

Heather Smith- William Shakespeare

Dromio concludes the play-

“We came into the world like brother and brother, and now let’s go hand in hand, not one before another.”

What does Shakespeare mean by this? How important is this statement in relation to the whole play?

William Shakespeare writes the play “The Comedy Of Errors” focussing on inequalities, by concluding with the quote by Dromio,

“We came into the world like brother and brother, and now let’s go hand in hand not one before another.”

The two brothers are now together and have regained their identity.

Identity is also important throughout this play due to the witty confusion and humorous genre. This humour however is not only to entertain the audience but also to influence and affect the audience’s way of thinking about the aspects covered throughout “The Comedy Of Errors” set in Elizabethan England.

The title, “The Comedy of Errors” immediately introduces the genre of the play, commencing the confusion. Identity and equality are important aspects that are tackled in William Shakespeare’s play writing.

These aspects are presented throughout, starting in Act 1, scene 1. Shakespeare’s views on inequality are presented when the character “Duke” is directed to say “Both by the syracusians and ourselves, to admit no traffic to our adverse towns.” By using this view of Syracusians and Ephesians, not being allowed to mix in the same country begins to explore inequality.

Here, the aspect that the countries a law run and are very strict is portrayed to the audience again through speech from the character, Duke.

“If any born at Ephesus be seen at any Syracusian marts or fairs; again: if any Syracusian born come to the bay of Ephesus, he dies.”

This shows how strict the law is and how Syracusians view Ephesians as unequal from themselves, and vice versa. This brings in historical context at the time of Elizabethan England as inequality was frequently accepted around the world. This has a universal meaning therefore, enabling the audience to relate this to the modern day world that we live in.

Egeon’s character is then clearly defined by the playwright creating the characters identity. Shakespeare does this by the telling of Egeon’s story through Act 1, scene 1.

“In Syracuse was I born; and wed unto a woman, happy but for me.”

Other characters are also identified through the telling of Egeon's story these are; Emilia, Egeon's wife who later is brought into the confusion of identity. His two sons (twins) both named Antipholus.

“A joyful mother of two goodly sons, and which was strange, the one so like the other.”

These twins are two extremely important characters creating the main aspect of confusion of identity throughout the play. Another set of twins was born in the same hour, however they were from an extremely poor background, and were both named Dromio.

“A meaner woman was delivered of such a burthen, male twins, both alike: those for their parents were exceeding poor.”

Both Dromios then became slaves for the Antipholus twins. This develops inequality on a more personal and intimate level.

Image is a very important aspect throughout Shakespeare's play. This commences with the character of Duke. He needs to be perceived by the people of Ephesus as strict and powerful and not to show personal opinion or emotions. However, after the telling of Egeon's story, this becomes false as he has sympathy for Egeon and extends his time for a day instead of immediate public execution. This shows his caring side, however he tries to hide this because if he were to be seen like this, the character feels as if he would not gain respect so therefore in public he is a very different person than he is in private.

Throughout the play inequality links with identity. Questions are raised to the audience throughout such as ‘Are we treated based on our appearances or treated based on how we act and whom we are inside?’ This becomes apparent when Antipholus of Ephesus and Antipholus of Syracuse are introduced.

These two characters act differently from one another although they are identical in appearance.

Antipholus of Ephesus is materialistic, has a very short temper, and does not believe in monogamy.

“And fetch the chain; by this I know't is made: Bring it, I pray you, to the Porpentine; for there's the house: that chain I bestow. Be it for nothing but to spite my wife.”

This is stating that Antipholus of Ephesus plans to take the chain to a local prostitute instead of his wife in order to spite her. He does this because she has locked him out by accident thinking that he was already in the house dining with her, however, this was Antipholus of Syracuse.

On the other hand, the character, Antipholus of Syracuse is shown to be the opposite and believe in romance and love.

“Thee will love, and with thee lead my life: Thou hast no husband yet, nor I no wife. Give me thy hand.”

Although both Antipholus’ are portrayed completely different in personality and beliefs, they are treated the same by other characters because the others do not realise that they are two different people. This is where the confusion of identity arises to the audience as they are confusing one Antipholus with the other. There is a sense of dramatic irony throughout the play. This is when the audience is aware of something that the characters on stage do not appear to be. This is a technique included by William Shakespeare, which creates a lot of humour throughout and links with identity confusion. Here, the audience has a greater knowledge of the events and characters and those involved in the play, which enables them to analyse the different issues and characteristics.

There are two main confusions of identity in the play “The Comedy of Errors”. These are between Antipholus of Syracuse and Antipholus of Ephesus. Also between Dromio of Syracuse and Dromio of Ephesus.

This confusion between the Dromio twins begins in Act 1, scene 11 when the character of Dromio of Ephesus enters to meet Antipholus of Syracuse. Antipholus of Syracuse meanwhile is portrayed to view him as Dromio of Syracuse. This becomes obvious to the audience in this scene and throughout the play by Shakespeare’s order of events and speech.

At the beginning of this, the First Merchant tells Antipholus of Syracuse to tell people he is from Epidamnus and not Syracuse to avoid prosecution by the Duke. Antipholus of Syracuse then tells Dromio of Syracuse to take his money back to their place of stay for safe keeping.

“Go bear it to the Centaur, where we host, and stay there, Dromio, till I come to thee.”

This causes confusion between the characters on stage when Dromio of Ephesus enters presuming that the character of Antipholus of Syracuse he sees is his master Antipholus of Ephesus.

“Returned so soon? Rather approached too late.”

Confusion is then reinforced by the confusion of money between Dromio of Ephesus and Antipholus of Syracuse. This is portrayed when Shakespeare instructs Antipholus of Syracuse to say “I am not of sportive humour now. Tell me, and dally not: where is the money?”

The audience begins to wonder the relevance of the money and whether it is linked with the beginning of the play and the money, that Egeon has to find in twenty-four hours.

The whole play uses dramatic irony to focus on confusion of identity. This is because the audience knows who is who through actions and mistakes but the characters on stage do not; this therefore creates the humorous events. This also makes the audience think about the nature of identity and what makes our identity? Is it the public view that people/characters give out or is it their private opinions that count? This creates questioning in the audience's minds of their own identity and perception of others.

More humour is then created through identity because due to this confusion, when William Shakespeare directs Antipholus of Syracuse to beat Dromio of Ephesus. This also introduces inequality between the two sets of twins, this links with the change and the equality shown at the end of the play.

The confusion is then emphasised in Act 2, Scene 2. The dramatist deliberately enters Dromio of Syracuse at this point to reinforce the identity misunderstanding. This is done for humorous purposes towards the audience. This is when Dromio starts to think that his master is going mad, as he does not know what he is talking about.

“Hold, sir, for god's sake; now your jest is earnest. Upon what bargain do you give it me?”

Adriana is then brought into the confusion when she confuses Antipholus of Syracuse for Antipholus of Ephesus.

“Plead you to me, fair dame? I know you not: In Ephesus I am but two hours old.”

This quote made by the character, Antipholus of Syracuse shows his disbelief in the words that Adriana has spoke about being his wife. “How comes it now, my husband”, and is showing confusion about the whole situation and why Adriana is talking to him. “To me she speaks; she moves me for her theme: what, was I married to her in my dream?”

However, knowing that a mistake must have been made, Shakespeare directs Antipholus of Syracuse to go along with Adriana's demands and goes to her home to dine with her and pretend to be her husband. Therefore giving the character a false identity of Antipholus of Ephesus.

“I'll say as they say, and persevere so, and in this midst at all adventures go.”

The character, Balthazar is directed to advise Antipholus of Ephesus when he becomes locked out of his own house. Balthazar is directed to say “If by strong hand you offer to break in now in the stirring passage of the day, a vulgar comment will be made of it, and that supposed by the common

roust against your yet ungalled estimation.” The dramatist deliberately includes this to give a different sense of identity and peoples perception of behaviour. It shows Antipholus of Ephesus to be extremely superficial, as he has to be someone he is not by holding back and waiting until night to act. However, without influence from Balthazar the character would have typically acted immediately due to the characters short temper and continuous bursts of anger shown throughout. For example, when he beats Dromio.

Antipholus of Syracuse has to hide his identity and feelings aswell, and change his image and actions in Act 3, scene 2. “Be secret false: what need she be acquainted?” shows this by speech of Luciana. Luciana is Adriana’s sister who has different beliefs from Adriana.

Adriana is portrayed by the dramatist to be a strong believer in marriage and monogamy. The character is directed to believe that everyone should be married and that you are not complete without marriage. This combines a feeling of inequality between her and her Luciana because Luciana is not married and Adriana is.

However, Luciana is portrayed to believe in freedom and believes that women should put up with men in marriage and the mistakes that they frequently make. This character is directed to find these mistakes normal, for example adultery. Whereas Adriana is a very jealous person always questioning her character husband, Antipholus.

This is shown by Luciana’s line, “Be secret false: what need she be acquainted?” Here, Luciana is advising Antipholus of Syracuse to tell Adriana what she wants to hear by lying about his adultery to make Adriana happy and not cause any upset. By the end of the play, Luciana realises that identity should consist of both the public and private view and they should be linked in some way therefore making fair judgements.

Luciana’s character’s point in this scene therefore, is protecting her sister’s image. Image is important throughout the whole play as it affects the perceptive view of the audience on the characters, which reflects on the play. Image also links with identity, because how we reveal ourselves alters our identity and shapes it to match our actions and personality.

William Shakespeare then brings another character into the identity confusion of the play. Angelo confuses Antipholus of Syracuse for Antipholus of Ephesus. The fact that they are twins is very important because it makes the audience look at the perception of the character by the other characters on stage, e.g. Adriana. This confusion appears when Angelo is entered onto stage where another character is already present, Antipholus of Syracuse.

“Here is the chain. I thought to have ta’en you at the Porpentine: The chain unfinished made me stay thus long.”

Here, Angelo is presenting Antipholus of Syracuse with the chain that Antipholus of Ephesus had instructed Angelo to make. Angelo has confused the twins at this point.

“Made it for me, sir! I bespoke it not.”

This shows Antipholus of Syracuse disbelief and this character is starting to be confused. The dramatist deliberately does this to emphasise identity to the audience, which in turn makes the audience think about identity and other like issues in modern day life or true identity issues with which they can relate. However, Shakespeare instructs Angelo to speak persuasively, Antipholus of Syracuse accepts the chain from Angelo.

“Go home with it, and please your wife withal; and soon at supper-time I’ll visit you, and then receive my money for the chain.”

Shakespeare introduces money into the play again to constantly remind the audience of the character at the beginning of the play, Egeon, and his purpose. Dramatic Irony is a technique used throughout to show the audience the truth; also creating humour, as the characters do not know what the audience does and therefore this creates Dramatic Irony. This is important with the character Egeon, because the audience know of his presence whereas the other characters in the play do not.

At this point in the play, Antipholus of Syracuse has the chain, has become fed up, and wants to leave Ephesus. The dramatist presents these thoughts through speech from Antipholus of Syracuse when he is directed to say “I’ll to the mart, and there for Dromio stay: If any ship put out, then straight away.”

In Act 4, scene 1, the introduction of a new character made by William Shakespeare to the play pursues the aspect of inequality. The character is the Second Merchant and he is presented to be in authority to Angelo by his demands of money.

“Therefore make present satisfaction, or I’ll attach you by this officer”

The strict laws of Ephesus are also combined here to remind the audience of Egeon from the beginning of the play and the rules set upon him, therefore the purpose of the play.

Angelo yet again, confuses the Antipholus twins. “Come, come, you know I gave it you even now. Either send the chain, or send me by some token.” This shows Angelo’s confusion to the audience because the character has previously confused Antipholus of Syracuse for Antipholus of Ephesus. This now shows a great deal more as the chain was given to

Antipholus Of Syracuse not Antipholus of Ephesus, who Angelo is now asking about the money he 'owes'.

Dromio of Syracuse is then brought into this confusion as he enters with news of a boat that Antipholus of Syracuse asked him to find.

"Master, there is a bark of Epidamnum that stays but till her owner comes aboard, and then, sir, she bears away. Our fraughtage, sir"

The audience then builds up the image and their feelings about Dromio of Syracuse because the dramatist deliberately creates sympathy by instructing Antipholus of Ephesus to beat him for actually doing no wrong. This creates a softer and more volatile image and identity of the Dromio twins, therefore affecting the audience's view.

"Thou drunken slave, I sent thee for a rope, and told thee ant told thee to what purpose and what end."

The audience can also tell that this is Antipholus of Ephesus and not Antipholus of Syracuse because the speech and actions portray an aggressive and short-tempered image. This also shows inequality between the Dromio twins and the Antipholus twins. The inequality appears to be present in the play because of money and wealth. The Antipholus twins are portrayed by the playwright to have more authority and power over the Dromio twins because they come from wealthier backgrounds whereas the Dromio twins came from a poor family.

Angelo's identity and portrayed image by Shakespeare is the questioned because he has been presented to have a split personality and his attitude changes in this scene. Sometimes he seems to be very trusting, "Go home with it, and please your wife withal; and soon at supper-time I'll visit you, and then receive my money for the chain". This shows trust between Angelo and Antipholus because he is trusting Antipholus to pay him later. However, Angelo is also portrayed by the dramatist to be quite aggressive, "Here is thy fee; arrest him, officer. I would not spare my brother in this case, if he should scorn me so apparently." This shows aggression from the character, Angelo towards Antipholus at a latter stage of the play. The playwright does this deliberately to change the audience's perception of character.

Inequality is approached again in Act 4, scene 4 in the same way as William Shakespeare has presented it before in "The Comedy of Errors". Dromio of Ephesus returns to his master, Antipholus of Ephesus with a rope as he was instructed. However, previously, Antipholus of Ephesus directed Dromio of Syracuse to fetch the money for bail form his wife, Adriana, thinking it was Dromio of Ephesus, his slave. Therefore, identity confusion is also covered here.

“ And to that end, sir, I will welcome you. [*Beating him*]”

This shows the inequality between master and slave. Slavery has universal meaning as this happens in particular places around the world and previously took place worldwide.

Antipholus of Ephesus then confronts Adriana, his wife when she enters the scene. The audience is expecting the identity confusion to be resolved.

“You minion, you, are these your customers? Did this companion with the saffron face revel and feast it at my house to-day, whilst upon me the guilty doors were shut, and I denied to enter in my house?”

The playwright portrays Antipholus of Ephesus to be expressing his anger here about not being allowed to dine in his own home. Shakespeare has Adriana lying; he does this by instructing her to say, “O husband, God doth know you dined at home”. This presents both stories and the audience pieces together the information of the Identity Confusion.

The argument carries on between Antipholus of Ephesus and Adriana, with Dromio of Ephesus backing up his master, Antipholus of Ephesus.

“Certes, she did; the kitchen-vestal scorn’d you.”

In act 5, scene 1, Angelo describes the image of Antipholus of Ephesus.

“Highly beloved”

“Very reverent reputation”

“His word might bear my wealth at any time”

Therefore in Angelo’s opinion, Antipholus of Ephesus is portrayed to be highly regarded and loved throughout Ephesus. This affects the way he is portrayed to the audience.

Identity is confused yet again in this scene. The Second Merchant and Antipholus of Syracuse draw swords after Antipholus of Syracuse has entered wearing the chain, which Angelo previously gave him. Angelo becomes confused because Antipholus of Ephesus denied having the chain, as he did not receive it, however Angelo thought he was giving it to Antipholus of Ephesus. Now Angelo sees the chain on Antipholus of Syracuse, mistaking him for Antipholus of Ephesus. Angelo becomes angry with this for not telling the truth and causing shame upon them.

“’T is so; and that self chain about his neck, which he forswore most monstrously to have. Good sire, draw near to me, I’ll speak to him; Signior Antipholus, I wonder much that you would put me to this shame and trouble.”

Therefore, due to identity confusion, trouble has been caused. Neither of the Antipholus twins is lying and are both telling the truth.



Shakespeare directs Luciana to suggest telling the Duke of this matter.

“Complain unto the Duke of this indignity.”

Therefore, they decide to wait for the Duke who is due to pass at five o’clock for the execution of Egeon, Antipholus of Ephesus and Syracuse father. Dramatic Irony is tackled here again; Shakespeare has presented the idea of Egeon being executed to the audience. However, the characters on stage do not know this.

The Duke’s line here is “If any friend will pay the sum for him, he shall not die; so much we tender him.” Shakespeare deliberately inserts this to remind us that: Egeon has been sentenced to death at the beginning of the play. Someone does have the money that could release him. This is also Dramatic Irony again.

Both Adriana and Antipholus of Ephesus tell the Duke of the story of events. Shakespeare deliberately has two characters retelling the story so that: everything is somehow brought to a conclusion, to see how the play has fitted and pieced things together, and to see the different views of both characters. In addition, the identity confusion starts to clear up here.

When Egeon is confronted with Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus, the character cannot understand why Antipholus and Dromio cannot recognise him. This is because it is actually Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse and not Antipholus of Ephesus and Dromio Ephesus as he thought. Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus do not recognise Egeon, Antipholus’ father, because they have not seen each other since separation.

However, Antipholus of Syracuse and Dromio of Syracuse recognise Egeon immediately.

“Egeon, art thou not? Or else his ghost?” spoken by Antipholus of Syracuse.

“O, my old master! Who hath bound him here?” spoken by Dromio of Syracuse.

Within the play, the image and identity of the Abbess is contradicted as the Abbess now turns out to be Emilia, Egeon’s wife. Therefore, making the abbess the mother of Antipholus twins.

“Speak, old Egeon, if thou be’st the man that hadst a wife once call’d Emilia, that bore thee at a burthen two fair sons: O, if thou be’st the same Egeon, speak, and speak unto the same Emilia!” This speech written by William Shakespeare for the character Emilia to say is a powerful speech confirming her identity.

“If I dream not, thou art Emilia: if thou art she, tell me, where is that son that floated with thee on the fatal raft?” This confirms Emilias identity as Egeon recognises her.

Inequality is probably the most important aspect of William Shakespeare's writing of "The Comedy of Errors". It is a constant viewpoint relating with Antipholus of Ephesus, Antipholus of Syracuse, Dromio of Ephesus, and Dromio of Syracuse.

At the end of the play "The Comedy of Errors", a question is raised 'Who is more important', 'Who should go first'. This is delivered through Shakespeare's playwriting concentrating on the two characters set on stage, 'Dromio of Syracuse' and 'Dromio of Ephesus'. The statement draws out all inequalities to grant justice and equality between brother and brother.

"We all came into the world like brother and brother; and now lets go hand in hand, not one before another."