MacKAY
LUCIANA, her sister............................................................................... Leni PARKER
The ABBESS of Ephesus ..................................................................... Clare COULTER
LUCE, a servant to Adriana .................................................................. Adrienne MEI IRVING
BALTHAZAR, a merchant .................................................................... Stephen LAWSON
ANGELO, a goldsmith ........................................................................ Braulio ELICER
DR. PINCH, a psychic investigator ...................................................... Paul RAINVILLE
A Courtesan.......................................................................................... Stephen LAWSON
Officers of the Law........................................................................... Braulio ELICER and Adrienne MEI IRVING
A Merchant, to whom Angelo is a debtor........................................... Adrienne MEI IRVING
Travellers, Revellers........................................................................... The Company

Creative Team
Written by: William SHAKESPEARE
Directed by: Peter HINTON
Set and Costume Design by: Eo SHARP
Lighting Design by: Robert THOMSON
Sound Design by: Troy SLOCUM

Stage Management
Stage Manager: Stéfanie SÉGUIN
Assistant Stage Manager: Todd BRICKER
Excerpts from an interview with director Peter Hinton

Why did you choose this play?
It’s always been one of my very favourite plays of Shakespeare. Often the play is described as a farce, and it’s critiqued as being an immature work, lacking some thematic and poetic qualities that more mature comedies like *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It* possess. It’s an incredible original and disciplined piece of writing, and within it lie the seeds of many rich and full themes that Shakespeare continues to write about throughout his lifetime.

The idea of twins is very beautifully realized, both comically and dramatically, and it leads to the theme of reunion. Reunion is one of Shakespeare’s most magnificent themes and his reunion scenes are remarkably moving. We realize how closely comedy and tragedy live, side by side. The first act of a Shakespearean comedy is surprisingly without a lot of laughs. These plays are comedies in terms of humour and absurdity and foibles and funny lines. They have great emotional richness because they demonstrate or dramatize what we might call hope.

What are your challenges with this play?
The play contains many of Paul’s (see p.18) references to the Ephesians - which would have been a really big comic joke itself in 1593. Ephesus, in our modern day Turkey, was the centre of the world, where east met west, and it was also where the temple of Diana was, so there was a female goddess as its deity. It was known as a wild, anarchic, lawless place. And so Paul’s words are about how husbands should treat their wives, how wives should obey their husbands, how children should be reared, what respect children owe their parents, how servants and slaves should be managed, how people should respect their elders, all the rules of social order and balance and hierarchy.

This comedy is set in the most anarchic place in the world. We are aware of two very different places, Syracuse and Ephesus, and we have to translate that. Syracuse is more traditionally male, logical, a place of business and order. Ephesus is female, nighttime, unorganized, chaotic, and more feminine. I tried to think of a way that best expressed these two ideas, and thought of our own Canadian two solitudes, the division of Quebec and English Canada, exemplified, for example, by Toronto and Montreal. Given that we were doing this play with the Centaur Theatre in Montreal, Montreal felt like a really great inspiration for Ephesus. Montreal’s joie de vivre, attention to pleasure, and nightlife is very Ephesian. Syracuse is like Toronto - very business-like, a bit more buttoned up, careful to follow the letter of the law, that sort of thing. And so that’s our point of inspiration for this production.

The production is modern dress and the modern dress not only makes it more accessible, but also really allows the comic opportunities of the play to work. A key part of comedy is recognition. If you were to do it in 1590s costume, it would all appear a bit foreign. Adriana and Antipholus have been married for seven
years. They have to really contend with whether, and how, their marriage is going to work. I really wanted the audience to recognize those people. The modern dress is a way to allow the recognition factor to work.

And yet it is inspired by Montreal. Montreal is an inspiration for the language, the style, the set, and the qualities of Ephesus too. There are references in the set to the city.

**Design process? Designers?**
Eo Sharp designs the set and costumes. Over the years we’ve developed a language and an aesthetic. We begin by reading the play out loud together, talk about each scene, look at images that feel like the play, concrete things and very abstract qualities and feelings, and we try to create a world in which the drama can take place. *The Comedy of Errors* needs an upper middle class world, where people love things shiny and new, where a husband’s trying to buy jewelry to make up for his behaviour, it’s all commerce. We ended up looking at a lot of stainless steel fridges. What was once a designer element people now expect for their own house, and so the whole set is made out of brushed aluminum, walls and floors - it’s like a mirror, or the sea that parted the twins. The set has a series of sliding doors and mirrors, like a funhouse – you’re never quite sure what’s going to pop out of the wall next, what’s around the next corner. It’s a really beautiful design. Robert Thompson is going to be the lighting designer, and the lighting will have fluidity and an element of surprise.

**How will you handle the beatings on stage?**
What was funny then isn’t necessarily funny now. History is hard to translate. There must be beatings. The violence tells you something about the Antipholus boys. Antipholus of Syracuse is very heady, and Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus are all about the body. The violence shows they’re out of balance. United, they are in balance, and there are no more beatings. So the violence is important to the play, not just for Three Stooges humour, but also to show that there is no order within the two sets of twins when they are separate. It’s so funny when people say there is violence in the play – we live in such a violent age. I just think the violence tells the truth.

*Is there anything else you want people to take away with them?*
Shakespeare’s age had people from all over the world living together and figuring out how they would be as a city – the late 16th century as a really exciting and dynamic time. I think the play is about an illegal immigrant, trying to find his family in a new world where cultures and commerce are the name of the game, and it feels very contemporary. So I am really hoping in the production that it’s a world we recognize, that this production invites us to consider our own age in a new way.
The Comedy of Errors – a Modern, Canadian Production

Expect to see a different The Comedy of Errors. Given an up-to-date treatment with modern-day dress and sensibilities, and set in Montreal today, it plays with a decidedly contemporary take on fashion and mores.

In this production, our Anglo-Canadian “Toronto the Good,” with its stuffy values of good behaviour and stolidity, represents the ancient Syracuse of the play. In contrast, our Franco-Canadian Montreal, representing ancient Ephesus, flames with fun and naughtiness. Ephesus, according to the Apostle Paul, and to the Elizabethans, was in need of order to tame its chaos.

This production accents the Québécois values of marriage and family above all else, and the life of the “bon vivant,” the welcoming of friends, and the enjoyment of good wine, good food and good conversation. This chaotic world of Montreal is an exciting, accepting, feminine world that comes alive at night. It questions women’s roles, plays with gender, and highlights aspects of the physical Montreal we all recognize.

Marriage is a central theme of this production. Today’s society wrestles with some of the same concerns that we see in the play. What is a good marriage? How much freedom is there for each partner? What are society’s expectations of each partner? The unmarried Luciana in The Comedy Errors gives us this picture of Elizabethan marriage, as she advises her sister:

- A man is master of his liberty.
- Time is their master, and, when they see time,
- They’ll go or come...
- Men ... Are masters to their females, and their lords:
- Then let your will attend on their accords.

Katharina, new wife in Shakespeare’s The Taming of the Shrew, agrees, at the end of the play, with these roles of husband and wife:

- Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper
- Thy head, thy sovereign; one that cares for thee
- And for thy maintenance commits his body
- To painful labour both by sea and land,
- To watch the night in storms, the day in cold,
- Whilst thou liest warm at home, secure and safe;
- And craves no other tribute at thy hands
- But love, fair looks and true obedience.

Must women stay home and tend the house, while men travel the world in pursuit of a living and excitement? Adriana, in The Comedy of Errors, does not think so:

- Why should their liberty than ours be more?

How long can a marriage last? Why do we need marriage? These questions resonate as this Montreal The Comedy of Errors takes a deep look at what makes a good marriage - then and now.
Introduction

Written in 1593-94, *The Comedy of Errors* is one of Shakespeare’s earliest plays, and one of his first comedies. The play was first performed at Gray’s Inn, as Christmas fun for lawyers, on December 28, 1594. Although it is often described as a farce, the predicaments the characters find themselves in are serious, and all too human.

The play is built around the idea of loss of identity, and mistaken identity. Shakespeare builds his plot error by error, while his characters’ bewilderment escalates, and so does the hilarity. Finally all conflicts are resolved, with reconciliation, reunion and joy.

The main elements of Shakespeare’s mature comedies and romances are to be found in this early play. Although he borrows his basic plot line from the Roman playwright, Plautus, he changes that play by adding plot devices, characters and romance, magic, mistaken identity and themes that he will use again and again.

Shakespeare probably knew that British plays had been a mix of styles, social classes, Biblical stories and everyday life. He read, watched and acted in these plays. His creativity, sensitivity to the human condition, and keen sense of fun helped him hone his skills, as he learned to recognize human nature and command plot, language and poetry.

Shipwrecks

England is surrounded by water, and England in Shakespeare’s time was a trading nation, which also initiated great exploration. The seas were, and still are, full of danger, and to a merchant might mean tremendous loss- of life, of family, of goods. We see in his plays that the dangers of the sea are often in Shakespeare’s mind.

*The Comedy of Errors, Pericles, The Tempest, The Merchant of Venice, and Twelfth Night* are all plays with shipwrecks.

The United Nations estimates that there are over three million wrecked ships on the ocean floor. The most common causes are still storms and bad weather, poor navigation, faulty equipment, unsafe design of the ship, and fires on board.
The Play

Plot Synopsis
When Egeon, a merchant from Syracuse, comes to Ephesus, he breaks a law that prohibits business and travel between Ephesus and Syracuse. He is arrested and told he must pay 1000 marks to save himself. He does not have the money. When Solinus, Duke of Ephesus, asks Egeon why he is traveling in Ephesus, Egeon explains.

Twenty-five years earlier, Egeon’s wife, Emilia, gave birth to twin boys. Soon the family bought another pair of twin boys, born “that same hour,” as servants for their own sons. They gave both sons the same name, Antipholus, and both servants the same name, Dromio. Years later, the family was shipwrecked. Egeon, one twin son and his servant were rescued by one ship; Emilia, the other son and his servant were rescued by a second ship. Eighteen years later, Egeon’s son, Antipholus of Syracuse, with his servant, Dromio, left Syracuse to find his lost twin. After five years, when Antipholus and Dromio had not returned, Egeon left to look for his son. On his way home, after a fruitless search, he was arrested in Ephesus (where he is now), and condemned to death.

Duke Solinus mercifully grants Egeon a reprieve, and gives Egeon until sunset to borrow the money he needs to buy his freedom. Meanwhile, unknown to any of the other characters, Antipholus of Syracuse is arriving in Ephesus with his slave, Dromio of Syracuse. The audience discovers that Antipholus of Ephesus is already living in the city with his wife, Adriana, and the other slave, Dromio of Ephesus.

We are ready for problems and for comedy. The “errors” begin immediately and increase throughout the play. Antipholus of Syracuse meets Dromio of Ephesus on the street and beats him soundly because the servant tries to get Antipholus (the wrong master) to go home with him for dinner. Adriana locks her real husband, Antipholus of Ephesus, out of their home. His confused twin, Antipholus of Syracuse, is already there and she believes he is her husband. When Angelo, the goldsmith, asks Antipholus of Ephesus for payment for a gold chain he ordered, Antipholus refuses to pay, saying he did not receive it. (The chain was actually delivered to his surprised twin.) Angelo has Antipholus of Ephesus arrested for non-payment. Dromio of Syracuse is accused of being responsible, and is beaten by Antipholus of Ephesus.

As the situation grows worse and worse, and everyone believes that everyone else is totally mad, Duke Solinus prepares for Egeon’s execution. Antipholus of Ephesus goes to the duke, and demands that he intercede for him. Egeon then sees his son and thinks himself saved; but, of course, Antipholus of Ephesus is the wrong son, and does not recognize Egeon. Finally, Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse take refuge in an abbey. When they leave they see the other two twins, and Egeon. Egeon has suddenly found not just the son he was searching for, but both of his sons. Suddenly, the abbess reveals that she too has been living in disguise, and is actually Egeon’s wife, Emilia. The reunions are complete. Egeon is freed, all embrace, and all ends in happiness.
Characters

**Solinus, Duke of Ephesus:** Solinus is a noble duke, who condemns Egeon in order to comply with the law.

**Egeon:** A merchant from Syracuse, Egeon is married to Emilia, and is the father of twin boys, both named Antipholus. He is sentenced to death for traveling in the hostile city of Ephesus while looking for his lost son.

**Antipholus of Ephesus:** The son of Egeon and Emilia, and twin brother of Antipholus of Syracuse, this Antipholus ended up in Ephesus after being separated from his father and brother in a shipwreck many years before, and is now an established citizen there.

**Dromio of Ephesus:** The slave of Antipholus of Ephesus and twin of Dromio of Syracuse, this Dromio lives unhappily with his master in Ephesus.

**Antipholus of Syracuse:** The son of Egeon and Emilia, and twin brother of Antipholus of Ephesus, this Antipholus, who was saved with his father after the shipwreck, has recently set out to find his lost twin, and has arrived in Ephesus.

**Dromio of Syracuse:** The slave of Antipholus of Syracuse and twin of Dromio of Ephesus, this Dromio is traveling with his master when the play begins.

**Angelo:** A goldsmith, Angelo has been commissioned to make a gold chain for Antipholus of Syracuse to give to his wife, Adriana. He delivers the chain to the wrong Antipholus.

**Adriana:** Anxious wife of Antipholus of Ephesus, Adriana mistakes Antipholus of Syracuse for her husband.

**Luciana:** Sister to Adriana, and a foil to her. Luciana is unmarried, and believes that patience is a wife’s obligation. Antipholus of Syracuse falls in love with her.

**Emilia:** The long-lost wife of Egeon, Emilia became an abbess at Ephesus after the shipwreck. She offers refuge to her son, Antipholus of Syracuse without knowing who he is.

**Doctor Pinch:** A doctor/scientist, Pinch is a quack who looks after Antipholus of Ephesus by suggesting that he and his slave be bound and laid in some dark room to exorcise the “fiend” within them.

**Luce:** The wife of Dromio of Ephesus and servant of Adriana, Luce is also called Nell.

**Balthazar:** A merchant.

**The Courtesan** dines with Antipholus of Ephesus, and wants him to return her ring.
Glossary

- **Doom** - sentence (1.1.2)
- **Outrage** - violence (1.1.6)
- **guilders** - Dutch coins worth about forty cents (1.1.8)
- **intestine jars** - internal conflicts (1.1.11)
- **marks** - foreign money, originally eight ounces of gold or silver (1.1.21)
- **doubtful** - dreadful (1.1.68)
- **amain** - with full speed (1.1.92)
- **disannul** - cancel (1.1.144)
- **dinner time** - lunchtime 1-2-11
- **confounds himself** - mingles with the rest (1.2.38)
- **in post** - in a hurry (1.2.63)
- **The Phoenix** - name of the shop of Antipholus of Ephesus (1.2.75)
- **cozenage** - cheating (1.2.97)

- **horn-mad** - furious, like fighting bulls (2.1.55)
- **defeatures** - disfigures (2.1.98)
- **keep fair quarter** - keep the peace (2.1.108)
- **fond** - infatuated, foolish (2.1.116)
- **sconce** - head; a small fort; shelter (2.34.37)
- **Marry** - exclamation (originally an oath, “by the Virgin Mary”) (2.2.50)
- **Choleric** - yellow bile, a humour: dry meat will make you angry (2.2.61)
- **tiring** - hairdressing (2.2.98)
- **dearly** - grievously (2.2.130)
- **confusion** - ruin (2.2.180)
- **course and drift** - general meaning (2.2.210)
- **Sirrah** - term used in addressing inferiors (2.2.209)

- **carcanet** - jeweled necklace (3.1.4)
- **coil** - disturbance (3.1.44)
- **mickle** - much (3.1.45)
- **minion** - hussy (3.1.54)
- **hind** - boor (3.1.77)

- **made** - shut (3.1.93)
- **stirring passage** - busy traffic (3.1.99)
- **vulgar** - public (3.1.100)
- **Porpentine** - porcupine; in the London of Shakespeare’s day there were both an inn and a brothel bearing the name “Porpentine” (3.1.116)
- **become disloyalty** - make infidelity seem becoming (3.2.11)
- **carriage** - demeanour (3.2.14)
- **board** - table (3.2.18)
- **chalky cliffs** - teeth (3.2.12)
- **errors** - failures of judgment (3.2.35)
- **mated** - checkmated; partnered (3.2.54)

- **ducats** - gold coins (4.1.30)
- **waftage** - passage by sea (4.1.96)
- **heart’s meteors tilting** - emotions tossing (4.2.6)
- **stigmatical in making** - made deformed (4.2.22)
- **lapwing** - bird, peewit (4.2.27)
- **tartar limbo** - hell (4.2.32)
- **buff** - leather, for sergeants (4.2.36)
- **shoulder-clapper** - back slapper, arresting officer (4.2.37)
- **creeks** - winding alleys (4.2.38)
- **sergeant** - officer who arrests offenders (4.2.56)
- **conceit** - from “conceive”: imagination (4.2.66)
- **conjure** - solemnly call on (4.3.66)
- **ecstasy** - madness (4.4.49)
- **discharge** - pay (4.4.116)

- **forswore** - denied an oath (5.1.11)
- **stand** - prepare to fight (5.1.31)
- **wot** - know (5.1.148)
- **wasting lamps** - dimming eyes (5.1.316)
- **genius** - spirit who accompanies a man through life (5.1.332)
Geographical Setting of the Original Play

Syracuse, the home of Egeon and Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse, is located on the modern day island of Sicily. The city was founded in 734 BCE. Cicero, a famous orator and statesman in ancient Rome, described Syracuse as being “the greatest and most beautiful Greek city.” In this modern-day production, Toronto, as a centre of business and order, represents Syracuse.

Ephesus, the home of Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus and Emelia, is located on the western coast of Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). Ephesus, full of business, trade, and intrigue, was thought of by Elizabethans to have been a place of magic and wickedness. The city was converted by St. Paul in the First Century A.D. In this production, Montreal represents the chaotic early Ephesus.

Set: There are three areas on stage throughout the play: the marketplace, the priory, and the home of Antipholus of Ephesus. Read the interview with director Peter Hinton (p. 2-3) for a description of the set used for this production.

Aristotelian Unities
- The Unity of Time says the entire action of the play should take place in no more than 24 hours, one day.
- The Unity of Place says the entire action of the play should be in one location.
- The Unity of Action says that every incident in the play should contribute to the main plot and there should be no irrelevant information or action.
Structure
The five-act structure moves from a situation with tensions or conflict (Introduction) to developing conflict (Development), to the height of conflict where there is a frequently an impasse (Climax), to things clearing up (Dénouement) and the problem being resolved and the knots untied (Resolution).

Different people use different terms for these structural stages. These are the terms used in rehearsal by Peter Hinton. (Other terms you might be used to using for these structural stages are Exposition, Rising Action, Turning Point, Falling Action or Resolution, Dénouement, and Climax, as the point where the emotions reach a peak.)

Exposition
The exposition (background facts), is almost all given in the beginning, when Egeon tells us of the shipwreck that separated his family, and the departure of Antipholus and Dromio to look for their lost kin.

Characterization
All characters in a staged play show their characters through their physicality and their appearance. Shakespeare uses stock characters extensively in his early plays. Shakespeare also develops “round” characters with whom we empathize. **Characters are developed through their actions, their speech and thoughts, and what others say of them.** Antipholus of Syracuse is lost – in search of his identity, feeling like a drop in the ocean. He is willing to go after adventure where he finds it, and like others of his time, believes in magic. Becoming more and more lost in this foreign place, he is anxious to leave. He soon falls in love and finally finds his lost family and his father too.

Sources of Humour in *The Comedy of Errors*
- The Situation
- Plot
- Character
- Mistaken Identity
- Misunderstanding
- Timing
- Coincidence
- Physical Humour
- Language: Puns, Images, Bawdy, Insults, Jokes, Wit
- Surprise

Narrative and Literary Devices
**Suspense:** A device used to make us wonder what will happen.
**Foreshadowing:** A hint of what is to come.
**Dramatic irony:** The audience is aware of truths of which the characters are ignorant.
**Irony:** A device using duality of meaning. It involves the difference between what is understood and what the truth is. See [http://nac-cna.ca/pdf/eth/0708/the_way_of_the_world_guide.pdf](http://nac-cna.ca/pdf/eth/0708/the_way_of_the_world_guide.pdf).
**Language and Poetic Devices**

**Soliloquy:** Speech revealing a character’s thoughts, spoken when the character is alone on stage.

**Asides:** Lines spoken to the audience. The other characters on stage do not hear.

**Prose:** Ordinary sentences, usually spoken by servants or lower class characters.

**Poetry:** Blank verse, iambic pentameter, spoken by the higher-class characters.

**Allusions:** References to well-known historical or literary figures, events, or objects. Examples from Greek mythology in this play are “The Phoenix”, and “Circes’ cup”; and from the Bible, in Act 2 Scene 1, there are echoes of Paul’s “Wives, submit yourselves unto your husbands,” and of lines in Genesis, that make man lord over the animals. The “prodigal son” is also a reference to the Bible.

**Metaphor:** Indirect comparisons.

**Imagery:** Pictures in words, to enrich the meaning.

One image used is of a football, to show how Dromio feels at being “kicked around” by his master and mistress. A second is of vines climbing up a tree, a biblical image used to show what Adriana thinks of her entwined relationship with her husband. Luce’s round damp body is compared to the earth.

Water imagery is dominant in the play, and a symbol of separation. First we hear of it in Egeon’s speech describing the storm. Twice characters describe their loneliness as though they were drops of water. Antipholus of Syracuse seeks his brother as though he were a drop of water in the ocean, to show he is lost when he fails to find his him: “I to the world am like a drop of water/ That in the ocean seeks another drop, / Who falling there to find his fellow forth / Unseen, inquisitive, confounds himself ” (1.2.35-38). Adriana says separating her from her husband would be like trying to capture a single drop of water again after it had been dropped it into a gulf (2.2.126). Adriana says she will throw her tears at the feet of the Duke, to persuade him to bridge the gap between her and her husband. Throughout the play, Antipholus of Syracuse tries to get back on the water to escape from Ephesus, but at the end of the play, he, his brother, and the Dromios, all now united and complete, leave the water for solid ground.
Themes
The main theme in the play is order (see http://nac-cna.ca/pdf/eth/shakespeare_an_overview.pdf or http://www.artsalive.ca/pdf/eth/activities/shakespeare_overview.pdf). When things are out of order, or harmony, disturbances abound. The storm, itself a disturbance, parted a family, and the family members, now in an unnatural state, are all off balance, unhappy and seeking stability. We see the disorder manifest in the violence on stage. Disorder reaches a peak in Act 4, Scene 4. We see Dromio beaten, Antipholus of Ephesus bound, and Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse fighting with drawn swords, and the belief that Antipholus of Ephesus is possessed by Satan. This public disorder is the result of internal disorder. The disorder begins to abate with the mention of the priory (showing the presence of God). Marriage is in part a sub-theme of order – all are seeking a happy union to be complete, and when each couple is paired, when reunion is affected, then order is restored.

The nature of personal identity and its place in social relationships is a central theme. It again relates to order. When you know your truths, you can end your internal conflicts.

A different theme is that of money. The play is about merchants and the merchant class, in a port city full of merchants and trade, and there are many references to money in the play. From Egeon’s ransom, to the jailing of Antipholus, to the „loss“ of the 1000 ducats, and the retrieval of the ring, the play is also about materialism.

Read the interview with director Peter Hinton (p. 2-3) for what he sees as the main themes of the play.

Twins
Whether twins are identical or fraternal they have a special close relationship with each other. Sometimes separated twins are found, years, later to have the same habits, likes and behaviour.

Everyone is fascinated by twins. Multiple births are becoming more common in the developed world. A very public example is the television series, Jon and Kate. Television cameras follow the lives of a family with sextuplets and one set of twins. Shakespeare himself was the father of twins, a girl and a boy. He lost his son, Hamnet, to sudden illness.

The Comedy of Errors has two sets of twins. Their separation and longing to find each other initiates and ends the plot. Read director Peter Hinton’s interview (p. 3) to see what he says is special about twins.
Comedy

“Laughter is nothing else than sudden glory.” - Thomas Hobbes

“One excellent test of the civilization of a country ... I take to be the flourishing of the Comic idea and Comedy.” - George Meredith

Comedy is, of course, intended to amuse us. Often it makes us think, too. There are many genres of comedy. Some are Satire, Parody, Farce, Black Comedy, Comedy of Manners, Slapstick, Romantic Comedy, Sit-coms, Stand-up Comedy.

Comedy is one of the original four genres of literature as defined by Aristotle in his Poetics. Aristotle defines Literature, in general, as a mimesis, or imitation of life. Comedy is the third genre of literature, the farthest away from a true mimesis.

For Aristotle, all comedies begin with a person of low status unable to achieve what he wants. By the end of the story or play that person has won the prize he was seeking. Comedies often use the supernatural, and magic. All comedies end happily.

Elizabethan Comedy

"Comedy", in Elizabethan times, had a very different meaning from modern comedy. A Shakespearean comedy is one that has a happy ending, usually involving marriage between the unmarried characters, and a light tone and style. Patterns in the comedies include movement to a "green world" (an innocent world), internal and external conflicts, and a tension between order and serenity on the one hand, and frenzy or chaos on the other.

Conventions of Shakespearean Romantic Comedy

1. The main action is about love, about separation and re-unification. There is a struggle of traditional rivals to overcome a difficulty, which is often presented by young people. The lovers must overcome obstacles before being united. The ending frequently has several couples getting married, and an actual celebration, in dance, song, or feast.

2. Frequently, the play contains the improbable, the supernatural, or the miraculous, with unbelievable coincidences, scenes of mistaken identity, disregard for the social order, instant conversions, enchanted or foreign settings, and supernatural beings (witches, fairies, gods and goddesses). The happy ending may be brought about through supernatural or divine intervention, or may involve improbable plot twists.

3. Shakespeare uses stock characters extensively in his early plays, and occasionally in his later work. A clever servant often helps to bring the ending about.

4. The themes involve important issues, such as personal identity, the importance of love, the power of language, poetry and art; the conflict between appearance and reality.

5. There is frequent word play, with wit, jokes and punning.
Is The Comedy of Errors a Farce?

Farce: A light dramatic work in which highly improbable plot situations, exaggerated characters, and often slapstick elements are used for humorous effect; a light, humorous play in which the plot depends upon a skillfully exploited situation rather than upon the development of character.

A contemporary reports that princes and the Lord Mayor of London were present at Gray’s Inn, when The Comedy of Errors was first performed, but left before the play, because the party became too wild. Following the plot would have been difficult in this party atmosphere, because the play is complicated. Shakespeare depends on careful structure, intrigue, and broad humour. There are two sets of twins, each set having the same name, unknown to the others; one set lands in Ephesus where the other set happens to live. Although no one knows, their mother lives there too. Their dad has landed and been arrested. Sometimes the pairs of twins themselves wonder who they are.

The mistaken identity is definitely funny. Farce relies on the visual as well as on dramatic irony. The two Dromios are constantly punished for not carrying out their masters’ orders, when, in fact, they believe they have meticulously done so. Antipholus of Syracuse finally agrees to dine with Adriana, who believes he is her husband, and they have dinner together while her real husband demands entrance to his home. There is loud horseplay and coarse wit to amuse everyone.

The language and structure of a classical comedy would be especially appropriate to an educated audience at an Inn of Court. Shakespeare creates the types of jokes particularly appealing to a drunken audience, jokes on fat people, thin hair, bodily excretions, the roles of men and women, even ethnic humour, and uses the basic plot elements of broad farce (such as beatings).

But the characters make the play more than a farce.

Shakespeare creates characters who are human beings with their own problems. We share Egeon’s sadness as he tells the tale of the loss of his family, and we worry about his imminent execution from the beginning of the play to the final act. We sympathize with Adriana, who believes her husband has fallen in love with her sister. Both sets of twins suffer identity crises as their world becomes foreign and unpredictable. Dromio of Syracuse asks his (real) master: “Do you know me sir? Am I Dromio? Am I your man? Am I myself?” (3.2.73). The loss of community and family, the search for the self and the challenge to the identity that occurs when one twin is mistaken for the other are very real. Antipholus of Syracuse wants to flee Ephesus, a place where “none but witches do inhabit” (3.2.156). He is afraid of becoming a traitor to himself, saying that he must “stop [his] ears against the (seductive) mermaid’s song.” (3.2.164). When he is finally threatened, he runs toward sanctuary in the church.

As in all Shakespeare’s plays, order is restored in Act 5. The action turns towards recognition of the truth, and happiness results from the re-uniting of the families.
[The house of ANTIPHOLUS of Ephesus.]

[Enter ADRIANA and LUCIANA]

ADRIANA:
Neither my husband nor the slave return'd. Sure, Luciana, it is two o'clock.

LUCIANA
Perhaps some merchant hath invited him, and from the mart he's somewhere gone to dinner. Good sister, let us dine and never fret: A man is master of his liberty: Time is their master, and, when they see time, they'll go or come: if so, be patient, sister.

ADRIANA
Why should their liberty than ours be more?

LUCIANA
The beasts, the fishes, and the winged fowls, Are their males' subjects and at their controls: Men, more divine, the masters of all these, Lords of the wide world and wild watery seas, Are masters to their females, and their lords: Then let your will attend on their accords.

ADRIANA
This servitude makes you to keep unwed.

LUCIANA

Well, I will marry one day, but to try. Here comes your man; now is your husband nigh.

[Enter DROMIO of Ephesus]

ADRIANA
Say, is your tardy master now at hand?

DROMIO OF EPHESUS
Nay, he's at two hands with me, and that my two ears can witness.

ADRIANA
Say, didst thou speak with him? Know'st thou his mind?

DROMIO OF EPHESUS
Ay, ay, he told his mind upon mine ear: Beshrew his hand, I scarce could understand it.

LUCIANA
Spake he so doubtfully, thou couldst not feel his meaning?

DROMIO OF EPHESUS
Nay, he struck so plainly, I could too well feel his blows; and withal so doubtfully that I could scarce understand them.

ADRIANA
But say, I prithee, is he coming home? It seems he hath great care to please his wife.
DROMIO OF EPHESUS

Why, mistress, sure my master is horn-mad.

ADRIANA

Horn-mad, thou villain!

DROMIO OF EPHESUS

I mean not cuckold-mad;  
But, sure, he is stark mad.  
When I desired him to come home to dinner,  
He ask'd me for a thousand marks in gold:  
"Tis dinner-time," quoth I; "My gold!" quoth he;  
"Your meat doth burn," quoth I; "My gold!" quoth he;  
"Will you come home?" quoth I; "My gold!" quoth he;  
"Where is the thousand marks I gave thee, villain?"  
"The pig," quoth I, "is burn'd;" "My gold!" quoth he;  
"My mistress, sir" quoth I; "Hang up thy mistress!  
I know not thy mistress; out on thy mistress!"

LUCIANA

Quoth who?

DROMIO OF EPHESUS

Quoth my master:  
"I know," quoth he, "no house, no wife, no mistress."  
So that my errand, due unto my tongue,  
I thank him, I bare home upon my shoulders;  
For, in conclusion, he did beat me there.

ADRIANA

Go back again, thou slave, and fetch him home.

DROMIO OF EPHESUS

Go back again, and be new beaten home?  
For God's sake, send some other messenger.

ADRIANA

Back, slave, or I will break thy pate across.

DROMIO OF EPHESUS

And he will bless that cross with other beating:  
Between you I shall have a holy head.

ADRIANA

Hence, prating peasant! Fetch thy master home.

DROMIO OF EPHESUS

Am I so round with you as you with me,  
That like a football you do spurn me thus?  
You spurn me hence, and he will spurn me hither:  
If I last in this service, you must case me in leather.

[Exit]

LUCIANA

Fie, how impatience loureth in your face!
Montreal: the Inspiration

Montreal is the inspiration behind this production. “Montreal is so hot it sizzles,” says the latest travel book. “With a plentiful night scene, cool slick European vibes, world-class restaurants and a seemingly never-ending string of stellar summer festivals, it’s easy to imagine you’ve been transported to a distant locale, where hedonism is all that matters.

“Its irresistible allure is in large part due to its population. The largest francophone city outside Paris, it combines North American ambition and a sizable immigrant population, from such places as Brazil, Italy, Haiti and Lebanon. Add a huge Jewish presence and the gay Village, and voilà - Montreal is one of the most diverse, happening places in the world.”

At night along its crooked cobblestone lanes, the most beautiful facades of old Montreal are illuminated. The Centaur Theatre lives here.

The famous Notre Dame Basilica towers over its neighbours. The basilica was the site of the state funeral of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, in 2000, when Jimmy Carter and Fidel Castro were two of the pallbearers.

In the peak summer season, there are free outdoor concerts and street performers, and the host of festivals includes the biggest jazz festival in the world, and the international Just For Laughs Festival.
Background

Paul the Apostle
Saul of Tarsus, also called Paul the Apostle, or Saint Paul, (c.5 BC - c.67 AD), was one of the most influential of the early Christian missionaries. Paul is considered responsible for bringing Christianity to many places, including Rome. Paul wrote letters which make up part of the Bible.

Paul tells us in his letters that he first “violently persecuted” early Christians, and that his dramatic conversion to Christianity took place on the road to Damascus. Then he began to travel through Asia Minor, Greece and Rome, teaching Christianity. An important centre for Paul’s activities was Ephesus, where he lived from AD 52 to AD 54. His time in Ephesus was marked by disturbances and possibly his imprisonment.

Paul was arrested in AD 57 and sent to Rome for trial, where he spent two years under house arrest.

According to later reports, in AD 65 Paul was imprisoned in Rome, where he wrote the letter to the Ephesians that is part of the Bible today. He was beheaded at Tre Fontane Abbey in Rome by order of Emperor Nero, and then buried in the family tomb of a devout Roman noblewoman, Matrona Lucilla. The Church of St. Paul of Three Fountains was raised over the spot where he was beheaded.

Legend says that the head, once severed from the body, bounced, striking the earth in three different places, from which fountains sprang up, which flow to the present day and are located within the sanctuary itself.

Paul’s letters to the early churches, found in the Bible’s New Testament, are some of the most influential on Christian thinking. Perhaps Paul’s most famous passage is his poetic definition of love: "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy … "

Recent news about St. Paul, 2009
Archaeologists working for the Vatican recently unearthed a sarcophagus, which had until now been hidden beneath an altar. Its contents are believed to be the remains of St Paul the Apostle. See http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/6219656.stm and Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls#The tomb of St. Paul.

The tomb dates back to at least AD 390 and was found in a crypt under a basilica in Rome. Though it had long been thought the crypt might contain the tomb of St Paul.
Ancient Ephesus
Elizabethans thought of Ephesians as being rowdy people, hard to convert to Christianity, and in need of instruction. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul makes references to order – how women must respect their husbands and servants their masters.

The city was famous for its temple to the goddess Artemis (Diana of Ephesus), a huge structure made of marble, 220 by 425 feet at its base, supported by beautiful pillars and rising to a height of 60 feet, considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

Some of the important buildings present during Paul's ministry include a huge theatre on a hillside that could seat 24,000 people, the town hall (Prytaneion), the commercial market (Agora), baths and gymnasiums, a medical school, and a stadium 229 meters long and 30 meters wide, built during Nero's reign (54-68 AD).

Besides the cult of Artemis, there is evidence of various "mystery religions," the practice of magic, worship of the Egyptian gods Sarapis and Isis, and devotion to a large number of other deities. Some are: Aphrodite, Apollo, Athena, Demeter, Dionysus, Hecate, Heracles, Pan, Pluto, Poseidon, Zeus and river deities. A Jewish synagogue also existed in Ephesus. Ephesus was a fabulously wealthy city, and noted for licentiousness. Because no one could be arrested for any reason near the Temple of Artemis, criminals thrived. Ephesus was known worldwide as the centre of Demonism and magic. The Greek historian Plutarch (AD 46-120) tells us that the utterance of certain sounds could expel disease and evil spirits. Ephesians who burned their books of magic when they converted found them worth 50,000 pieces of silver. (Book of Acts 19:19).

Founding of the Church at Ephesus
Paul's first and hurried visit for three months to Ephesus is recorded in the Bible, in the Book of Acts, 18:19–21. On his second visit he remained at Ephesus three years, for he found it was the key to the western provinces of Asia Minor. Here he established and strengthened the church. From Ephesus, the Christian gospel spread abroad "almost throughout all Asia," in spite all the opposition and persecution Paul encountered.

Why did Paul write his Letter to the Ephesians?
Paul's letter is meant for the many people who converted to his church. Their former religions worshipped mysteries, magic and astrology. Now they needed reassurance about Christ's relationship to these forces, and encouragement to adopt a new lifestyle free from drunkenness, sexual immorality, theft, and hatred. In his letter, Paul tells them that Christ is far superior to any hierarchy of other gods and spiritual beings, and that they need to construct a spiritual temple. Paul's letter develops several ideas -- the greatness of God, and Jesus, salvation, the status of Christian believers, the unity of Jew and Gentile, the ethical obligation of believers, Paul's own ministry, and the church.
Resources

Books or Essays
Johann David Wyss. The Swiss Family Robinson, a novel, first published in 1812, about a Swiss family who is shipwrecked.

Websites
http://www.fullbooks.com/An-Essay-on-Comedy.html Meredith, George, Essay on Comedy
http://www.daphne.palomar.edu/Shakespeare Mr. William Shakespeare and the Internet
http://www.bardweb.net—The Shakespeare Resource Center
http://www.sgc.umd.edu—Shakespeare’s Globe Center USA
http://www.hrsbstaff.ednet.ns.ca/engramja/Svtour.html—Shakespeare: A Virtual Field Trip
http://www.shakespeare.org.uk—Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

Movies, Video, and Song
BBC production of The Comedy of Errors with The Who’s Roger Daltry playing both Dromios
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hPaYaJqJi8o&feature=PlayList&p=6D1C23C68DAC38B9&index=0&playnext=1 (available at the Ottawa Public Library)
The Beatles do Pyramus and Thisbe.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WEuo2uUHpYQ
The Perfect Storm, DVD starring George Clooney for a terrifying storm at sea
Titanic, DVD, starring Kate Winslett and Leonardo Di Caprio, for the most famous ship disaster
Gordon Lightfoot's song, The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald
The Boys From Syracuse, DVD, starring Martha Raye, Allan Jones
Activities
(all suitable for grades 9 through 12)

1. Have a news reporter interview the participants, during the storm, or after the storm. Improvise, or write.

2. Contrast the nature and attitudes of Luciana and Adriana. Improvise or write a scene in which Luciana gives Adriana advice.

3. Discuss the relationship between the Dromios and their masters. Create a scene in everyday life with two such characters, such that the Dromio character ends up being beaten.

4. Read the information on Tragedy at http://nac-cna.ca/pdf/eth/shakespeare_an_overview.pdf or http://www.artsalive.ca/pdf/eth/activities/shakespeare_overview.pdf. Discuss the changes you need to make to turn The Comedy of Errors into a tragedy. Discuss the ease with which you could change it, and the significance of that ease.

5. Drama exercise: Create an identical twin. In pairs, mirror each other’s actions, facial reactions, and speech. Dress alike and present a two-minute scene. Would having a twin be fun? Complicate your life?

6. Brainstorm common archetypes and stock characters with your group. What do we call the types today? Cast The Comedy of Errors for a movie, using current popular figures.

7. Write, or improvise a one-page dialogue between the two characters in one of the scenarios below. Use at least one aside or soliloquy in your dialogue. These may be serious or humorous.
   a) A has just arrived in a foreign land and is upset, searching for his/her family. B, a companion, is trying to calm him/her.
   b) A has lost his/her money, and blames B, a companion. B is unaware of the loss and tries to explain his/her innocence.
   c) A has just arrived in class to find that there is a major test that he/she had not known about. Write a soliloquy for him.

8. Discuss, in class: Shakespeare uses violence in the play, especially between Antipholus and Dromio. How does Shakespeare use the violence to create comedy? Discuss how a director might create this violence on stage. Prepare to look for it while watching the play, and later discuss what works or doesn’t work. Read what director Peter Hinton has to say (p. 2-3). What other reason is there for the violence? Do you agree with him?

9. Plays by Shakespeare are often adapted into movies, new plays or musicals for the stage. The musical West Side Story is based on Romeo and Juliet, and the movie O is based on Othello. Having seen the National Arts Centre / Centaur Theatre Company production of The Comedy of Errors, how could you imagine it being adapted into a new play, musical or movie?

10. Read Shakespeare’s biography at http://nac-cna.ca/pdf/eth/shakespeare_an_overview.pdf or http://www.artsalive.ca/pdf/eth/activities/shakespeare_overview.pdf. Research the reception this play received at its first presentation at Gray’s Inn. As Shakespeare, write a letter home, (in prose) telling about the play and how the production went.
11. On YouTube, watch The Comedy of Errors videos listed in the Resources section (p. 20). In which medium do you find the play to be more exciting? More amusing? More alive? Easier to understand? Why? (Watch the Beatles’ Pyramus and Thisbe video for fun)

12. What underlying themes of the play are relevant today (travelling, loss of identity, twins, separation, treatment of servants)? How?

13. Scene Study:
Analyze Act 2 scene 1 of the play (p. 15-16) for a) meaning; b) beats within it; c) use of language; d) emotions; e) movement; f) emotional impact on the audience.
Then act it in groups of made up of three actors and a director.
Try using a) modern language or b) gibberish. Add choreography.
Or try without language, make a tableau, then a series of tableaux, add music. Use a narrator if you want.
Try playing it to make the audience laugh; to make the audience cringe.
In a class discussion, tell what you learned about playmaking.

14. The Apostle Paul wrote about social duties and obedience in his letter to the Ephesians, where he said, for example, “wives submit to your husbands.” Debate: Societies need hierarchies.

15. Identify the key moments in the play, then improvise the whole play by presenting these key scenes briefly, and chronologically. Play in modern language, or Shakespearean English. Use tableaux instead, if you like. The whole presentation should be a disciplined 10-15 minutes.

16. Find examples for each of the sources of humour listed.

17. Write a song for Antipholus of Syracuse, when he first arrives on the Ephesian shore. Write a song for him at the end of the play. How did you change the emotion, wording, melody?

18. Have a class discussion about the acting, writing, themes, director’s choices, relevance, humour, and production values (set, costumes, props, lighting, sound, music) of the performance. Then write a play review of two to three pages, covering all these topics, but emphasizing only one area. Use the correct names of the artists.

19. Do the crossword puzzle which follows. Solutions are provided on page 24.

Clues:
ACROSS:
4 Roman playwright 7 Major theme 10 Number of feet in a line 11 Setting for this production
15 Gold coin 18 Rhythm: Iambic ___ 20 Abbess 22 City of business and beauty
23 Dromio’s status 24 City of magic and evil possibilities 26 A play with a happy ending
27 Reigning monarch when The Comedy of Errors was first performed

DOWN:
1 Background information 2 Often-used image 3 A play with ridiculous situations 5 Designer
6 Necklace 8 Speech made alone on stage 9 Director, Peter ___ 12 Merchant
13 Cause of separation 14 Temple to her 16 Wife 17 Paul came from here
19 Inn in Ephesus, theatre in Montreal 21 Twin
25 He wrote important letters that are part of the Bible
COMEDY OF ERRORS
Answers to the Crossword Puzzle on page 23:

Across:
4. Plautus
7. Order
10. Five
11. Montreal
15. Ducat
18. Pentamer
20. Emilia
22. Syracuse
23. Servant
24. Ephesus
26. Comedy
27. Elizabeth

Down:
1. Exposition
2. Water
3. Farce
4. Sharpe
6. Carcanet
8. Soliloquy
9. Hinton
12. Egeon
13. Shipwreck
14. Diana
16. Adriana
17. Tarsus
19. Centaur
21. Dromio
25. Paul
Theatre Etiquette

Please take a moment to prepare the students for their visit to the National Arts Centre to explain what good Theatre Etiquette is, and why it will enhance the enjoyment of the play by all audience members.

1. *The Comedy of Errors* will be performed in the Theatre of the NAC. Matinées at the NAC are for students and the general public. It is important for everyone to be quiet (no talking or rustling of materials) during the performance, so that others do not lose their immersion in the “world of the play.” Do not unwrap candy, or play with zippers, or your programme. Unlike actors in movies, the actors in live theatre can hear disturbances in the audience, and will give their best performances when they feel the positive involvement of the audience members. The appropriate way of showing approval for the actors’ performances is through laughter and applause. For the enjoyment of all, people who disturb others during the show may be asked to leave the Theatre.

2. Do not put your feet on the back of the seat in front of you. If someone needs to pass you in the row, it is courteous to stand and allow that person to pass you. Do not climb over seats. Avoid wearing scented products such as perfume or cologne or aftershave, as many people are sensitive or even allergic to these.

3. If you plan to make notes on the play for the purpose of writing a review, please do not try to write them during the performance. Seeing you do this can be distracting for the actors. Wait until intermission or after the performance is finished to write your reflections, please.

4. It is important that there be no electronic devices used in the Theatre so that the atmosphere of the play is not interrupted and others are not disturbed. **Cell phones, pagers, and anything that beeps must be turned off.** Cameras and all other recording devices are not permitted in the Theatre.

5. Tickets with assigned seats will be distributed by your teacher, and to avoid problems it is important to sit in your own assigned seat. In the Theatre all even-numbered seats are on one side and all odd-numbered seats are on the other. This means, for example, that seats 10 and 12 are actually beside each other.

6. Programmes may or may not be distributed at this student matinée. Information on the artists who put this play together, however, can be found in this Study Guide for those who wish to use it in writing a review. Some programmes can be made available to teachers if desired as a teaching aid, to show how a programme is put together.

7. The running time of this production is **currently estimated at approximately 1 hour and 40 minutes. There will be no intermission.** It is advisable to make a trip to the washroom before the performance starts, as anyone leaving while the play is in progress runs the risk of not being allowed back into the Theatre.
Eo Sharp’s Costume Design Concept for Dromio
Eo Sharp's Costume Design Concept for Solinus
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