

# THE DUBUQUE SHAKESPEARE PROJECT

at the Carnegie Stout Library, Dubuque, IA

Winter/Spring 2024

## THE MAKING OF A PLAYWRIGHT

### The Comedy of Errors

Synopsis: Shakespeare's shortest play is also his most farcical comedy with multiple mistaken identities. Two sets of identical twins, the masters both named Antipholus and the servants both named Dromio are separated at birth. One set grows up in Syracuse and comes to Ephesus to find the other, and every possible combination of master and servant happens resulting in gleeful chaos.

Discussion Topics:

- *Comedy* starts with a serious ticking clock where Egeon will be killed if his ransom is not paid within a certain time. How does this set up the stakes for the farce that follows? This is a structural element Shakespeare will use for almost all his comedies.
- Shakespeare tends to value suspense over surprise where the audience always knows more than the characters. *Comedy* throws some delightful surprises, not least of which is the identity of the Abbess. How does Shakespeare structure the narrative to best utilize both surprise and suspense?
- Shakespeare rarely obeys Aristotlean unities of space, time and action except in *Comedy* and *The Tempest*. While the unities are defined for tragedy, they are here used for a farce. How do the unities help inform the structure for the comedy?

Folger Text Link: <https://www.folger.edu/explore/shakespeares-works/the-comedy-of-errors/>  
CS Library also has paper copies of the play.

Kanopy Film link: <https://www.kanopy.com/en/dubuque/video/5332678>

***Other resources to consider:***

The Flying Karamazov Brothers 1983 version (on youtube)

The Boys from Syracuse, musical version with music by Richard Rodgers

Big Business 1988 movie with Bette Middler & Lily Tomlin

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Carnegie-Stout Public Library 360 W 11th Street, Dubuque, IA