

THE COMEDY OF ERRORS

1. Compare the opening scene of *The Comedy of Errors* (1.1) with the Chief Actor's speech which opens *The Brothers Menaechmus* (pp.77–79). Both provide us with necessary exposition to help us understand the story. Which way of presenting the exposition do you find most effective? How does having Egeon deliver the exposition affect the tone of this scene and of the play as a whole?
2. Think about how Shakespeare establishes the world of the play. The ocean is the key feature of the world's geography. How is the ocean characterized? How peaceful or belligerent is the society? What about familial bonds, how are they portrayed? Think about how time is portrayed.
3. Antipholus of Ephesus and Antipholus of Syracuse are identical twins. How do you think these twins would be portrayed on stage? Consider that while the characters confuse the two, the audience must be able to tell them apart. Which twin is more important in Shakespeare's play? Which twin does Plautus make more important? Why?
4. Consider how Shakespeare differentiates the characters of Antipholus E and Antipholus S. What different attitudes and values do they embody? How do they relate to their world? their society? their family? How do they behave differently? Which twin has a more positive experience in the play? Why?
5. Shakespeare adds a set of twin servants to the plot: the Dromios. Besides more comic confusion, what do the Dromios add to the play. How are their relationships with their masters different.
6. The narrative device of identical twins is ubiquitous in dramatic literature (think of all the TV shows where the "evil twin" shows up for an episode or two). What do you think makes twins such a popular dramatic device? How does Shakespeare use the twin device? What thematic concerns do the twins help him portray?
7. *The Comedy of Errors* may be the most faithful adaptation of a source Shakespeare ever wrote. Yet there are many small and large changes from *The Brothers Menaechmus*, and they can all serve to illuminate Shakespeare's creative process. Consider that Shakespeare changes the dress in Plautus's play to a chain. Why did Shakespeare make this change? How does it fit thematically with his vision of the play? Think about other small modifications to the play and speculate on why Shakespeare made them. What does Shakespeare's adaptation of Plautus tell us about his own artistic vision and skill as a playwright?
8. One of the most radical modifications of Plautus comes in the play's conclusion. How does the character of the Abbess change the tone and meaning of the play's resolution? Why did Shakespeare add the Abbess? Which play's conclusion do you find more satisfying and effective? Why?