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The Comedy of Errors

The Cambridge Dover Wilson Shakespeare

VOLUME 5

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
EDITED BY JOHN DOVER WILSON

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BY

SIR ARTHUR QUILLER-COUCH
AND JOHN DOVER WILSON

THE COMEDY OF ERRORS

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

While the Introduction (except for a postscript) and the Stage-History are left as Q. and Harold Child wrote them in 1922, the Text, Notes, and Glossary have been revised throughout. In this I have received valuable help from Mr J. C. Maxwell, who must not however be held responsible for the new readings, to some of which he would probably not subscribe. With considerable reluctance I am leaving untouched the Note On the Copy as I wrote it in 1922, contenting myself by adding a cautionary note. J.D.W.

THE COMEDY OF ERRORS

I

The Folio of 1623 supplies our only text, *The Comedie of Errors* coming fifth in the order of that volume. On every test it must rank among the earliest of Shakespeare's plays. Francis Meres (1598) puts it second on his famous list in *Palladis Tamia*. 'As *Plautus* and *Seneca* are accounted the best for Comedy and Tragedy among the Latines, so *Shakespeare* among the English is the most excellent in both kinds; for Comedy, witnes his *Gentlemen of Verona*, his *Errors*, his *Loue labors lost*....' But we find an almost indubitable reference to it in a merry tract describing the Christmas revels at Gray's Inn, 1594–5, and entitled *Gesta Grayorum: or the History of the High and mighty Prince, Henry, Prince of Purpoole...Who Reigned and Died*, A.D. 1594;[1] this Prince being one Henry Helmes of Norfolk, gentleman,

[1] A boyish, boisterous and clearly contemporaneous account of these very remarkable revels, which ended by attracting Queen Elizabeth herself to witness their *finale* in a *Masque of Proteus* (introduced by Campion's lovely lyric 'Of Neptune's Empire let us sing...'). The MS would seem to have lain in limbo until 1688, when it was 'printed for W. Canning, at his Shop in the Temple-Cloysters, Price, one Shilling', and dedicated by him to Matthew Smyth, Esq., Comptroller of the Inner Temple. A reprint (1915) has been edited by Dr W. W. Greg for the Malone Society. 'Prince of Purpoole' is a title facetiously borrowed from Porte Poule Lane, by Gray's Inn. For the descent of this property to Gray's Inn from one Simon de Gardino de Purtepole the curious may consult C. L. Kingsford's edition of Stow's *Survey of London* (Oxford, 1908), and follow the references given in his Note, vol. II, p. 371.

chosen Lord of Misrule for the occasion. He was installed with no little pomp and circumstance, issued extravagant proclamations containing much legal wit (and some bawdry), and in particular on the second Grand Night (28 December) entertained an 'ambassador' and his suite from the Inner Temple: on which occasion, it would seem, a great deal of misrule arose.

When the Ambassador was placed, as aforesaid, and that there was something to be performed for the Delight of the Beholders, there arose such a disordered Tumult and Crowd upon the Stage, that there was no Opportunity to effect that which was intended: there came so great a number of worshipful Personages upon the Stage, that might not be displaced; and Gentlewomen, whose Sex did privilege them from Violence, that when the Prince and his Officers had in vain, a good while, expected and endeavoured a Reformation, at length there was no hope of Redress for that present. The Lord Ambassador and his Train thought that they were not so kindly entertained, as was before expected, and thereupon would not stay any longer at that time, but, in a sort, discontented and displeased.

After their Departure the Throngs and Tumults did somewhat cease, although so much of them continued as was able to disorder and confound any good Inventions whatsoever. In regard whereof, as also for that the Sports intended were especially for the gracing of the *Templarians*, it was thought good not to offer any thing of Account, saving Dancing and Revelling with Gentlewomen; and after such Sports, a Comedy of Errors (like to *Plautus* his *Menechmus*) was played by the Players. So that Night was begun, and continued to the end, in nothing but Confusion and Errors; whereupon, it was ever afterwards called, *The Night of Errors*.

Now this (in 1594), while obviously referring to our play, obviously does not refer to a *première*. It leads

rather to a conjecture which Mr Henry Cuningham[1] thus sets forth:

> The expression 'played by the Players' must have reference to a performance by the Chamberlain's servants, which was on the 28th December, the servants most probably including Shakespeare himself; and it is somewhat singular, as Fleay points out in his *Life and Works of Shakespeare*, p. 125, that this performance should also have been given apparently by the same company as that which we know played before the Queen at Greenwich on the same date and possibly in the same piece. It would undoubtedly, at any rate from the business point of view, be so much more convenient for the company *not* to change the piece that we may fairly regard Fleay's supposition as correct.

A difficulty is raised by Dr Greg (following Mr E. K. Chambers)[2] that the accounts of the Treasurer of the Chamber show payments to the Lord Chamberlain's men (Shakespeare's company) for performances before the Court, then at Greenwich, both on 26 December and 28, Gray's Inn night: *and the performances were in the evening*, and the players could not have been in two places at once. But Mrs C. Carmichael Stopes had already shown, and has recently reminded us,[3] that the assumption italicised is worse than unnecessary: that instead of the usual form 'On Innocents' Day at night' this particular entry has 'On Innocents' Day'. So we are still free to believe that our players, having enacted *Errors* before the Queen in the afternoon, returned in time to present it before the lawyers in the evening.

[1] Introduction to *The Comedy of Errors* in 'The Arden Shakespeare', p. xv.

[2] *Modern Language Review* (October 1906).

[3] *The Life of Henry, Third Earl of Southampton, Shakespeare's Patron*, by Charlotte Carmichael Stopes (Cambridge, 1922), p. 73.

We cannot follow Mrs Stopes, however, in extracting from the *Gesta* a theory that 'the play was considered the crowning disgrace of the evening'. To be sure a mock court was held, two nights later, to enquire into these 'great Disorders and Abuses', and a mock 'Sorcerer' put on trial for having caused them—'and Lastly, that he had foisted a Company of base and common Fellows, to make up our Disorders with a Play of Errors and Confusions; and that that Night had gained to us Discredit, and it self a Nick-name of Errors'. It seems to us, remembering some few undergraduate 'rags' at Oxford and Cambridge and the 'literature' to which they gave gay occasion, that the lady takes *au grand sérieux* a serio-comic account of what was actually a giddy revel from first to last. We doubt then that it was a makeshift: we suspect rather that it was pre-arranged; that the players had been pre-empted from Greenwich to present just such an extravaganza upon Plautus as would tickle the scholarly taste and amuse the 'studious lawyers' amid their bowers.

All this, at any rate, carries us back to 1594. A scrap of 'internal evidence' suggested to Theobald a yet earlier date. The following passage occurs in 3. 2. 122, where Dromio (of Syracuse) is describing Luce, the fat kitchen-wench:

> She is spherical, like a globe: I could find out countries in her...
> Where France?
> In her forehead—armed and reverted, making war against her heir.

Here is a play upon *hair* and *heir*. In 1589 Henry III of France had named Henry of Navarre[1]—Henri Quatre—as heir to the throne. This nomination revived

[1] Cf. for England's contemporary interest in Navarre, *Love's Labour's Lost* (*passim*).

civil war, as everyone knows, and in 1591 Elizabeth sent across an expeditionary force, under Sir John Norris and the Earl of Essex, to support Navarre's cause—a move in her game of Protestant policy. Peace was made in July 1593, and Navarre proclaimed king: after which the pun in our author's topical allusion must have speedily fallen flat. But in 1591 (say) our great national deliverance from the Armada would yet prevail in memory, to win applause as the catechism went on:

> Where Spain?
> Faith, I saw it not: but I felt it hot in her breath.
> Where America, the Indies?
> O, sir, upon her nose, all o'er embellished with rubies, carbuncles, sapphires, declining their rich aspect to the hot breath of Spain, *who sent whole armadoes of carracks* to be ballast at her nose.[1]

On the whole the date, 1591–2, generally assigned to this play, seems the likeliest.

II

For its 'origin', it is simply an adaptation of the *Menaechmi* (*The Two Menaechmuses*) of Plautus; with the additions of one scene (3. 1) borrowed from the same author's *Amphitruo*—where Mercury keeps the real husband out of his own house while Jupiter, the sham husband, is engaged with the poor fellow's wife, within doors—and a romantic Shakespearian beginning and end.

We are not greatly concerned to enquire if Shakespeare had enough Latin to derive his plot direct from Plautus, or if he took it from a translation—and, if so,

[1] Possibly some pun here, to us recondite, between Spain's *nose* and King Philip's *No's*.

from what translation? It would be interesting to know; and research has passed all that it can gather of Elizabethan Grammar Schools and their *curricula* through various sieves, to shake out various modest heaps of our poet's latinity. In the result we get little for certain, and that little certainly, for critical purposes, of no great matter. For our part, it lays no strain upon us to believe that the 'small Latin' put into Shakespeare at the Stratford-on-Avon Grammar School included a play or so of Plautus, the trick of whose Latin is easier to master than that of Homeric Greek to which, at age of eleven and under, one of the present editors underwent promotion straight from an Attic grammar. The earliest known English translation of *Menaechmi* was entered on the books of the Stationers' Company in 1594, and appeared in 1595 under the title, *Menæchmi, A pleasant and fine conceited Comœdie, taken out of the most excellent wittie Poet Plautus. Chosen purposely from all the rest, as least harmefull, and yet most delightfull. Written in English by W. W.* Those who, on the strength of a resemblance of phrase here and there,[1] believe

[1] Of which we may quote two of the most salient.

(*a*) *Menæchmi*, 5. 1. 91:

Mulier. He makes me a *stale* and a laughing-stocke to the world.

Errors, 2. 1. 101:

Adriana. He breakes the pale
And feedes from home; poore I am but his stale

—both ladies complaining of their husband's misbehaviour.

(*b*) *Menæchmi*, 5. 1. 308:

Methinks it is no pleasure to a man to be *basted with a ropes end* two or three houres together.

Errors, 4. 1. 16; 4. 4. 16, 42, etc.:

Ropes end: to a ropes end, sir, and to that end am I return'd: beware the ropes end;

and cf. 2. 2. 62: Purchase me another drie *basting*.

Mr Cuningham collects some fourteen of these parallels

or incline to believe that Shakespeare used W.W.'s translation, have to conjecture—and this, to be sure, is not incredible—that he had seen it in manuscript some time before its appearance in print.

There is, however, another explanation, which we ourselves favour, viz.: that Shakespeare worked upon some older play based on Plautus' comedy.[1] If so, it was probably the lost play *The Historie of Error*, 'shown at Hampton Court on New Yere's daie at night 1576, 77, enacted by the children of Powles (St Paul's)': which same play seems to turn up again in 1583 as the 'History of Ferrar' (!) in the Revels Accounts as having been produced at Windsor. But it will be noted—and to this we shall recur—that whenever we hit on any record, whether of *The Comedy of Errors* itself or of some likely original, the place of performance is always some banqueting hall, be it Gray's Inn, or Greenwich, or Hampton Court, or Windsor.

This third chance, that Shakespeare worked upon an earlier play, is curiously strengthened when we discover the Folio, in the two first Acts, distinguishing the two Antipholuses as *Antipholus Erotes* and *Antipholus Sereptus*. In 1. 2. *Antipholus Erotes* (of Syracuse) probably = *Antipholus Erraticus* or *Errans*, the 'wandering' and *Antipholus Sereptus* = *Surreptus*, the 'stolen' brother: but the point is that in the very Prologue of the original Plautus calls the stolen twin *puer surreptus*.[2]

In any event, and whether Shakespeare went straight

in his Introduction and reprints the whole of W.W.'s rendering in his Appendix. Cf. also Hazlitt's *Shakespeare's Library*.

[1] See the note on the copy, pp. 75, 77–9.

[2] The similarity between Antipholus *Erotes* and the name *Erotium* of the courtesan in Plautus may be purely accidental, or *may* have crept in somewhere by mnemonic confusion.

to the Latin, or was indebted to W.W. or to some antecedent play, no one seriously disputes that the play, as we have it, is of Shakespeare's writing in the main, or that it is early work, or that its plot comes out of Plautus.

III

The fun to be extracted from 'mistaken identity', if not as old as the hills, dates back to earliest fairy-tale and, on the stage, at least so far back as to later Greek Comedy. Plautus himself is suspected to have 'lifted' his *Menaechmi* from a play of Poseidippus, the Δίδυμοι[1] 'The Twins' (or Ὅμοιοι, 'As Like as Two Peas'). But let us see, in a brief abstract, how Plautus works it.

He opens with a Prologue, the speaker of which takes the spectators knowingly into his confidence and says, in effect, 'The scene behind me, ladies and gentlemen, is a street in Epidamnus. It will present some other town to-morrow, in another play; but for the while suppose that in Epidamnus we are. I have no personal acquaintance with the characters who will presently appear; but, as I understand it, the situation is something like this:

'There was a certain merchant in Syracuse who had twin sons born to him, so much alike that their real mother—let alone their foster-mother—could not tell t'other from which. When they had grown to seven years of age, their father took one of them, with a rich cargo, on a voyage to Tarentum. At Tarentum there happened to be a Fair day, with a great concourse of people. The boy, straying from his father, was lost in

[1] Athenaeus (XIV, 658) says that only in the comedies of Poseidippus are slave-cooks presented to us. There is one, Cylindrus, in the *Menaechmi*. An allusion to Hiero of Sicily (*Men.* 409 *seq.*) seems a throw-back from Plautus to an original which would agree with the date of Poseidippus.

the crowd. A certain merchant from Epidamnus—a childless man—picked the urchin up—kidnapped him, if you will—carried him home to Epidamnus, and adopted him for his own.

'Meanwhile the true father, after seeking his boy all over Tarentum, took to his bed there and died in a few days, of a broken heart.

'When news of all this reached Syracuse, the boys' grandfather [nothing is said of the mother] in his repining altered the name of the surviving twin, Sosicles, to Menaechmus, that of the stolen one, the *puer surreptus*.' And this Sosicles-Menaechmus, coming to man's estate, travels for six years in search of his lost brother, scouring Istria, Spain, Marseilles, Illyria, the Adriatic coasts, Magna Graecia, and all the harbours of Italy: until at length on a day he puts in at the port of Epidamnus, in Sicily: and at this point the play itself opens.

The lost twin, Menaechmus, is by this time a well-to-do citizen of Epidamnus; able to entertain parasites: but something of a loose-liver and moreover married to a jealous shrewish wife. As the curtain rises his pet parasite, one Peniculus, is discovered hanging about his patron's doorway, hungry for a meal, when the door opens and Menaechmus tumbles out followed by objurgations from his wife. But never mind! He has stolen one of her mantles—he has it hidden under his cloak—and, by your leave, he'll carry it off for a present to the courtesan Erotium across the way, taking Peniculus with him. So off they steal and are greeted effusively by that wanton lady, who calls out her cook and despatches him to buy provisions for a luncheon. The assignation made, Menaechmus goes off with Peniculus to his morning's business in the forum.

In their absence and while Erotium's cook is marketing for the meal, the other twin, Menaechmus-Sosicles,

arrives on the scene, with his slave Messenio and a porter or two carrying his luggage from the quay; for he is fresh from shipboard. Whilst he stares about him, the cook returns laden with provisions and greets him by name; and his amazement is by no means over when Erotium herself appears in the doorway and bids him in with endearing words and caresses—'*Animule mi*, my own Menaechmus!'—confounding him still further by rattling off his family history. 'What! Not know you?—Menaechmus, the son of Moschus, born at Syracuse in Sicily' etc. Upon this the stranger—who has hitherto supposed her to be mad or drunk—starts, in desperation of his own wits, to play up to her, and, against his slave's warning, follows her into the house. This closes Act II.

Act III opens with the sweating return of the parasite, Peniculus, who has lost his patron in the crowd of the forum, and is harking back with pangs in his belly for the belated luncheon. Upon him, out of Erotium's doorway, tumbles the Traveller-twin; who has eaten and been entertained, and, moreover, carries perplexedly a rich mantle on his arm, on an errand to the dyer's. 'This Epidamnus is a fine place egad! where the strumpets not only feast you for nothing, but let you loose with a *gage d'amour* of this value!' The parasite, promptly mistaking him for his twin, at once assails him with reproaches. 'Sir, this is outrageous! You gave me the slip: you have doubled back and cheated me of my promised luncheon....' Close upon this altercation Erotium's maid comes running out to overtake the stranger with another commission, 'And please Menaechmus, my mistress desires you, with her love, to take this bracelet to the jeweller's to be smartened up with an extra ounce of gold.' 'Better and better!' thinks Sosicles-Menaechmus, and walks off with his double booty, having first taken care to toss his festal garland down another street, to mislead pursuit.

But the parasite, vowing revenge for his lost luncheon, has gone off to tell Menaechmus' wife of her husband's perfidy. At the opening of Act IV she comes bouncing out of her house in a fury, with the informer at her heels. 'You'll catch him red-handed', he promises. 'He came out of that woman's, full of wine and garlanded, with the mantle on his arm to take to the dyer's....Yes, and hullo! here's the garland he had....*Here*'s the way, if you want to find him!' Sure enough, at that moment, they see the real Menaechmus approaching up the street, and hide themselves in a porchway. He is late for luncheon and in a very bad temper, having been detained at the law-courts finding security for a client. As he makes for Erotium's door, his wife collars him and slaps his face, demanding her mantle. A lively scene follows, the parasite abetting the wife and Menaechmus lying hardily. But the woman, weakened by her outburst, finally breaks down in tears; threatening, however, that he shall never re-enter his own house unless he brings back the mantle. 'I'll see it's brought back', promises Menaechmus. 'But, look here,' asks Peniculus, as she goes in, 'what do *I* get for my services?' 'I'll do as much for you when something is stolen from *your* house!' is the answer, as she closes the door.

The parasite—not the first man to interfere between husband and wife and to end by cursing both—walks off in dudgeon. Menaechmus knocks at Erotium's door, which is opened by that lady in person. He asks her for the mantle, saying that his wife has found out everything. 'But I gave it to you, to take to the dyer's—*and* my bracelet!' He protests; and the more he protests, the more convinced she becomes of his cheating. Ladies of her profession know these tricks, and she wastes no time over cutting her losses. 'Oh, very well! Keep the mantle, wear it or let your wife wear it....You have fooled me this time, but you don't set foot in this

house again. So you may just run along and fool somebody else!' *Her* door in its turn is slammed-to, and Menaechmus left in the street scratching his head, the most shut-out—*exclusissimus*—citizen in Epidamnus. He must really go and ask a few friends for advice.

He has no sooner departed on this errand than [Act v] his twin re-enters from the opposite street, still a little drunk, still carrying the mantle, and in foggy search after his slave Messenio, who has the wallet containing his money and is doubtless drinking in some obscure tavern. Simultaneously Menaechmus' wife opens her door and, recognising the mantle, of course recognises him for her husband. 'So you've come back, you beast: and properly ashamed of yourself, I hope!' Menaechmus-Sosicles, almost sobered by the shock of this onset, pulls himself together and asks, with stiff politeness—

I beg your pardon—What is it excites you, madam?
Wife. You dare breathe a word to me, you shameless villain?
M. Sosicles. Excuse me, what is my offence, that I may not speak?
Wife. You ask me? Oh, the brazen impudence of men!
M. Sosicles (*yet more politely*). Do you happen to know, ma'am, why the Greeks asserted Queen Hecuba to be a bitch?
Wife. Certainly not.
M. Sosicles. It was because Hecuba used to behave precisely as you are behaving at this moment.

So, between the man who has never set eyes on her before and the woman who objurgates him as her husband, the wrangle goes on until the wife's father appears—an old man grumbling at his years and infirmities. To him she appeals to be taken home and released from this monster of a husband. To this the dotard's first answers amount to no more than 'Tut-tut!

A squabble? Look here, how many times have I warned you against that sort of thing?...And goes with another woman, does he? Well, what do you expect if you mew a husband up? Would you have him sit indoors with the maids and card wool?' But when he tries equally sage advice upon Menaechmus-Sosicles it is met with assertions and denials which both accusers in their turn so sincerely accept for signs of madness that at length in bewildered self-defence the poor man feigns actual madness. A doctor is sent for: whose attentions Sosicles avoids by escaping to his ship. Prompt on the doctor's arrival the real Menaechmus strolls up, and is at once subjected to an examination in lunacy, and is only saved by the intervention of Messenio, who rescues his supposed master and is promised his freedom for it by one who neither is his real master nor knows him from Adam. Finally, in the rough-and-tumble, Menaechmus-Sosicles, infuriated on learning that his slave has been given his liberty by somebody who had no business to do anything of the sort, rushes in, confronts his twin upon Erotium's doorstep. Whereupon, after a swift *ἀναγνώρισις*, all is explained and all ends happily.

IV

From this analysis of Plautus' comedy two things will at once be perceived. For the first and most obvious—Plautus is content with one pair of twins: Shakespeare, out-Plautusing Plautus, adds a second pair, the two Dromios. Now to double a pair of twins so alike that even a wife cannot tell one from the other is not merely to double that amount of the improbable which a play of 'mistaken identity' claims for credence, but to multiply it by more than a hundred—nay by more than a thousand. When all the changes have been rung on Aristotle's impossible probabilities and possible

improbabilities, a fairy-tale is a fairy-tale, and we can concede a Fairy Prince incommoded by a nose a yard long. But a play supposed to be enacted by real persons exempt from magic must hold *some* claim of credence in its postulate, even though it call itself a farce. So when the condemned merchant Ægeon, telling his tale before the Duke, asserts that his wife arrived at an inn and became

> A joyful mother of two goodly sons:
> And, which was strange, the one so like the other,
> As could not be distinguished but by names....
> *That very hour, and in the self-same inn,*
> A meaner woman was deliveréd
> Of such a burden male, twins both alike:

we must suspect that inn of more than dramatically-licensed victualling; or at least submit that here is behaviour beyond even the lax range of the Bona-fide Traveller. On the stage of Plautus the convention of two men being alike enough to deceive even a wife might pass. It was actually a convention of pasteboard, since the actors wore masks; you had only to paint two masks alike, and the trick was done. But even on the stage of Plautus to present *two* pairs of doubles would have been to present an impossible improbability.

Shakespeare makes that improbability still more impossible by presenting it, on *his* stage, without masks. The critical excuse for *The Comedy of Errors* is usually borrowed from a passage in Coleridge's *Literary Remains*, and runs thus:

> Shakespeare has in this piece presented us with a legitimate farce in exactest consonance with the philosophical principles and character of farce, as distinguished from comedy and from entertainments. A proper farce is mainly distinguished from comedy by the license allowed, and even required, in the fable, in order to produce strange and

laughable situations. The story need not be probable, it is enough that it is possible. A comedy would scarcely allow even the two Antipholuses; because, although there have been instances of almost indistinguishable likeness in two persons, yet these are mere individual accidents, *casus ludentis naturae*, and the *verum* will not excuse the *inverisimile*. But farce dares add the two Dromios, and is justified in so doing by the laws of its end and constitution. In a word, farces commence in a postulate, which must be granted.

With all respect to Coleridge we say that this has the air of special pleading; and we distrust it the more because of its categorising farce apart from comedy and giving it 'laws of its end and constitution'. As a matter of history, and even of nomenclature, farce and comedy never have been and never can be divided into compartments with separate literary laws. If Molière and Congreve be the norm of Comedy (as Meredith in his famous Essay quite capriciously assumes) then Aristophanes is merely farcical, and—what does it matter? Who ever made these categories or gave them 'laws'? M. Maeterlinck's *L'Oiseau Bleu* or Sir James Barrie's *Peter Pan* are not farces as certainly as they are not tragedies. There is no line of demarcation—all such lines, or attempts at them, are a professional humbug of criticism. In literature it is all a question of tact. The author persuades us into the right mood, and Cinderella's godmother changes a pumpkin into a coach as readily as Gulliver finds himself in Lilliput, Peisthetairus in Nephelococcygia. We see no point at all in praising the *Errors* above the *Menaechmi* as 'the high water mark of elaborate farce in its highest signification'. It might (though we doubt it) have come near to deserve such praise had Shakespeare not set his artificial farce between the romantic-realism of the distressed merchant, with which he opens, and of the long-lost

wife reclaimed, with which he concludes. As Dowden puts it:

> The old man [Ægeon] stands before us doomed to death; and presently a play, like the flashing across and to and fro of dragon-flies, distracts our attention, but the human sorrow and affliction cannot wholly pass from view; before the close it must give place to some consolation. This is not the spirit in which mere farce is written. Plautus is in fact too light for Shakespeare.

We should prefer to say that in this early play Shakespeare already discloses his propensity for infusing romance into each or every 'form' of drama; that unique propensity which in his later work makes him so magical and so hard to define. But, as yet, farce and romance were not one 'form' but two separate stools; and between them in *The Comedy of Errors* he fell to the ground. We should add, however, that we have never seen it on the boards, for it is seldom staged. There is some evidence that it 'acts well'—which, after all, is the test—and even that it provokes uproarious mirth.

Sundry passages, even in its farcical episodes, show us the born poet, the born romancer, itching to be at his trade. For an example:

> O, train me not, sweet mermaid, with thy note,
> To drown me in thy sister's flood of tears:
> Sing, siren, for thyself, and I will dote:
> Spread o'er the silver waves thy golden hairs;
> And as a bed I'll take them, and there lie:
> And, in that glorious supposition, think
> He gains by death that hath such means to die:
> Let Love, being light, be drownéd if she sink!
>
> 3. 2. 45–52.

We prefix our book with a portrait of Bacon, who was admitted to Gray's Inn in 1575 and became a Bencher in 1586. It is likely enough, therefore, that he attended the performance of this play of Shakespeare's

given in Gray's Inn Hall on Grand Night, 28 December 1594. Indeed we may go further. In the course of the revels (as related in *Gesta Grayorum*), and some nights after the performance of 'Errors', we find the Prince of Purpoole holding a Council and listening to the set speeches of Six Councillors, who in turn exhort him upon (1) the Exercise of War, (2) the Study of Philosophy, (3) Eternizement and Fame by Buildings and Foundations, (4) Absoluteness of State and Treasure, (5) Virtue and a gracious Government, (6) Pastimes and Sports. These addresses are fully reported, with the Prince's reply: and James Spedding in 1861 (*Letters and Life of Francis Bacon*, I, 325) boldly, on internal evidence of style, ascribed them to Bacon: the speeches of the Six Councillors, says he, 'carry his signature in every line'. Spedding, on the strength of his long and close intimacy with Bacon's style, was entitled to speak positively. That, upon examination of the speeches, we believe him to be right is as much as we can modestly say. The ascription rests on internal evidence only, save for one small fact, noted by Dr W. W. Greg, which curiously supports it—that in the index of the so-called Northumberland MS occurs the entry of an item missing from the MS itself, *Orations at Graies Inne reuells*. Indeed it lies within the range of conjecture that the pages of this missing item were removed from the Northumberland collection to be used as the 'copy' from which W. Canning in 1688 set up *Gesta Grayorum* in print.

1922 Q.

P.S. The facts and theories in the foregoing should be checked by the section on this play, pp. 305–12, vol. I, of *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems*, by E. K. Chambers (1930).

1961 J.D.W.

THE STAGE HISTORY OF *THE COMEDY OF ERRORS*

In spite of an entry in the accounts of the Treasurer of the Chamber, which states that the Lord Chamberlain's Company was acting before the Court at Greenwich on the evening of 28 December 1594, it is commonly accepted that on that evening they were acting Shakespeare's play, *The Comedy of Errors*, in Gray's Inn during the Christmas Revels. *Gesta Grayorum*, the contemporary account of those revels, gives a vivid picture of the scene. When the Lord Ambassador from 'Templaria', the Inner Temple, had been placed in a chair of state in the hall, 'there arose such a disordered Tumult and Crowd upon the Stage, that there was no Opportunity to effect that which was intended'. Worshipful Personages, and 'Gentlewomen, whose Sex did privilege them from Violence', crowded on to the stage, and might not be displaced. The Lord Ambassador and his train departed, 'in a sort, discontented and displeased'; but still the tumult went on, so as to 'disorder and confound any good Inventions whatsoever. In regard whereof, as also for that the Sports intended were especially for the gracing of the *Templarians*, it was thought good not to offer any thing of Account, saving Dancing and Revelling with Gentlewomen; and after such Sports, a Comedy of Errors (like to *Plautus* his *Menechmus*) was played by the Players. So that Night was begun, and continued to the end, in nothing but Confusion and Errors; whereupon, it was ever afterwards called, *The Night of Errors*.'

In 1598 Meres mentions 'Shakespeare...his *Errors*' among the six comedies of Shakespeare; the Revels

Accounts show that '*The Plaie of Errors*, by Shaxberd', was acted by His Majesty's Players before the Court at Whitehall on Innocents' Night, 1604. Then the play disappears for nearly a century and a half. On 9 October 1734 'a Comedy in two Acts taken from Plautus and Shakspeare, called See if you like it, or 'Tis all a Mistake' was acted at Covent Garden by Stoppelear and others. Five times in the season of 1741–2 *The Comedy of Errors* was acted at Drury Lane, and it is recorded that in these performances Macklin played Dromio of Syracuse; and thereafter, in one version or another, the comedy appeared pretty regularly at Covent Garden, and once or twice at Drury Lane, until the end of the first quarter of the nineteenth century. It seems to have been a special favourite for benefit nights. Several people tried their hands at improving it; and it is not always possible to tell from the records whose version was acted on each occasion, though it is safe to conclude that it was never, during that period, Shakespeare's own. And in the casts Antipholus is always spelled Antipholis. At Covent Garden, on 24 April 1762, *The Twins, or the Comedy of Errors*, was acted 'but once', with a new prologue by Smith. This version was attributed to Thomas Hull, actor and dramatist, but was probably not his work. At Covent Garden, on 22 January 1779, another version appears, which may have been Hull's; or, again, the production at Covent Garden on 3 June 1793 may have been the first performance of Hull's version of the comedy, which is said to have been published in London in that year. Meanwhile at the Theatre Royal in Edinburgh, in 1780, a farce by W. Woods, called *The Twins, or Which is Which?*, 'altered from Shakespeare's Comedy of Errors', was produced; and this farce, the author of which 'endeavoured to use the Pruning-Knife only to make the shoots of Genius spring

forth more vigorously', was printed at Edinburgh the same year. On 6 April 1790 a version in three acts makes its appearance at Covent Garden; and in 1808, on 9 January, John Philip Kemble produced his own alteration (first printed in 1811) of the version by Hull. Hull had cut a great deal of Shakespeare out and had put a great deal of Hull in its place. In general, the aim of these versions was to remove, or to conceal, the 'improbability' of the events, and to get rid of some of the verbal witticism which amused Georgian audiences less than it had amused Elizabethan. Among the players who took part in the comedy during this period we find Hull constantly playing Ægeon. 'Gentleman' Lewis was famous as Antipholis of Syracuse. Quick was an excellent Dromio of Ephesus, with sometimes Brunsdon, but usually Munden for Dromio of Syracuse; and, after Quick had left Covent Garden for Drury Lane, we find Rees playing Dromio of Ephesus to the Dromio of Syracuse of Munden, and closely imitating Munden's voice and manner. Mrs Lessingham, Mrs Bates, Mrs Mattocks and Miss Wallis all played Adriana; and an eminent Luciana was Mrs Mountain, while Wewitzer was often seen as Dr Pinch. When Kemble first produced his alteration of the version by Hull (who died just about that time), Pope and Charles Kemble played the Antipholis twins, Munden and Blanchard the Dromios (unfortunately, Blanchard was much taller than Munden); Murray succeeded Hull as Ægeon; Mrs Gibbs was the Adriana, and Miss Norton the Luciana.

Kemble's version held the stage (it is at least strongly probable that it was his uncle's version which Henry Siddons, the son of Sarah, staged at the Theatre Royal, Edinburgh, in February 1815) until, in 1819, Frederic Reynolds turned the comedy into an opera, which was as successful as were most of Reynolds's operas, and

was acted twenty-seven times in one season. Songs from other plays by Shakespeare were dragged in with complete impropriety; but the staging was splendid; the music was well chosen by Henry Bishop, and the cast included Liston and William Farren as the Dromios, Blanchard as Dr Pinch, Mrs Faucit as the Abbess, Miss Stephens as Adriana, and Maria Tree as Luciana. Hazlitt said of Maria Tree: 'She sings delightfully in company with Miss Stephens; and in the Comedy of Errors almost puzzles the town, as she does Antipholis of Syracuse, which to prefer: *Magis pares quam similes*.' In February 1820 *The Comedy of Errors*, which possibly means Reynolds's opera, was staged at Bath, with Farren as Antipholis of Syracuse; but poor Miss Greene, less fortunate than Miss Stephens, was 'execrable' as Adriana. However, she was not too execrable to play the part in the autumn of that year at Covent Garden. And at Drury Lane, in 1824, Mme Vestris appeared in the opera as Luciana, to the Adriana of Miss Stephens, with Liston and Harley for the Dromios.

Samuel Phelps restored Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* (with many another of Shakespeare's plays) to the stage. On 8 November 1855 he played it at Sadler's Wells, tacked on to a 'new play called Hamilton of Bothwellhaugh', written by one A. R. Slous; but in January 1856 he seems to have given it the place of honour in his bill. In the next decade the play was taken up by two Irish brothers, Charles and Harry Webb, who played the Dromios at Drury Lane under Falconer and Chatterton, at the Princess's during the Shakespeare Tercentenary celebrations of 1864, and in many provincial towns. On one occasion, in 1864, when they were playing the comedy at Liverpool, the Antipholus of Syracuse was a young actor named S. B. Bancroft, and the Dr Pinch a still younger actor