

The Comedy of Errors



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare's father was a glove-maker, and Shakespeare received no more than a grammar school education. He married Anne Hathaway in 1582, but left his family behind around 1590 and moved to London, where he became an actor and playwright. He was an immediate success: Shakespeare soon became the most popular playwright of the day as well as a part-owner of the Globe Theater. His theater troupe was adopted by King James as the King's Men in 1603. Shakespeare retired as a rich and prominent man to Stratford-upon-Avon in 1613, and died three years later.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The comedy is set in an unspecified time in ancient Greece and the Mediterranean. This historical setting provides the backdrop for the merchant and trading lifestyle prevalent in the play, as well as the feuding between local regions and cities, such as between Syracuse and Ephesus. However, the play is by no means intended to be a faithful reconstruction of any ancient time period. Rather, a vague ancient Greek setting provides the jumping-off point for Shakespeare's comedy.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Shakespeare was heavily influenced by the comedies of the ancient Roman playwright Plautus, especially his play *Menaechmi*, about twins separated while young. *The Comedy of Errors* has been influential among later literature, as well, as a prime example of the genre for which it is named, a kind of light comedy often featuring mistaken identities.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Comedy of Errors*
- **When Written:** Early 1590s
- **Where Written:** England
- **When Published:** 1595
- **Literary Period:** The Renaissance (1500-1660)
- **Genre:** Drama, comedy, comedy of errors
- **Setting:** Ephesus (an ancient Greek city in Asia Minor, located on the coast of present-day Turkey)
- **Climax:** As the Duke prepares to execute Aegeon, both Aemilia and Antipholus of Ephesus demand justice from him. Antipholus, Aemilia, Luciana, Angelo, Dromio, the courtesan, and the merchant all give different versions of what has happened during the day.

- **Antagonist:** There is no real antagonist. Most characters create their own problems by making assumptions based on the similar appearances of each Antipholus and Dromio.

EXTRA CREDIT

The Three Unities. *The Comedy of Errors* is one of few Shakespeare plays that obeys the “three unities” of theater, a rigid neoclassical set of rules for plays derived from Aristotle and popular in the 17th century. The unity of place dictates that the play should happen in a single place (in this case, Ephesus); the unity of time dictates that the play should take place over no more than 24 hours (this play occurs all in one day); and the unity of action dictates that the play should focus on one main plot action (in this case, the confusion of Antipholus of Ephesus and Antipholus of Syracuse).



PLOT SUMMARY

Aegeon is a merchant from Syracuse, who has traveled to the city of Ephesus. The two cities are in a feud, and the Duke of Ephesus, Solinus, has made a decree that anyone from Syracuse found in Ephesus will pay a 1000 mark fine or be executed. Aegeon does not have enough money for the fine, so Solinus prepares to execute him. First, though, he wants to hear what has brought Aegeon to Ephesus. Aegeon explains that he and his wife had twin sons, and had another pair of twins as servants for their sons. They were all on a ship during a big storm, and suffered a shipwreck. Aegeon took one son and one servant, and tied himself to a mast for safety. His wife did the same. The ship broke in two, and Aegeon and his wife were rescued by two separate groups of sailors who went off in two different directions. Years later, Aegeon's son left Syracuse to find his long-lost twin brother and mother, and Aegeon followed suit, eventually coming to Ephesus in his quest to find his wife and sons. Solinus takes (some) pity on Aegeon and says that he will give him 24 hours to find someone to pay his fine. Otherwise, Aegeon will be executed.

Elsewhere in Ephesus, Aegeon's son Antipholus of Syracuse has recently arrived with his servant Dromio. He sends Dromio to the inn where they are staying with his money and promises to meet him after doing business with some merchants. Dromio leaves, and then the servant of Antipholus' lost brother, Dromio of Ephesus (the twin of Dromio of Syracuse) arrives and tells Antipholus (whom he mistakes for his twin, Antipholus of Ephesus) to come home for dinner. Antipholus is confused and asks about his money. Dromio says he doesn't know what Antipholus is talking about, and Antipholus beats him. He says that he has heard of sorcerers and witches inhabiting Ephesus

and concludes that some magician is controlling Dromio, making him act strangely.

At the house of Antipholus of Ephesus (the lost twin of Antipholus of Syracuse), his wife Adriana talks with her sister Luciana, upset that neither her husband nor her servant Dromio have returned. Luciana tells her to wait patiently for her husband, and advises her to cede to her husband's authority and will. Dromio of Ephesus enters and tells Adriana that Antipholus would not come home, claimed not to know her, and talked only about money. Adriana thinks that her husband is having an affair, and this is why he won't come home for dinner.

Antipholus of Syracuse runs into Dromio of Syracuse in the street and asks what he was talking about earlier (confusing him with Dromio of Ephesus). Dromio is confused and says he hasn't seen his master since he was sent to the inn. Antipholus beats Dromio in frustration. Luciana and Adriana enter, and Luciana scolds Antipholus for treating his wife poorly. Antipholus says he doesn't know who either of these women are. Dromio guesses that they are "goblins, owls, and sprites." Antipholus decides to play along with Adriana and go back to her home for dinner. They all go inside Adriana's house, leaving Dromio to watch the door and not let anyone in to disturb the meal.

Nearby this house, Antipholus of Ephesus is talking with his servant, Dromio of Ephesus, a goldsmith named Angelo, and a merchant named Balthazar. He tells Angelo that he must go to dinner with his wife and tells him to bring a gold **necklace** he has ordered to his house later. Dromio insists that Antipholus previously denied the existence of his wife, beat him, and asked him about money, but Antipholus denies that he did any of it. He invites Balthazar to dinner, and they go to the door of his house. When he knocks, though, Dromio of Syracuse refuses to let them enter. He says his name is Dromio, and Dromio of Ephesus thinks that someone has tried to steal his identity. Antipholus of Ephesus threatens to break down the door, but Balthazar cautions him against this, saying it might spread gossip about the state of his marriage. Antipholus agrees and suggests they go to have dinner with a courtesan he knows instead.

Later, Luciana chastises Antipholus of Syracuse for how he is treating Adriana. Antipholus insists that he is not married to Adriana and professes his love for Luciana, much to her distress. She leaves, and a distressed Dromio of Syracuse enters. He says that an ugly, fat kitchen-maid in the house named Nell knew him by name and claimed that he was her fiancé. Antipholus again concludes that Ephesus is full of dangerous witches. He tells Dromio to see if there are any ships leaving soon, so that they can get out of Ephesus. Dromio leaves, and Angelo enters. Angelo gives Antipholus of Syracuse the gold **chain** that was intended for Antipholus of Ephesus. Antipholus is confused but accepts the **chain**.

Later in the day, a merchant confronts Angelo about money that he owes him. Angelo says that he is expecting payment for a **necklace** from Antipholus, and will use this money to pay the merchant back. Antipholus of Ephesus then enters with Dromio of Ephesus. He tells Dromio to go buy a rope, which he will give to his wife. Angelo asks for his payment, but Antipholus insists that he has not yet received the **chain**. Angelo and the merchant have an officer arrest Antipholus. Dromio of Syracuse then enters and tells Antipholus that there is a ship leaving Ephesus soon. Antipholus is confused and tells Dromio to go get money from Adriana for his **bail**.

Back at Antipholus' house, Adriana is discussing her husband with Luciana, who tells her about how Antipholus denied his marriage and tried to woo Luciana. Dromio of Syracuse enters and says that Antipholus has been arrested. Adriana gives him money for Antipholus' **bail**. Dromio goes to find Antipholus, and runs into Antipholus of Syracuse in the street. He gives him the gold, much to Antipholus' confusion. He asks how Antipholus got out of prison, and Antipholus tells him to stop fooling around. He says that all of this confusion must be the result of sorcerers in Ephesus. A courtesan enters and asks Antipholus if he has the gold **chain** he has promised her in return for her **diamond ring**. Antipholus and Dromio think she is a witch, call her "Mistress Satan," and tell her to leave. The courtesan says that she has heard Antipholus has gone mad, and now knows it to be true. She plans to go to Adriana.

Meanwhile, Antipholus of Ephesus is still under arrest. Dromio of Ephesus finds him, and he asks if Dromio has the **bail money**. Dromio is confused, and says he has the rope he was sent for. Antipholus is furious and beats Dromio. Adriana, Luciana, the courtesan enter with a "conjurer" named Pinch. Adriana thinks that Antipholus and Dromio are mad and possessed, and asks Pinch to try to perform an exorcism on them. Antipholus threatens to tear out Adriana's eyes, and Pinch ties Dromio and him up, planning to lock them in a dark room until they come to their senses. He takes them away. The courtesan says that Antipholus took a **diamond ring** from her and promised her a gold **chain**, but has not given it to her. Just then, Antipholus of Syracuse and Dromio of Syracuse enter, with their swords drawn. They chase all the women away, thinking they are witches. Antipholus wants to leave Ephesus immediately.

Angelo apologizes to the merchant for making him wait for the money he is owed. Just then, Antipholus of Syracuse and Dromio of Syracuse enters. Antipholus is wearing the gold **chain**, and Angelo asks how he could deny that he received the **necklace**. Antipholus says he never denied it. The merchant swears that Antipholus did deny this, and the two prepare to duel. Just then, Adriana enters with Luciana and the courtesan. Adriana says that Antipholus is mad and asks for help in tying up Antipholus and Dromio. The two men flee to a nearby abbey, and the abbess comes out to see what is going on. Adriana explains that her husband is mad, but the abbess refuses to let

anyone into the abbey. She asks what has befallen Antipholus to make him mad, and Adriana says it might be that he has become unfaithful. The abbess blames Adriana for this—first for not scolding her husband, then for scolding him too much about possible infidelity. The Duke enters with Aegeon, preparing to execute him, and Adriana asks the Duke also for justice against the abbess. She explains what has happened with her husband, and the Duke sends for the abbess. A servant comes from Adriana's house and tells her that Antipholus and Dromio have escaped and attacked Pinch. Adriana says this cannot be true, as Antipholus and Dromio are in the abbey. Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus arrive, and Antipholus asks the Duke for justice. Aegeon says he recognizes Antipholus as his son, but no one pays attention to him as Antipholus tells the Duke what has happened to him earlier in the day: he was locked out of his own house, then Angelo failed to deliver the gold **necklace** he promised him, then he was falsely arrested, then Dromio failed to bring him the **bail money**, and then he was tied up and thrown in a dark room by Pinch. He and Dromio had to gnaw the ropes that tied them up in order to escape. Adriana and Luciana deny locking Antipholus out of the house, though Angelo says he witnessed this. He says he did give Antipholus the gold **chain**, and the merchant agrees. Aegeon interrupts to say that Antipholus is his son, but Antipholus says he doesn't know who Aegeon is.

Finally, the abbess enters with Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse, who recognize Aegeon. The abbess also recognizes Aegeon, and identifies herself as Aemilia, his long-lost wife. She explains that she was separated from Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus after the shipwreck and became an abbess. Everyone clarifies just what has happened during the day with the two Antipholuses and two Dromios. Antipholus of Ephesus offers to use his **bail money** to pay Aegeon's fine, but Duke Solinus decides to pardon Aegeon for free. Aemilia suggests everyone come to the abbey to "hear at large discoursed all our fortunes." Everyone but the two Dromios leaves, and then both Dromios follow them walking side-by-side and hand in hand as brothers.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Aegeon – A merchant from Syracuse, who was separated from one of his twin sons, one of his twin servants, and his wife in a shipwreck. He has come to Ephesus searching for them, in violation of a law forbidding any Syracusans from being in the town. He is due to be executed for this, but is pardoned at the last minute at the conclusion of the play.

Antipholus of Ephesus – One of Aegeon's twin sons, separated from him when just a baby. He has become a wealthy merchant in Ephesus, with a wife named Adriana (whom he may be cheating on). He is constantly confused with his twin

throughout the play, arrested for (apparently to him) no reason, and tied up and thrown in a dark room by Pinch. In his frustration, he beats his servant Dromio and threatens violence against Adriana. At the end of the play, he prioritizes family above money, offering to pay Aegeon's fine in order to save his life.

Antipholus of Syracuse – The other one of Aegeon's twins. He comes to Ephesus with his servant Dromio of Syracuse, in search of his long-lost mother and brother. He is greatly concerned with his money, but also with his family—he has traveled all over the Mediterranean in search of his missing relatives. He is continually confused for his twin, and resorts to the supernatural (especially witches) to explain the strange behavior of everyone in Ephesus. He is easily frustrated with Dromio, whom he beats in his frustration.

Dromio of Ephesus – One of the twin servants of Aegeon's family, who ends up in Ephesus with Antipholus of Ephesus after the shipwreck. He is obedient but, due to all the confused identities during the play, is often made the scapegoat of various mix-ups and suffers beatings as a punishment. Like his twin, he is clever with words, puns, and riddles.

Dromio of Syracuse – The other twin servant, who accompanies Antipholus of Syracuse to Ephesus. Like his twin, Dromio does his best to obey his master, but ends up getting beaten and scolded as a result of the mistaken identities that drive all the errors of the play. He is equally as clever and quick with words as his twin.

Angelo – A goldsmith who makes a gold **necklace** for Antipholus of Ephesus. He mistakenly gives the **necklace** to Antipholus of Syracuse and then asks for payment from Antipholus of Ephesus. When this Antipholus denies having received the **necklace**, Angelo and the merchant (to whom Angelo owes money) have Antipholus of Ephesus arrested.

Luciana – Adriana's sister, who advises her to remain subservient to her husband. She scolds Antipholus of Syracuse (thinking him to be Antipholus of Ephesus) for denying being married to Adriana and tells him to at least try to cover up his infidelity. Antipholus of Syracuse, however, professes his love for Luciana.

Aemilia – The long-lost wife of Aegeon and mother of the Antipholus twins. After being separated from Antipholus of Ephesus, she became an abbess. Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse seek sanctuary in her abbey, and she brings them to the Duke at the end of the play to clear up everyone's confusion.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Duke Solinus – The Duke of Ephesus, who plans in the beginning of the play to strictly uphold the law forbidding any Syracusans from being in Ephesus, by executing Aegeon. At the end of the play, though, moved by the exceptional

circumstances of the day, he pardons Aegeon.

Balthazar – A merchant who Antipholus of Ephesus invites to dinner. They are both shut out of his house, though, and it is Balthazar who persuades Antipholus not to break the door down.

Merchant – A merchant who is owed money by Angelo. He has Antipholus of Ephesus arrested when he refuses to pay Angelo for the gold **necklace**. He later sees Antipholus of Syracuse with the **necklace** and almost duels him over the matter.

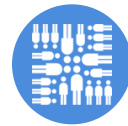
Pinch – A “conjurer” who Adriana gets to try to perform an exorcism on Antipholus. He ties up Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus and puts them in a dark room. He is an example of how the play’s characters foolishly resort to supernatural explanations for the confusing coincidences they encounter.

Adriana – The wife of Antipholus of Ephesus. Adriana suspects her husband of cheating on her and blames herself for his infidelity. She is upset when Antipholus of Syracuse (whom she thinks to be her husband) denies their marriage.

Luce – A servant in Adriana’s house who appears only briefly in one scene.

Courtesan – A woman with whom Antipholus of Ephesus may be having an affair. Antipholus has taken her **diamond ring** and promised her a gold **necklace** in return. She tries to track him down and finds Antipholus of Syracuse instead, who thinks she is a witch.

play’s most important “exchange” is that of the identities of each Antipholus and Dromio. One could say that, for part of the play, Adriana exchanges husbands. As this suggests, the whole world of the play can be seen through a kind of economic logic of exchange, value, and profit: is it more profitable for Antipholus of Syracuse to play along with the person Adriana thinks him to be? How much money is a life (e.g. Aegeon’s) worth? Characters in the play often seem more concerned with profit and money than with other matters. However, the play is also filled with examples of people who respect values other than monetary ones. Antipholus of Syracuse and Aegeon are willing to travel faraway and risk their lives in order to find the missing members of their families. And Antipholus of Ephesus gladly offers to pay his father’s expensive fine to save his life (though the Duke Solinus ends up pardoning him). Thus, while the exchange of valuable objects is central to the plot of the play, Shakespeare reveals that the center of his characters’ lives is not necessarily things, but rather people, specifically family.



MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

The Comedy of Errors is essentially a play about a family that is split apart and then reunited at last. The family unit and the bonds of familial

relationships are crucial to the play. Antipholus of Syracuse travels all around the Mediterranean in search of his lost brother and mother, and Aegeon puts his life in jeopardy by searching for his family in Ephesus. At the end of the play, Aegeon’s entire family is overjoyed to meet their long-lost relatives, and the comedy concludes with Dromio of Ephesus and Dromio of Syracuse walking hand in hand, showing the importance of their brotherly bond.

Given the importance of family in the play, it is no surprise that marriage also plays a significant role. Marriage is what solidifies new family bonds and brings families together. Along with the reunions of brothers and children in the final scene, Aegeon and Aemilia are also importantly reunited as loving husband and wife. The play also shows, however, less than ideal examples of marriage. For most of the play, Adriana suspects that her husband is cheating on her, and, as she tells Aemilia, she spends most of her time chastising Antipholus of Ephesus for this suspected infidelity. (It is never absolutely clear whether Antipholus cheats on Adriana, but he does admit to spending a lot of time with the courtesan.) Additionally, this marital relationship forces Adriana into a subservient role. Luciana advises her to cede to her husband’s will, because “a man is master of his liberty.” Adriana is even blamed by Aemilia for her husband’s infidelity. Antipholus occupies a more powerful position than his wife in their marriage, and frequently threatens physical violence against her. In addition to this marriage, Nell’s desire for Dromio of Syracuse offers a low, comedic counterpoint to the more ideal marriage of Aemilia and Aegeon. As these two relationships show, marriage



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don’t have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



COMMERCE AND EXCHANGE

Many of the characters in the play are merchants or traders, and issues of money are important from the start of the play: Aegeon’s life depends on whether or not he will be able to come up with 1000 marks in order to pay the fine for being a Syracusan in Ephesus. And one of the first concerns of Antipholus of Syracuse when he arrives in Ephesus is for the safety of his money. All of this emphasis on economic issues points to the general importance of exchanges in the play. It is the exchange of several key objects—the gold chain made by Angelo, the courtesan’s ring, Antipholus of Ephesus’ bail money—that moves the plot along and creates problems for characters. Then, it is with the return of these items to their rightful owners that the play comes to a resolution in the final scene.

But it is not just objects that are exchanged in the comedy. The

may be crucial in forming the family relationships so highly valued in the play, but in one's day-to-day life it can also be full of arguing, suspicion, fighting, and strategic maneuvering. These examples do not negate the ideal of marriage as an institution that brings families together in loving bonds, but, in comedic fashion, they do bring these high aspirations down to earth a bit.



APPEARANCES AND IDENTITY

Practically all of the high-jinx and mistakes that drive the comedy and plot of *The Comedy of Errors* result from the confusion of the identities of

Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus, and Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse. Each one is constantly mixed up with his twin because of his physical appearance, even though they act differently and insist on who they really are. The play thus shows the folly of making assumptions based on someone's appearance. In the end, everyone's true identity is revealed. This resolution, though, does not put an end to the play's deeper questioning of identity. In particular, Shakespeare's comedy prompts one to ask: where does identity come from? Is it something innate that we are born with and that is then recognized by other people? Or does the recognition of others actually help create our identity?

Each Antipholus and Dromio has a "true" identity with which they are born that determines their life to some degree. However, characters' identities are also partially formed by how other people treat them. Antipholus of Syracuse in some sense becomes Antipholus of Ephesus for a small period of time, because he is treated as such. Moreover, it is only when characters' true identities are recognized by others that they truly become themselves. Aemilia declares herself to be Aegeon's wife, and Aegeon declares Antipholus of Ephesus to be his son, but it is only when Aegeon recognizes Aemilia and Antipholus recognizes his father that these identities are completely fulfilled. Moreover, what people do can also help define who they are. The merchant and courtesan remain unnamed in the play, known only by their occupations. Similarly, Aemilia is only known as the abbess for much of her time on stage. Thus, identity in the play is a curious and complicated mix of innate qualities, where one is from (the two pairs of twins are only distinguished by their cities of origin), what one does, and how one is seen by other people.



MISTAKES AND COINCIDENCES

Shakespeare's play is called *The Comedy of Errors* for a reason: the play is filled to the brim with humorous mistakes and errors, from mistaken

identities to mixed-up objects to misinterpreted puns.

Characters continually make mistakes and grow more and more confused as the play progresses. While such mistakes can be seen as negative things in the lives of the play's characters,

they are also in some sense beneficial to the play. It is precisely error that allows for the comedy and plot of the play, which can be seen as a continually escalating series of errors followed by one final scene of revelation and resolution. This happy ending is the defining feature of comedy as a genre. But the play can't jump directly to this resolution. It must take a wandering path from beginning to happy conclusion (in Latin, *error* literally means "a wandering"). There have to be obstacles for the characters, a plot that meanders as characters go off-course and make mistakes. These mistakes make the comedy interesting and amusing, and create the very problems that the ending can then solve.

In addition to characters' mistakes, simple coincidences are also a significant force in the plot. The play relies on the (almost implausible) coincidences of Aemilia having become an abbess in the city where her lost son settles, and of all the characters finding themselves in Ephesus on the same day and running into each other at just the right time to save Aegeon's life. All these coincidences continually baffle the characters of the play, who can find no adequate explanation for what they see as strange, inexplicable events and behavior. So, they often turn to the supernatural. Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse think that Ephesus is inhabited by witches and sorcerers in order to explain how everyone seems to know them. Adriana thinks that her husband is possessed, and gets Pinch to try to perform an exorcism on him. And the Duke, when he sees both pairs of twins, thinks that one pair are spirit versions of the real Antipholus and Dromio. All this talk of the supernatural, though, ends up being just one more error. The play reveals that we often use the supernatural as a catch-all explanation for what we don't understand, even though such things are more often just the result of bizarre coincidences and simple human error.



SCAPEGOATS AND SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Resorting to supernatural explanations is one way the play's characters make sense of the strange things they experience during the play. Another way is through using scapegoats. With no easy explanation, characters become frustrated and take this anger out on other people whom they irrationally blame for their troubles. In particular, Antipholus of Ephesus and Antipholus of Syracuse place blame on their respective servants and Adriana. In the world of the play, women and servants occupy lower, less privileged roles in society. Thus, Adriana and the two Dromios are prime targets for scapegoating. Both Antipholus of Ephesus and Antipholus of Syracuse beat and abuse their Dromios, and Antipholus of Ephesus threatens physical violence against Adriana multiple times.

These instances reveal the strict, oppressive social and gender hierarchies in the world of the play, as both women and servants are subject to the whims of their husbands or masters.

Shakespeare, however, mostly puts this kind of scapegoating on stage simply for laughs and slapstick humor. Nevertheless, the play also delights in moments when these scapegoat figures can get a slight bit of revenge on their social superiors. Adriana is able to lock her husband out of their home, and has him tied and bound by Pinch. And both Dromio of Ephesus and Dromio of Syracuse are witty and quick with words, often talking back to their masters with clever riddles and jokes. While the play is a rather light comedy and is mostly interested in the comic potential of scapegoats, it can also be seen as critiquing the practice, since all of the scapegoats of the play are really not to blame, and it is ultimately foolish and mistaken for each Antipholus to take out his anger on his unfortunate social inferiors.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



THE GOLD NECKLACE, BAIL MONEY, AND DIAMOND RING

While there are not really any symbols in the play (insofar as objects that stand in for something other than what they really are), there are several highly important objects that function as links between characters, plot points, and significant themes. The gold necklace made by Angelo, the courtesan's diamond ring, and the bail money intended for Antipholus of Ephesus are all exchanged and end up in the wrong hands. They drive the plot of the comedy, resulting in the arrest of Antipholus of Ephesus, Antipholus' beating Dromio (for not bringing the bail money), and the courtesan's getting involved in things. As these things pass from character to character, they highlight the importance of the idea of exchange in the play (of money, objects, and also of identities), and also serve as indicators of all the mix-ups of the play: neither the necklace nor the bail money go to the right character, and the diamond ring is not returned to the courtesan as promised. The very idea of bail (giving money in return for someone's release from jail) suggests the extent to which the world of the play is governed by economics, as money can be exchanged effectively for a human being (a point driven home by Aegeon's needing 1000 marks to save his life). The return of all these objects to their rightful owners at the end of the play signifies at last the resolution of all the play's various errors.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Simon & Schuster edition of *The Comedy of Errors* published in 2005.

Act 1, Scene 1 Quotes

☞ Again: if any Syracusian born
Come to the bay of Ephesus, he dies,
His goods confiscate to the duke's dispose;
Unless a thousand marks be levied,
To quit the penalty and to ransom him.
Thy substance, valued at the highest rate,
Cannot amount unto a hundred marks;
Therefore by law thou art condemn'd to die.

Related Characters: Duke Solinus (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 1.1.18-25

Explanation and Analysis

Duke Solinus is explaining the legal situation which causes much of the tension in the play. The cities of Syracuse and Ephesus are feuding, so the Duke of Ephesus has decreed that if anyone from Syracuse (a Syracusian) comes to Ephesus, he will be executed unless he can pay a fee of 1000 marks. Solinus explains that since Aegeon only has 100 marks, he will be executed. This comedy begins in a dark place, as Aegeon is not only sentenced to die, but is also *willing* to die, saying that death will end his troubles.

This quote establishes the problem of Aegeon's execution, which the play will need to resolve. This problem is framed by commerce and exchange, introducing one of the play's major themes. Aegeon's execution can be prevented by an exchange of money. Merchants, money, misunderstandings, and confused exchanges make up most of the plot and the humor of *The Comedy of Errors*. This quote also leads well into Aegeon's response (below), which explains the familial split that sets the rest of the plot in motion.

☞ There had she not been long but she became
A joyful mother of two goodly sons;
And, which was strange, the one so like the other
As could not be distinguish'd but by names.
That very hour, and in the self-same inn,
A meaner woman was delivered
Of such a burden, male twins, both alike:
Those, for their parents were exceeding poor,
I bought, and brought up to attend my sons.

Related Characters: Aegeon (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 1.1.49-57


Explanation and Analysis

Though he plans to execute Aegeon, the Duke is curious about Aegeon's story and reason for being in Ephesus. Aegeon explains that he made a fortune as a merchant, and that when a business partner died, he and his wife traveled to Epidamnum. In this quote, Aegeon describes how soon after his wife's arrival in Epidamnum she gave birth to children: "two goodly sons." He remarks that it was "strange," since the two sons (twins) looked so alike each other that they could only be told apart by their names. By a miraculous coincidence, at the same time that his wife was giving birth, a poor ("meaner") woman gave birth to another set of male twins, also extremely identical. Since Aegeon was wealthy, he purchased and took on the poor set of twins to be servants to his own sons.

This pair of identical births is the basis for much of the confusion and the humor in the play. Almost every single character in the play mistakes one brother for his twin, and hilarity ensues. Family is extremely important to Aegeon, and this "strange" set of twins and serving twins sets the stage for the other problem of the play: the family split. Much of the work of the play and its plot will be to reunite the family after the split that Aegeon describes below.

☝ For, ere the ships could meet by twice five leagues,
We were encounter'd by a mighty rock;
Which being violently borne upon,
Our helpful ship was splitted in the midst;
So that, in this unjust divorce of us,
Fortune had left to both of us alike
What to delight in, what to sorrow for.

Related Characters: Aegeon (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 1.1.10-106

Explanation and Analysis

Aegeon says that with his wife, his sons, and his sons' servants, he boarded a ship from Epidamnum home to Syracuse. But, as he describes in the quote, before the ship could get far from Epidamnum, the ship began to sink. Aegeon and his wife tied themselves and their boys to the masts, floating and hoping to be saved, but the boat then crashed into "mighty rock." This crash caused the ship to split in half, 'divorcing' the family. The family was rescued in two

groups by separate boats traveling in different directions. Aegeon remarks on Fortune's role in this familial schism, suggesting that it left each trio equally thankful (for living) and sorrowful (for losing the other half of the family).

A key detail that enables the confusion and countless cases of mistaken identities in the play is that, in the chaos of the storm, each parent was uncertain which children they were with. Even Aegeon and his wife were unable to tell the babies apart without their names, and, in another huge coincidence, each parent believed they had the children with the same names. Thus Aegeon's son is named Antipholus of Syracuse and his servant is Dromio of Syracuse. The mother also believed she had Antipholus and Dromio, so the pair who live in Ephesus are Antipholus of Ephesus and Dromio of Ephesus. Without this coincidence, many of the mistaken identities would have been cleared up instantly, and the play would have resolved itself almost immediately. Fate, chance, and coincidence are the ruling forces of Aegeon's life and the play itself.

After hearing this sad story, the Duke decides he will give Aegeon an extra 24 hours to come up with the 1000 marks, or else he will still have to be executed.

Act 1, Scene 2 Quotes

☝ He that commends me to mine own content
Commends me to the thing I cannot get.
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:
So I, to find a mother and a brother,
In quest of them, unhappy, lose myself.

Related Characters: Antipholus of Syracuse (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 1.2.33-40

Explanation and Analysis

Antipholus of Syracuse, along with his servant Dromio of Syracuse, has landed in Ephesus to look for his mother and brother. A local merchant tells Antipholus to be careful, and to pretend that he is not from Syracuse or else he'll have to pay the 1000 mark fine or be sentenced to death. Antipholus sends Dromio to the Centaur Inn with his money, planning to meet Dromio soon. The merchant wishes Antipholus happiness before leaving the stage. Left

alone, Antipholus of Syracuse delivers this small soliloquy. In the soliloquy, Antipholus describes the difficulty of finding his lost family. He compares himself to "a drop of water" which "in the ocean seeks another drop." It is extremely difficult and unlikely for him to reunite with his family, making the eventual reunion all the more miraculous and rewarding. Antipholus of Syracuse cares about money, but we also see how important family is to him and the unhappiness and pain he suffers in searching for his lost brother and mother.

Note also that he expresses this loss of his others as a loss of self: "unhappy, lose myself." This gesture foreshadows the existential feelings that the brothers experience in the many cases of mistaken identity (which begin with the entrance of Dromio of Ephesus immediately after this soliloquy ends). When the characters meet with people who know them by name as entirely different people, they begin to question who they are. The confusions are so great that they begin to turn inward, till characters lose themselves. As Dromio of Syracuse profoundly and comedically asks later in the play, "Am I myself?"

☛ Where is the gold I gave in charge to thee?

To me, sir? Why, you gave no gold to me.

Come on, sir knave, have done your foolishness,
And tell me how thou hast disposed thy charge.

My charge was but to fetch you from the mart
Home to your house, the Phoenix, sir, to dinner:
My mistress and her sister stays for you.

Now, as I am a Christian, answer me,
In what safe place you have bestow'd my money;
Or I shall break that merry sconce of yours,
That stands on tricks when I am undisposed:
Where is the thousand marks thou hadst of me?

Related Characters: Antipholus of Syracuse, Dromio of Ephesus (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 1.2.71-82

Explanation and Analysis

Dromio of Ephesus has entered the stage immediately after Antipholus of Syracuse finished his soliloquy. Dromio of Ephesus mistakes this Antipholus for his master, Antipholus of Ephesus, and tells Antipholus of Syracuse that it's time to come home dinner. Antipholus of Syracuse is confused, thinking that the Dromio he is speaking with is Dromio of Syracuse, the servant he just sent to the Centaur Inn with money. Thus at the beginning of the quote, Antipholus asks the wrong Dromio where is the gold that he gave to his own Dromio. Dromio of Ephesus is confused, and responds as such, since Antipholus of Syracuse only gave money to Dromio of Syracuse. The two continue to mistake each other for their twins, one asking for his money, the other asking his master to come home for dinner.

This interaction is the first of many, many confusing scenes of mistaken identities. Note that the social hierarchy dominates the interaction. In the dialogue that follows the quote, Dromio puns on "marks," saying he has received physical marks from beatings as opposed to marks as currency. Throughout the play, both master Antipholuses beat their (and their twin's) Dromio. The masters constantly blame the servants for the misunderstandings, and this scene shows early on how the dynamic will work in the play.

☛ Upon my life, by some device or other
The villain is o'erraught of all my money.

They say this town is full of cozenage;
As, nimble jugglers that deceive the eye,
Dark-working sorcerers that change the mind,
Soul-killing witches that deform the body,
Disguised cheaters, prating mountebanks,
And many such-like liberties of sin:
If it prove so, I will be gone the sooner.
I'll to the Centaur, to go seek this slave:
I greatly fear my money is not safe.

Related Characters: Antipholus of Syracuse (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 1.2.98-108

Explanation and Analysis

After Dromio runs off stage to avoid further beating, Antipholus of Syracuse offers this soliloquy. He first suggests that Dromio is a villain who has run away with Antipholus's money. Antipholus of Syracuse then goes on to

say that he has heard that Ephesus is home to "dark-working sorcerers" and "soul-killing witches." The supernatural explanation for the misunderstanding is humorous, and at the same time eerie. The dark undertones of Aegeon's possible execution are still fresh, and sorcery is the only way that Antipholus of Syracuse, who believes his situation to be hopeless, can understand the interaction he's just had with Dromio of Ephesus.



Act 2, Scene 1 Quotes

☝☝ 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.

Why should their liberty than ours be more?

Because their business still lies out o' door.

Related Characters: Adriana, Luciana (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 2.1.7-11

Explanation and Analysis

These lines are spoken at the house of Antipholus of Ephesus by his wife, Adriana, and her sister, Luciana. Adriana is upset since Antipholus of Ephesus and his servant Dromio of Ephesus have not returned yet for dinner (recall that Dromio of Ephesus accidentally told Antipholus of Syracuse to come home for dinner). Luciana tells Adriana to be patient, saying that "A man is master of his liberty." In other words, men are free, and can do what they want when they want, and spend their time how they please. Adriana protests, and suggests that the liberty and freedom of a woman should matter the same amount as that of a man, but her sister says men have business "out o' door," and are masters of women.

Thus we see another dynamic develop. As men are masters of their servants, so they are also masters over women. Adriana is not happy with her husband, since he is late, and is she unhappy with her subservient role in the marriage. Note that business and commerce is Luciana's primary reason for which men are the "masters."


Also note that the final lines of the interaction rhyme. In the dialogue that follows, Adriana and Luciana trade fast paced sentences, each speaking one line of iambic pentameter at a time. Trading single lines in this manner is a classic literary

device called "Stichomythia."

☝☝ 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!"

Related Characters: Dromio of Ephesus (speaker)

Related Themes:     

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 2.1.62-72

Explanation and Analysis


After Luciana and Adriana continue to argue about men, power, and marriage—with Luciana arguing that men are masters of nature and their wives—Dromio of Ephesus enters. Remember that Dromio of Ephesus was sent by Adriana to summon Antipholus of Ephesus, but Dromio accidentally called on Antipholus of Syracuse. Here Dromio of Ephesus tells his mistress Adriana about the confusing interaction he had with the man they believe to be her husband. Dromio humorously stages a mini-dialogue, giving both his voice and the responses from Antipholus of Syracuse. Thus on stage we see the first case of mistaken identity played out for a second time.


Dromio's impersonation of Antipholus consists mainly of one line: "My gold!" This emphasizes commerce and Antipholus's demand for his money, which will be transferred around and demanded again and again throughout the play. Finally, Antipholus speaks out against Dromio's "mistress," giving the impression that he is claiming not to know his own wife. This strange behavior makes Adriana believe that Antipholus of Ephesus is cheating on her (outlined below) and shows a potential for another family split, echoing the original division of Aegeon's family.

Dromio reports that he was beaten and that Antipholus spoke only of his gold, but Adriana sends him out to fetch Antipholus again, and also probably to receive more beatings.

●● I know his eye doth homage otherwhere;
 Or else what lets it but he would be here?
 Sister, you know he promised me a chain;
 Would that alone, alone he would detain,
 So he would keep fair quarter with his bed!
 I see the jewel best enameled
 Will lose his beauty; yet the gold bides still,
 That others touch, and often touching will
 Wear gold: and no man that hath a name,
 By falsehood and corruption doth it shame.
 Since that my beauty cannot please his eye,
 I'll weep what's left away, and weeping die.

Related Characters: Adriana (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 2.1.109-120

Explanation and Analysis


After Dromio of Ephesus leaves to seek Antipholus of Ephesus, Adriana tells Luciana her interpretation of Dromio's report. Despite warnings from Luciana not to be jealous, Adriana believes the behavior Dromio described indicates that Antipholus is cheating on her, and that "his eye doth homage otherwhere." Otherwise, the behavior and his absence from the home is inexplicable to her. Adriana goes on to mention the gold necklace that Antipholus promised to her. This chain will be another key object of commerce and exchange, as well as misunderstanding and fury for many of the play's characters.

To Adriana, the gold chain is a token of Antipholus's love, symbolizing beauty, goodness, and permanence. She remarks that even the "best enameled" jewels will lose their beauty (as humans do with age), while gold remains constant. It is incorrupt and everlasting. Adriana concludes that she, unlike gold, is apparently no longer beautiful enough to please Antipholus, dramatically resigning to weep and die. Despite her desire for more power in her marriage, Adriana is incredibly hurt by the idea of Antipholus's infidelity.

Note also that once Dromio leaves the stage, Luciana and Adriana revert back to rhyming.

●● Ay, ay, Antipholus, look strange and frown:
 Some other mistress hath thy sweet aspects;
 I am not Adriana nor thy wife.
 The time was once when thou unurged wouldst vow
 That never words were music to thine ear,
 That never object pleasing in thine eye,
 That never touch well welcome to thy hand,
 That never meat sweet-savour'd in thy taste,
 Unless I spake, or look'd, or touch'd, or carved to thee.
 How comes it now, my husband, O, how comes it,
 That thou art then estranged from thyself?

Related Characters: Adriana (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 2.2.120-131

Explanation and Analysis

Antipholus of Syracuse has reunited with Dromio of Syracuse, and found out that the money has in fact been delivered to the Centaur Inn. Confused by his previous interaction with Dromio of Ephesus and unsatisfied with Dromio of Syracuse's answers, Antipholus of Syracuse beats his servant. Dromio of Syracuse is confused by the beatings, since he has followed instructions perfectly and he himself has not yet been mistaken for his twin. Antipholus and Dromio are joking when Adriana enters and delivers this quote, the beginning of a long, passionate speech in which she chastises Antipholus for his rudeness and infidelity.

She begins by claiming "I am not Adriana nor thy wife," echoing the hurtful claims she believes her husband has made. She also echoes the out-of-body, existential experience of mistaken identity and self-questioning that Antipholus foreshadowed above with "lose myself." This same sentiment ends the quote, when Adriana asks the man she thinks is her husband, how is it that he became "estranged from thyself?"

In the middle of this quote, Adriana recalls the love poetry that Antipholus of Ephesus must have spoken to her when they were happily married or in courtship. This part of her speech uses a common poetic feature, anaphora, in which the multiple lines begin with the same words (in this case, "That never"). In these poetic lines she says that her husband claimed to take no joy in the senses unless Adriana was the origin of the experience (unless she "spake, or look'd, or touch'd, or carved").

☛ Fie, brother! How the world is changed with you!
 When were you wont to use my sister thus?
 She sent for you by Dromio home to dinner.

By Dromio?

By me?

By thee; and this thou didst return from him,
 That he did buffet thee, and, in his blows,
 Denied my house for his, me for his wife.

Did you converse, sir, with this gentlewoman?
 What is the course and drift of your compact?
 I, Sir? I never saw her till this time.

Villain, thou liest; for even her very words
 Didst thou deliver to me on the mart.

I never spake with her in all my life.

How can she thus, then, call us by our names,
 Unless it be by inspiration.

Related Characters: Luciana, Antipholus of Syracuse, Dromio of Syracuse, Adriana (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 2.2.163-178

Explanation and Analysis

Antipholus of Syracuse and Dromio of Syracuse are extremely confused by Adriana's long tirade, and so Antipholus explains that he has just landed in Ephesus. Luciana begins the dialogue in the quote by commenting how changed Antipholus seems, continuing to confuse him for his twin, Antipholus of Ephesus. Luciana asks him why he is treating her sister this way, pretending he doesn't know her when Dromio was sent to bring Antipholus home for dinner. Thus the comedic response of Antipholus and Dromio in turn: "By Dromio?" "By me?"

Adriana confirms that she sent Dromio and that he returned from Antipholus having been beaten and denied. Dromio of Syracuse respond in confusion, since he has never before met Adriana, but Antipholus calls him a liar, having interacted with (beaten) Dromio of Ephesus. Antipholus concludes by asking how else could Adriana know Dromio's name, unless by divine inspiration or witchcraft. This scene continues the building sequence of coincidences and mistaken identities. Like with most of the issues, the servants (Dromios) take the blame for the

miscommunications and problems. Antipholus of Syracuse is uncertain what to do and if he is dreaming or not, and he ultimately decides to follow Adriana and pretend to be her husband in order to find out more information.

☛ Are you, there, wife? You might have come before.

Your wife, sir knave! Go get you from the door.

Related Characters: Antipholus of Ephesus, Adriana (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 3.1.96-97

Explanation and Analysis



Antipholus of Syracuse is pretending to be Adriana's husband, and is inside the house. Dromio of Syracuse is guarding the door so that the family can enjoy dinner. Dromio of Ephesus has finally found the right Antipholus, and the two have finally come home for dinner. But when Dromio of Ephesus knocks on the door, Dromio of Syracuse denies him entrance from the other side. This marks the first time that twins have interacted on stage. The moment is filled with dramatic irony (meaning we know something the characters don't), since if they could only see each other during the scene they'd recognize that they were twins. When Dromio of Syracuse announces his name from behind the door, Dromio of Ephesus believes that his identity has been stolen.

In this quote, Antipholus of Ephesus calls up to his wife Adriana, asking if she's there and why she hasn't come before. But since Adriana believes her husband is inside, she dismisses Antipholus of Ephesus for a "knave" (a depraved or foolish person), and sends him away. Here, Adriana does exactly what she chided Antipholus of Syracuse for doing: denying to know her spouse. Antipholus of Ephesus responds violently, wanting to break down the door, but is advised not to. Much of the drama and humor of this scene is derived from how close the twins get to meeting without actually recognizing each other. As the play continues, the delay of such a recognition becomes more and more absurd.

Act 3, Scene 2 Quotes

☛☛ And may it be that you have quite forgot
A husband's office? Shall, Antipholus,
Even in the spring of love, thy love-springs rot?
Shall love, in building, grow so ruinous?
If you did wed my sister for her wealth,
Then for her wealth's sake use her with more kindness:
Or if you like elsewhere, do it by stealth;
Muffle your false love with some show of blindness:
Let not my sister read it in your eye.

Related Characters: Luciana (speaker), Antipholus of Syracuse

Related Themes:  



Page Number: 3.2.1-11

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Luciana and Antipholus of Syracuse are talking, while Luciana still believes him to be Antipholus of Ephesus. She chides him for forgetting his duties ("office") as a husband, first for falling out of love with his wife, and second for being so overt about it. She describes his love as rotting, and ruinous, suggesting that wealth was the only reason that Antipholus married Adriana in the first place. If this is the case, Luciana asserts, then Antipholus ought to be kind to her for the same reason: money. Luciana believes that if Antipholus loves someone else, he should hide it and use stealth, here using the figurative language of eyes and blindness to emphasize her point. As the dialogue continues, Antipholus of Syracuse will deny being married to Adriana, and go on profess his love to Luciana herself. Note also that Luciana speaks in rhymes (though not couplets).

☛☛ Are you a god? Would you create me new?
Transform me, then, and to your power I'll yield.
But if that I am I, then well I know
Your weeping sister is no wife of mine,
Nor to her bed no homage do I owe:
Far more, far more to you do I decline.
O, train me not, sweet mermaid, with thy note,
To drown me in thy sister flood of tears:
Sing, siren, for thyself, and I will dote.

Related Characters: Antipholus of Syracuse (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 3.2.40-49

Explanation and Analysis

Antipholus of Syracuse begins by asking Luciana if she is a god with the power to transform him. He uses this dramatic language to convey the impossibility and the emotional weight of her suggestion that he pretend to be someone he isn't. He continues by saying that if it is the case that he is himself (if that I am I), then he is certain that Adriana is not his wife. Here Antipholus uses rhetorical language (if / then statements) common in love poetry, to turn his focus from Luciana's suggestion to his own courtship of her and the beginning of a new argument. He continues, saying that he owes nothing to Adriana, and in fact is "far more, far more" interested in Luciana herself. Calling her a mermaid and a siren, he asks her to make her own case rather than telling him to love Adriana.

This comedic moment seems absurd and wrong to Luciana, who still believes that Antipholus of Syracuse is the Antipholus of Ephesus that is married to her sister. The courtship of Luciana seems natural, as Shakespearean comedies produce as many marriages as possible—but though Luciana has expressed the opinion that wives should be subservient, she has also expressed a hesitancy to get married. The end of the play will imply that Antipholus of Syracuse will marry Luciana, but we do not see the marriage take place on stage and are not certain that it will occur.

☛☛ Why, how now, Dromio! Where runn'st thou so fast?

Do you know me, sir? Am I Dromio? Am I your man? Am I myself?

Thou art Dromio, thou art my man, thou art thyself.

I am an ass, I am a woman's man, and besides myself.

What woman's man? And how besides thyself?

Marry, sir, besides myself, I am due to a woman; one that claims me, one that haunts me, one that will have me.

Related Characters: Antipholus of Syracuse, Dromio of Syracuse (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 3.2.77-89

Explanation and Analysis

Upset by Antipholus of Syracuse's sudden declaration of love, Luciana has run to get her sister. As she exits, Dromio of Syracuse runs onto the stage. Antipholus stops him and asks where he's running so quickly. Here Dromio responds with the comedic line that also speaks to the eerie feeling of being out of place: "Am I Dromio? Am I your man? Am I myself?" He is so confused by the way others are treating him that he begins to question if he really is himself. Antipholus assures him that he is himself, before Dromio claims to be an "ass" and a "woman's man." Dromio proceeds to describe an interaction with the kitchen woman named Nell, whom Dromio of Ephesus is engaged to. Nell mistook Dromio of Syracuse for her fiancée, instigating the strange, self-questioning hysteria in Dromio of Syracuse. He goes on to describe Nell as extremely fat, making an elaborate joke that she is the size of a globe, naming different parts of her body with countries around the world (also note the pun on Shakespeare's theatre, named the Globe). This scene is played for comedy, but it also causes Antipholus to believe that there are "none but witches" in Ephesus, using magic and witchcraft to explain what are actually a series of coincidences and human errors. He decides to leave Ephesus as soon as possible, and sends Dromio to find out when the soonest departing ship leaves.

☞ Master Antipholus,—

Ay, that's my name.

I know it well, sir:—lo, here is the chain.
I thought to have ta'en you at the Porentine:
The chain unfinish'd made me stay thus long.


What is your will that I shall do with this?

What please yourself, sir: I have made it for you.

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

Related Characters: Angelo, Antipholus of Syracuse (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 3.2.182-189

Explanation and Analysis

After Dromio leaves to find out when the next ship leaves, Angelo enters with the golden necklace that Antipholus of Ephesus promised Adriana. Angelo confuses Antipholus of Syracuse for his twin, and gives the chain to the wrong person. Antipholus denies requesting the chain, but eventually accepts it, confused by the interaction. This exchange begins the series of botched exchanges and trades with the wrong people that will continue throughout the play. Soon Antipholus of Ephesus will deny having received the necklace, since he truly has not, and frustration will build. This series of commercial mistakes will also involve a Merchant, who demands payment from Angelo. Angelo will demand money for the chain, but struggle to receive it having given it to the wrong person.

☞ I answer you! What should I answer you?

The money that you owe me for the chain.

I owe you none till I receive the chain.

You know I gave it you half an hour since.


You gave me none: you wrong me much to say so.

You wrong me more, sir, in denying it:
Consider how it stands upon my credit.

Well, officer, arrest him at my suit.

Related Characters: Antipholus of Ephesus, Angelo, Merchant (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 4.1.62-69

Explanation and Analysis

This scene begins with Angelo and a Merchant discussing the money that one owes the other. Angelo explains that he will pay the Merchant as soon as he receives payment for the Gold Necklace. When Antipholus of Ephesus enters, Angelo gives him the bill for the chain, saying he needs the money immediately so that he can pay the Merchant. Antipholus says that his money at home, and invites Angelo to come deliver the chain and receive payment there. This

offer confuses Angelo, since he has already given the chain to Antipholus of Syracuse. The two men become confused and irate, leading up to the dialogue in the quote.

Angelo demands the money, but Antipholus of Ephesus demands the chain, denying that he ever received it. They both claim to be wronged by the other, and eventually the Merchant, wanting his money, intervenes by having an Officer arrest Antipholus. This commercial debate is ridiculous given the confusion of both parties, making the arrest of Antipholus of Ephesus one of the most comedic errors of the play.

☛ What ship of Epidamnum stays for me?

A ship you sent me to, to hire waftage.


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

You sent me for a rope's end as soon:
You sent me to the bay, sir, for a bark.

I will debate this matter at more leisure,
And teach your ears to list me with more heed.
To Adriana, villain, hie thee straight:
Give her this key, and tell her, in the desk
That's cover'd o'er with Turkish tapestry
There is a purse of ducats; let her send it:
Tell her I am arrested in the street,
And that shall bail me: hie thee, slave, be gone!

Related Characters: Antipholus of Ephesus, Dromio of Syracuse (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 4.1.96-109

Explanation and Analysis

As Antipholus of Ephesus is being arrested, Dromio of Syracuse returns with news about departing ships. He tells Antipholus, whom he mistakes for his master, that there is a ship of Epidamnum waiting in the harbor. Antipholus begins the dialogue in the quote by asking, confusedly, what ship is waiting for him. Dromio responds that it's the ship that he was sent to hire. But Antipholus of Ephesus has sent Dromio of Ephesus to buy a rope, and of course makes the


servant the scapegoat for the error, blaming Dromio of Syracuse and yelling at him. He threatens his servant, implying that he will beat him until he knows how to listen better, than orders Dromio to go back to Adriana and get bail money from a desk. Thus another financial object, this time money itself, is interjected into the system of mistaken exchanges and errors.

☛ Thou art, as you are all, a sorceress:
I conjure thee to leave me and be gone.

Give me the ring of mine you had at dinner,
Or, for my diamond, the chain you promised,
And I'll be gone, sir, and not trouble you.

Related Characters: Courtesan, Antipholus of Syracuse (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 4.3.68-72

Explanation and Analysis

Antipholus of Syracuse is convinced that devils, sorcerers, and witches inhabit Ephesus and are the cause of all of the confusion. A Courtesan enters the stage and calls Antipholus by name, causing him to shout at her and call her Satan. The Courtesan requests of Antipholus the chain, which he has, in exchange for a diamond ring. Apparently, Antipholus of Ephesus purchased the gold necklace with the intention of trading it with the Courtesan for the diamond ring. The exchanges have all gotten mixed up due to the countless errors and mistakes, so the Courtesan believes that Antipholus has stolen her ring. This detail is especially confusing, as Adriana mentioned that she was promised a chain, not a ring. After Antipholus and Dromio leave, the Courtesan concludes that they are insane, and goes to tell Adriana that her husband has stolen the ring.

☹️ Alas, I sent you money to redeem you,
By Dromio here, who came in haste for it.

Money by me! Heart and good-will you might;
But surely, master, not a rag of money.

Went'st not thou to her for a purse of ducats?


He came to me, and I deliver'd it.

And I am witness with her that she did.

God and the rope-maker bear me witness
That I was sent for nothing but a rope!

Related Characters: Adriana, Dromio of Ephesus, Antipholus of Ephesus, Luciana (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 4.4.88-96

Explanation and Analysis

Dromio of Ephesus returns to the arrested Antipholus of Ephesus with the rope that was requested for Adriana. However, since that command, Antipholus has told Dromio of Syracuse to get the bail money. Thus when Dromio of Ephesus shows up with only a rope, Antipholus is furious. Adriana and Luciana then enter, along with the Courtesan. They think that Antipholus is mad, and argue about if Antipholus and Adriana ate dinner together or not. Here, Adriana says that she sent bail money with Dromio. She has, of course, sent it with the other Dromio, so Dromio of Ephesus begins to look insane, too, since he claims only to have been sent for a rope. The confusion in this scene is especially knotted and humorous since Antipholus of Ephesus has given commands to both Dromios. Every character is confused, so the mistakes and false identities continue in their absurdities.

In this scene Adriana pays Antipholus's bail and decides to shut him and Dromio up inside, but moments after their exit, Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse enter the stage. At this sight, Adriana is convinced that Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus have escaped. Now, even people are exchanged as commodities, and of course the exchange of persons is also confounded and filled with error. Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse escape and get ready to leave Ephesus.

Act 5, Scene 1 Quotes

☹️ You have done wrong to this my honest friend;
Who, but for staying on our controversy,
Had hoisted sail and put to sea to-day:
This chain you had of me; can you deny it?

I think I had; I never did deny it.

Yes, that you did, sir, and forswore it too.

Who heard me to deny it or forswear it?

These ears of mine, thou know'st, did hear thee.

Related Characters: Antipholus of Syracuse, Angelo, Merchant (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 5.1.19-26

Explanation and Analysis

As Angelo and the Merchant discuss their financial situation, Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse enter while Antipholus is wearing the gold necklace. Angelo and the Merchant ask why he denied receiving the chain if he is wearing it, mistaking him for Antipholus of Ephesus. Comedically, Antipholus doesn't deny receiving the chain, instead denying that he ever denied receiving it. The Merchant and Angelo claim to have heard Antipholus swear denial, which angers him. Honor is extremely important to Antipholus, and despite the humorous nature of the dozens of errors and coincidences, he is willing to duel to protect his word. Before a fight can begin, Adriana, Luciana, and the Courtesan enter and tell Angelo and the Merchant that Antipholus and Dromio are mad. The pair then flees to a nearby abbey.

●● Hath not else his eye
 Stray'd his affection in unlawful love?
 A sin prevailing much in youthful men,
 Who give their eyes the liberty of gazing.
 Which of these sorrows is he subject to?

To none of these, except it be the last;
 Namely, some love that drew him oft from home.

You should for that have reprehended him.

Why, so I did.

Ay, but not rough enough.

As roughly as my modesty would let me.



Haply, in private.

And in assemblies too.

[...]

The consequence is, then, thy jealous fits
 Have scared thy husband from the use of wits.

Related Characters: Adriana, Aemilia (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 5.1.50-89

Explanation and Analysis

After Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse run into the abbey, the Abbess comes out to investigate. Here the Abbess (soon revealed to be Aemilia, Aegeon's wife) asks Adriana what is wrong with Antipholus. Before the quote begins, she asks if he has lost wealth or experienced the death of a friend, before asking if he has been unfaithful and "strayed his affection in unlawful love." Returning to the question of a married man's liberty, the Abbess remarks on the common sin of young men giving their eyes the liberty to gaze too much at other women. When Adriana admits that she believes Antipholus has been unfaithful, the Abbess says that Adriana should have scolded him more. When Adriana reveals through quick back and forth (they complete each other's lines of iambic pentameter) that she did reprehend her husband, and often, the Abbess ultimately decides that her jealous nagging was the cause of her husband's infidelity. Note here the play's continued placement of the subservient class (servants and, in this case, women) into the scapegoat role. As a man, Antipholus is supposedly master of nature, women, and his servants,

but at the same time, the blame for his own actions and (presumed) infidelity falls on his wife, not himself. Ultimately, the Abbess refuses to let anyone into the abbey, saying that she will bring Antipholus and Dromio back from madness.

●● I am sure you both of you remember me.

Ourselves we do remember, sir, by you;
 For lately we were bound, as you are now.
 You are not Pinch's patient, are you, sir?

Why look you so strange on me? You know me well.

I never saw you in my life till now.

O, grief hath changed me since you saw me last,
 And careful hours with time's deformed hand
 Have written strange defeatures in my face:
 But tell me yet, dost thou not know my voice?

Neither.

Dromio, nor thou?

No, trust me, sir, nor I.

I am sure thou dost.

Related Characters: Aegeon, Antipholus of Ephesus, Dromio of Ephesus (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 5.1.300-314

Explanation and Analysis

Most of the characters are on stage at this point near the end of the play; the Duke has been brought in to try and resolve the issue. Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus have escaped from Adriana's house, causing everyone to think that they have just escaped from the abbey. Aegeon has been brought on with the Duke in the last hope of coming up with payment to stop his execution, and he has spoken a brief aside indicating that he recognizes Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus, believing them to be his son and son's servant from Syracuse. Which, of course, they aren't.

But in all this confusion, Antipholus of Ephesus gains some clarity of his own: opposing the previous states of confusion



and self-doubt, he says they do remember themselves and who they are, making a joke that they were just bound in Adriana's home as Aegeon is now imprisoned. When the sons continue to say they don't recognize him, Aegeon begins to believe that grief and time have changed him, textually writing new features on his face in the time since he has last seen Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse. He tries to appeal to another sense, asking if they remember his voice, but they still do not.

At this moment the tension and dramatic irony peak. Aegeon is looking for his long lost son, and has met him, but even now he confuses this lost son for the son he raised and has only been apart from for a few years. While every other character in the play has assumed that Antipholus of Ephesus is himself (other than Dromio of Syracuse), Aegeon mistakes him for Antipholus of Syracuse. Mistaken identity and errors cross even family lines, and the plots cannot be resolved until both pairs of twins are physically on the stage at the same time.

☞ I see two husbands, or mine eyes deceive me.

One of these men is Genius to the other;
And so of these, which is the natural man,
And which the spirit? Who decipher them?

Related Characters: Duke Solinus, Adriana (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 5.1.342-345


Explanation and Analysis

Finally, the Abbess Brings Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse onto stage, and both sets of twins are in the same place at once. After the Abbess's announcement, Adriana speaks this quote as the first line from the stunned crowd. She cannot tell if her eyes deceive her or not since, she is so confused by what she sees. Likewise, the Duke resorts to a supernatural explanation, suggesting that one image must be the real Antipholus and the other must be Antipholus's spirit ("Genius"). Note that his call to "decipher them" is an extremely textual image, calling attention to the deciphering that readers (and playgoers) must do in trying to keep track of all of the exchanges and errors.

With everyone on stage at once, the comedy can close; all it's problems are resolved. The Abbess reveals herself to be Aemilia, Aegeon's wife, and the entire family is reunited. As the mistaken identities are cleared up, the broken circuit of exchange is restored, and the gold necklace, bail money, and diamond ring all end up in the right places. Antipholus of Syracuse tells Luciana he is still interested in pursuing her, and the Duke, so moved by the events, waives the 1000 mark fee and spares Aegeon's life. True identities are restored along with order, functioning commerce, and the original family whose split instigated the play.

☞ We came into the world like brother and brother;
And now let's go hand in hand, not one before another.

Related Characters: Dromio of Ephesus (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 5.1.439-441

Explanation and Analysis

These are the final lines of the play, after all of the resolutions; the only characters remaining on stage are Dromio of Syracuse and Dromio of Ephesus, who gets the last word of the show. Dromio of Syracuse remarks that the woman who claimed to be his wife (Nell) will now become his sister-in-law, and the two brothers observe the oddity of meeting their mirror-like twin. They decide to follow the rest of the characters offstage into the abbey, not one by one, but "hand in hand" as brothers, like they came into the world, equal to each other, though they are still social inferiors to their masters. Their small family, too, has been reunited.

Note also that Dromio of Ephesus is not yet married to Nell, as Antipholus of Syracuse is not yet married to Luciana. These marriages are implied by the comedy, which usually ends in marriage, but are not staged nor certain. Instead, this play stages the restoration of two fractured marriages, first the idealized marriage between Aegeon and Aemilia, who have been apart for decades, and second the marriage between Adriana and Antipholus of Ephesus, which has suffered under Fate's coincidences since Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse first landed in Ephesus.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

ACT 1, SCENE 1

As the play begins, Solinus, the duke of Ephesus, is leading Aegeon, a merchant from Syracuse, to be executed. Solinus explains that there is great “enmity and discord” between Syracuse and Ephesus, and that there is a law in Ephesus that any Syracusians found in the city are to be executed unless they can pay a fine of a thousand marks. As Aegeon barely has one hundred marks, he is to be executed.

Aegeon says that he is glad to be executed, as this will end his troubles. Solinus asks Aegeon to explain and tell him why he came to Ephesus. Aegeon says that his grief is unspeakable, but begins to explain. He was born in Syracuse and had a wife. He made a good fortune as a merchant, but when one of his business partners in Epidamnum died, he had to travel to Epidamnum.

His pregnant wife came along, and there gave birth to two male twins, completely identical. At the same time, in the same inn, a poor woman gave birth to two identical male twins, as well. Aegeon bought these twins to bring up as servants for his own sons, and prepared to sail back home with his wife and the two pairs of twins.

Along the way, though, there was a great storm at sea, and Aegeon suffered a shipwreck. Trying to stay alive, Aegeon and his wife both tied themselves to masts of the ship, and each took one of their children and one of the servant twins with them. Fortunately, two ships approached to rescue them. However, a huge rock rent Aegeon’s ship in two, separating him from his wife. One ship rescued him and his pair of children, and the other rescued his wife and her pair of children. The two ships were separated, and Aegeon was separated from his wife.

Aegeon and his one son lived in Syracuse, and when the son turned eighteen, he wanted to travel abroad with his servant in order to find his mother and brother. Aegeon decided to do the same, and traveled all around “furthest Greece” by himself, “roaming clean through the bounds of Asia.” Thus he eventually came to Ephesus.

Financial matters are important from the very beginning of the play. For Aegeon, money literally becomes an issue of life or death, due to Duke Solinus’ law.



Aegeon’s troubles are related to his family, which is of utmost importance to him. However, it is also clear that his profession as a merchant and trader is a significant part of his life, as he tells of his business-related trip to Epidamnum.



It is of course a remarkable coincidence that a random woman should give birth to a pair of twins at the same time, in the same inn, as Aegeon’s wife. These two pairs of twins are completely identical in appearance, which will drive a lot of the action of the play.



Aegeon’s life is further influenced by strange coincidences and twists of fate. First, he suffers a shipwreck, then he is rescued. However, his and his wife’s attempt to find safety ends up being a mistake, leading to their separation. Aegeon’s separation from his dear family is the source of his woes.



Aegeon and his son both value their family so much that they are willing to travel all around the Mediterranean in search of their missing relatives, even if it means risking their lives in Ephesus.



Solinus pities Aegeon, but says that he cannot behave contrary to his city's laws and cannot pardon him. However, he gives Aegeon one day before his execution and tells him that he can try to find friends to pay the 1000 mark fine for him. Aegeon has little hope that he will find anyone to help him and, speaking of himself, says that this will only "procrastinate his lifeless end."

Solinus takes pity on Aegeon and his sad story, but maintains the law, which effectively puts a monetary value on Aegeon's life.



ACT 1, SCENE 2

Elsewhere in Ephesus, Aegeon's son, Antipholus, is talking to a merchant. The merchant warns him to pretend not to be from Syracuse, or else face a 1000 mark fine or death. Antipholus sends his servant, Dromio, with his money to the Centaur Inn, where they are staying, and says that he will meet him there soon. Antipholus invites the merchant to dine with him, but the merchant says that he has to meet with "certain merchants," he hopes to do business with.

Another merchant enters the play, and informs Antipholus of Solinus' law involving the 1000 mark fine. Antipholus is concerned about his money, so he sends Dromio ahead to the inn. The merchant has business to deal with, further establishing the economic background of the world of the play.



The merchant wishes for Antipholus to be happy, and then leaves. Antipholus says that he cannot be happy, as he is seeking his mother and brother but cannot seem to find them. Just then, the servant of Antipholus' lost brother, Dromio of Ephesus, arrives and tells Antipholus (whom he mistakes for his identical twin) to come home to dinner, as his wife is hungry and tired of waiting for him. Antipholus is confused and asks where his money is.

Despite Antipholus' concern for his money, his family is the most important thing in his life, as he cannot be happy without his mother and brother. He thinks that Dromio of Ephesus is his Dromio of Syracuse, the first of the play's many confusions of identity.



Dromio of Ephesus is confused by the question and again tells Antipholus to come home for dinner, or else his wife will be mad. He says that Antipholus gave him no gold. Antipholus angrily asks where his thousand marks are, and Dromio replies that he has some marks from him (i.e. from being hit) and some from his wife, but not a thousand. He jokes that Antipholus would not want him to give him a thousand marks (i.e. a thousand blows or strikes).

Dromio and Ephesus both think the other is his identical twin. Dromio tries to get Antipholus to come home by mentioning his wife. Antipholus, though, is only concerned with his money.



Frustrated, Antipholus hits Dromio, who then runs off. Antipholus says that he has heard of "dark-working sorcerers" and "soul-killing witches" in Ephesus. He guesses that some such magician is controlling Dromio and making him act so strangely. He leaves to go to the Centaur Inn and find Dromio (who he still thinks is his own Dromio of Syracuse).

Antipholus blames Dromio for their misunderstanding, and beats him (which seems to be a standard way for a master to treat a servant in the play). He still thinks that Dromio of Ephesus is Dromio of Syracuse, and resorts to sorcerers and witches to explain Dromio's behavior.



ACT 2, SCENE 1

At the house of Antipholus of Ephesus (the twin of Antipholus of Syracuse), his wife Adriana talks with her sister Luciana. She is upset that neither her husband nor her servant have returned. Luciana suggests that Antipholus has maybe gone to dine with a merchant, and tells Adriana to be patient, as “a man is master of his liberty.” Adriana protests that men should not have greater liberty than women.

Luciana tells her sister that men “are masters to their females,” but Adriana disagrees. She says that if Luciana were married, she would think differently, because she would be “burdened with like weight of pain.” Dromio of Ephesus enters and tells his mistress that Antipholus refused to come home and acted as if he didn’t know her. He says that Antipholus seemed mad and talked only of his gold, then beat him. Adriana tells him to go back and fetch Antipholus anyway. He leaves reluctantly.

Adriana tells Luciana that she is sure Antipholus is having an affair, and this is why he is behaving so oddly and pretending not to know her. She pities herself, thinking that Antipholus no longer finds her attractive. Luciana scolds her for being jealous of Antipholus’ supposed mistress, but Adriana tells her she doesn’t know what it feels like and continues to bemoan her state. She says that he has lost interest in her and that she will “weep . . . and weeping die.”

Adriana’s marriage with Antipholus is less than ideal. She is upset that he keeps her waiting at home. Luciana thinks that men should have more liberty in a marital relationship, though Adriana disagrees.



Luciana continues to argue that men should have more power in a marriage. Adriana is not happy with the subservient role that her marriage has appeared to put her in, though. Dromio informs Adriana of Antipholus’ stubborn concern for his money.



Adriana suspects that Antipholus is cheating on her. Their problematic marriage forms a counterpoint to the more ideal union of Aegeon and his wife.



ACT 2, SCENE 2

Antipholus of Syracuse has found out that his Dromio did indeed bring his money to the Centaur Inn. He runs into Dromio on the street and asks him about what he was talking about earlier. Dromio is confused and says he hasn’t seen his master since he was sent to the inn. He thinks Antipholus is joking, but Antipholus beats him, showing that he is serious.

Dromio asks why he is being beaten, and Antipholus says he should know. Dromio insists he is being beaten “out of season,” and trades some witty quips with his master. He tells Antipholus a long joke about Father Time and baldness, playing on many puns. Antipholus is amused and mostly pacified.

Adriana and Luciana enter. Adriana chastises Antipholus, who she thinks is her husband, for claiming not to know her. She expresses her pain at being cheated on and reasons that if she slept with someone else, he would be furious. She says that she is contaminated by his “contagion” of adultery. Antipholus is confused and says that he has just arrived in Ephesus and does not know her.

The confusion continues, as Antipholus finds Dromio of Syracuse and asks him about his behavior earlier (which was actually the behavior of Dromio of Ephesus). Though both characters have made errors, Antipholus puts blame on Dromio, and hits him.



Dromio is upset at being abused as a scapegoat, and gets out of further punishment with his quick wit, amusing Antipholus with jokes.



Adriana and Luciana continue to confuse Antipholus of Syracuse with his twin. Adriana’s worries about adultery show some of the potential problems that can happen in a marriage, and in particular the more limited position of a wife. Antipholus insists on his true identity, for now.



Luciana scolds Antipholus and says that Adriana had sent Dromio to fetch him for dinner. Antipholus asks Dromio if this is true, and Dromio says he has never seen Luciana or Adriana before. Antipholus calls him a liar, thinking of Dromio of Ephesus, who did bring the message to him earlier.

Adriana continues to speak to Antipholus as if he is her husband, and he is confused. He asks whether he is dreaming, and says that he will pretend to be her husband in order to find out more about what is going on. Luciana tells Dromio to go and prepare for dinner at home. Dromio says he must be talking with “goblins, owls, and sprites.” He talks to Antipholus and they both agree to play along as if they know Adriana.

Adriana says that it is time for dinner, and tells Dromio to watch the house door and let no one come in to see Antipholus. Antipholus asks, “Am I in earth, in heaven, or in hell? / Sleeping or waking? Mad or well-advised?” Luciana, Adriana and Antipholus go into Adriana’s home for dinner, leaving Dromio to watch the door.

ACT 3, SCENE 1

Near his house, Antipholus of Ephesus is conversing with his servant Dromio, a goldsmith named Angelo, and a merchant named Balthazar. He tells Angelo that he must leave because his wife gets “shrewish” when he is late for dinner. He tells Angelo to bring a **necklace** he has ordered for his wife to his house tomorrow.

Antipholus asks why Dromio previously said that he had beaten him, denied the existence of his wife, and asked him about a thousand marks. Dromio insists that Antipholus did deny his wife, beat him, and ask him about the money. Antipholus has invited Balthazar to dinner, and the two jest about what makes a good dinner: Balthazar says it is “small cheer and great welcome,” while Antipholus says it is food.

Antipholus sends Dromio to the door of his house, but Dromio of Syracuse, who is guarding the door from the inside, refuses to let anyone in. Dromio of Syracuse says his name, and Dromio of Ephesus thinks he has stolen his identity. A servant from within the house named Luce comes to the door and Dromio of Ephesus demands to be let in. She refuses, and Antipholus of Ephesus threatens to knock the door down.

Everyone continues to confuse the situation, as Antipholus, Luciana, and Adriana all think that Dromio of Syracuse is Dromio of Ephesus. Everyone is mistaken, but, as usual, a Dromio takes the blame.



Adriana continues to insist that Antipholus is her husband, and he ends up playing along and adopting this identity for at least a short period of time. Dromio uses the supernatural as a way to explain the strange coincidences and happenings in Ephesus.



Antipholus is certain of his identity, but being treated as a different person by others has made him question his sanity. As he illustrates, the recognition of others is an important factor in one’s own conception of one’s identity.



Antipholus is familiar with his “shrewish” wife, and plans to appease her with an expensive gift. The exchange of precious objects pervades all aspects of the characters’ lives, from business to personal matters.



Antipholus mixes up Dromio of Ephesus with his twin. While there is clearly some kind of mistake going on, it is Dromio who bears the brunt of the blame for the situation.



On opposite sides of the door, the two Dromios confront alternate versions of themselves, and Dromio of Ephesus insists that his identity has been stolen. Antipholus of Ephesus responds to the confusing situation with the threat of a violent outburst.



Having heard all this noise, Adriana comes to the door from inside and asks who is outside. Antipholus of Ephesus calls her his wife, and Adriana is shocked, telling this man whom she thinks is a stranger (because Antipholus of Syracuse is inside the house already) to leave. Antipholus is ready to break down the door, and tells Dromio of Ephesus to get “an iron crow” for this purpose.

Balthazar advises Antipholus not to break down the door, as this would raise suspicions about his and his wife’s relationship. He tells Antipholus to get dinner elsewhere and return home later that night to ask his wife why she is barring the door, when fewer people will see any altercation between them. Antipholus is persuaded and suggests they go to dinner with “a wench of excellent discourse” he knows, about whom his wife has “upbraided” him. He tells Angelo to meet him later with the **necklace** he has ordered.

ACT 3, SCENE 2

Outside the same house, Luciana and Antipholus of Syracuse are talking. Luciana scolds him for losing his love for Adriana and not respecting their marriage. She tells him to at least pretend to be faithful to her and “muffle your false love with some show of blindness,” rather than being so obvious about his infidelity. She tells him that it is “double wrong” to be both unfaithful and obvious about it.

Antipholus is confused, and says he does not know who Luciana is. He asks why she is trying to get him to pretend to be someone he is not, and tells her “your weeping sister is no wife of mine.” He tells her not to try to persuade him to love her sister, Adriana, but rather to plead her own case, as he is in love with her. Luciana is shocked and tells him, “gaze where you should,” that is, on Adriana.

Luciana tells Antipholus to focus his love on her sister, but he says he loves her sister’s sister (i.e. her) instead. Luciana runs off to get Adriana, and Dromio of Syracuse comes out of the house. He asks whether he is himself, and then says that a woman inside the house “claims” him as her fiancé.

He describes the woman, “the kitchen-wench,” as a fat woman “all grease,” and so dirty that not even “Noah’s flood” could wash her clean. Her name is Nell, and Dromio says that she is “spherical” like a globe. He says, “I could find out countries in her,” and he and Antipholus joke about where the various countries are on her. Ireland, for example, is “in her buttocks,” as Dromio found it “by the bogs.”

The mix-up of the two Antipholus twins continues to create more problems for Adriana’s marriage, as she now thinks a stranger is calling her his wife. Antipholus of Ephesus continues to respond to everyone’s mistakes with violence, wanting to break down the door.

Balthazar advises Antipholus not to raise any suspicions about the state of his marriage (which is evidently far from perfect). Antipholus has been spending time with another woman, to whom he now goes for dinner. He is still very concerned with the gold necklace that he plans to buy from Angelo.



Luciana thinks that Antipholus is his twin, and scolds him for not respecting his marriage to her sister. In her mind, it would be better to maintain a false outward appearance of fidelity, even if he is cheating.



Antipholus is confused by Luciana’s mistaken conception of his identity, and he reacts against her encouragement to pretend to be someone he isn’t. His expression of love for Luciana is all the more shocking to her because she thinks he is his twin and married to Adriana, her sister.



Luciana continues to think that Antipholus is betraying his wife in expressing his love for her. Dromio (comically) questions his own identity as a result of how other people have been addressing and treating him.



Dromio and Antipholus make fun of Nell’s physical appearance. Nell’s comic desire for Dromio forms a low counterpoint to the more idealistic marital relationship between Aegeon and Aemilia.



Dromio continues to make fun of Nell, describing her hideous appearance. He says that Nell called him by his name and claimed that he was “assured to her.” He calls Nell a witch and says he ran away from her. Antipholus tells Dromio to go see if he can find out about any ships leaving the town tonight, as he doesn’t want to spend one more night in the strange city. Dromio leaves as ordered.

Antipholus reflects that “there’s none but witches do inhabit here,” including Adriana. However, he admits that he loves Luciana and says she has almost enchanted him with her “mermaid’s song.” Angelo enters and gives Antipholus the **necklace** that Antipholus of Ephesus had ordered. Antipholus of Syracuse is confused, but accepts the **chain**. Angelo leaves, and Antipholus wonders what is going on. He plans to go to the market to await Dromio’s report about any departing ships.

ACT 4, SCENE 1

In Ephesus, a merchant tells Angelo that he owes him money, and that since he is leaving for Persia soon, he needs the money immediately, or else he will have an officer arrest Angelo. Angelo tells the merchant that he is expecting a payment from Antipholus for a **necklace** and that this will allow him to pay the merchant back.

Just then, Antipholus of Ephesus enters with Dromio of Ephesus. He tells Dromio to go get a rope so that he can give it to his wife for locking him out of his home. Dromio leaves. Angelo gives Antipholus a bill for the **gold chain** he ordered and asks for his payment immediately, as the merchant needs to go to sea. Antipholus says that he doesn’t have the money with him, and asks Angelo to go with the merchant to his home. There, he can deliver the **chain** and get the money from Adriana.

Angelo is confused, and asks if Antipholus has the **chain**. Antipholus says he does not, and Angelo insists that he gave him the **necklace** already. They argue, and the merchant begins to get frustrated, as he needs to leave soon. Angelo and Antipholus continue to argue back and forth, and the merchant and Angelo have an officer arrest Antipholus.

Dromio of Syracuse enters and tells Antipholus of Ephesus (who he thinks is his master) that there is a ship leaving soon. He has already put their baggage aboard and now just waits for Antipholus. Antipholus of Ephesus is confused and says he just sent Dromio to get some rope. Dromio says he was sent to find a boat leaving town.

Dromio again makes fun of Nell’s appearance, and tells Antipholus about his confusion that has resulted from Nell’s apparently knowing him. In order to explain the strange coincidental behavior of Nell, Dromio again resorts to the supernatural, calling Nell a witch.



Antipholus also uses witches and magic to explain what is actually the result of confused identities and human errors. Angelo mistakenly gives the necklace to the wrong Antipholus, starting the chain of botched exchanges and trades that will create most of the problems in the play’s plot.



The chain of exchanges of money and objects continues, as Angelo needs money from Antipholus in order to pay back the merchant. This becomes a matter of Angelo’s own life to some degree, as he faces being arrested if he does not pay the merchant.



Angelo mixes up Antipholus of Ephesus and Antipholus of Dromio, with the result that the exchange of the gold chain for money is not working as planned.



The botched exchange of the chain has important consequences for Antipholus, who is arrested as a result of it. The mistakes and errors arising from the confusion of Antipholus’ identity continue to multiply.



Dromio of Syracuse thinks that Antipholus of Ephesus is his own master, and comically delivers the news about the boat to the wrong person.



Antipholus says he will deal with Dromio later, and tells him to go to Adriana and have her send **bail money** to get him out of jail. Dromio is hesitant to go back to Adriana's house, where Nell is, but says that he must go, since "servants must their masters' minds fulfill."

Antipholus now has to get bail money from Adriana. Money is more than an economic issue for him; it is a matter of his freedom or imprisonment. Antipholus still thinks that Dromio of Syracuse is his twin.



ACT 4, SCENE 2

By the house of Antipholus of Ephesus, Adriana and Luciana are discussing Antipholus. Luciana says that he denied his marriage and tried to woo her instead. Adriana angrily calls her husband "deformed, crooked, old, and sere, / ill-fac'd, worse bodied, shapeless everywhere." Dromio of Syracuse enters and announces that Antipholus has been arrested. He asks Adriana to get **bail money** from Antipholus' desk.

Still confused about the identity of Antipholus of Syracuse, Adriana and Luciana think that Adriana's marriage is in serious trouble. Dromio arrives in order to carry out the exchange of bail money and free Antipholus of Ephesus (who he still thinks is Antipholus of Syracuse).



Luciana goes to get the money and Adriana and Dromio share some witty banter. He tells her Antipholus was arrested over a **chain**, but Adriana doesn't know what he is talking about. Luciana comes back and gives Dromio the money. Dromio leaves to go find Antipholus.

The exchange of the chain and money determines Antipholus' freedom (or lack thereof). Adriana and Luciana continue to think that Dromio of Syracuse is Dromio of Ephesus. Dromio, meanwhile, still thinks that Antipholus of Ephesus is his master.



ACT 4, SCENE 3

Antipholus of Syracuse runs into Dromio of Syracuse in the street. Antipholus mentions that all sorts of people in Ephesus act as if they know him. He says that sorcerers must inhabit the city. Dromio gives Antipholus the gold from Adriana, to his confusion. Dromio asks how Antipholus got out of prison. Antipholus tells him to stop fooling around and asks if there are any ships leaving Ephesus soon.

Once again, Antipholus uses the supernatural as an easy way to explain the strange behavior of the inhabitants of Ephesus, when it is really the result of human error and mistaken identities. Dromio mistakenly thinks that the two Antipholus twins are one and the same person.



Dromio says that he already told him about a ship. Antipholus exclaims, "here we wander in illusions," confused about what is going on. A courtesan enters and greets Antipholus by his name. She asks if the **gold chain** he has is for her. Antipholus and Dromio think she is "Mistress Satan," and "the devil's dam." The courtesan invites Antipholus to dinner. Antipholus calls the courtesan a sorceress and commands her to leave.

The confusion caused by the two pairs of twins only heightens, as the courtesan again introduces the importance of the exchange of valuable items. Dromio and Antipholus of Syracuse quickly assume that the courtesan is a kind of witch or supernatural being.



The courtesan asks for his **chain**, which he had promised her in return for the **diamond ring** he took from her, or at least for her **ring** back. Antipholus and Dromio leave, confused and frightened. The courtesan says that Antipholus must be mad. She says that he has promised her a **gold chain** for her **diamond ring**. She has heard that Adriana earlier shut him out of their home, and concludes that she must have done so because he is mad. She plans to go to Adriana and tell her that her husband has taken her **diamond ring**, worth forty ducats.

The complicated chain of exchanges is as follows: Antipholus of Ephesus was to buy the gold necklace from Angelo (who would use that money to pay back the merchant) in order to trade it with the courtesan for a diamond ring. This complicated series of exchanges has been ruined, though, by all of the characters' errors and mistakes.



ACT 4, SCENE 4

Antipholus of Ephesus is still under arrest by the officer. Dromio of Ephesus finds him, and Antipholus is hopeful that he will have the money for his **bail**. Dromio, however, only has the rope Antipholus asked for earlier. Antipholus is furious and beats Dromio. He calls his servant senseless, and Dromio says he wishes he were senseless, so he wouldn't feel his beating. He complains that he is often beaten for no reason.

The exchange of bail money does not go through as Antipholus intended, because the wrong Dromio finds him. Comically, Dromio has only the rope Antipholus asked for earlier. Antipholus takes out his frustration at all these mistakes by beating Dromio as a scapegoat. Dromio complains about how often this happens to him.



Adriana, Luciana, and the courtesan enter, along with a man named Pinch. Adriana and the courtesan are convinced that Antipholus is mad. Adriana asks Pinch, who is "a conjurer," to heal her husband. Pinch tries to exorcise a demon from Antipholus, who insists he is not mad. He asks if Pinch is the man Adriana had dinner with, and Adriana says that she had dinner with him. Antipholus protests that he was locked out from dinner, and Dromio agrees.

Like most of the play's other characters, Adriana uses the supernatural to explain the strange behavior of Antipholus, resorting to the conjurer Pinch. Adriana, Antipholus, and Dromio can't agree on what happened earlier in the day, because of confusion over the identity of Antipholus.



Adriana continues to think Antipholus is mad, and says that she sent **money** with Dromio to bail him out. Dromio denies this, though Luciana says she saw Adriana give him the money. Pinch concludes that both Antipholus and Dromio are mad and suggests locking them in a dark room. Antipholus asks Adriana why she locked him out of their home, and Adriana says she did no such thing.

The confusion arising from mistaken identities continues, and Adriana thinks that Dromio is the one she gave bail money to for Antipholus of Ephesus.



Antipholus threatens to tear out Adriana's eyes, and Pinch ties up both Antipholus and Dromio. The officer tells Pinch to let them go, as Antipholus is his prisoner. Adriana tells him to let Antipholus out of his watch, and promises to pay his debt. She tells Pinch to take Dromio and Antipholus to her house. He leaves with the two men.

Amid all the mistaken identities and coincidences, Antipholus lays blame on Adriana, against whom he threatens violence. Pinch comically ties up Antipholus and Dromio, thinking them to be mad, when they have only been the victims of coincidence and circumstance.



Adriana learns that Antipholus owes money for a **chain** that Angelo made. The courtesan adds that Antipholus took her **ring** and that she has seen him with both the ring and the chain. Adriana says she has not seen the chain, so she asks to be brought to Angelo, to figure out what's going on. Just then, Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse enter with their swords drawn.

Adriana and Luciana think they are Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus, just escaped from Pinch, and they flee along with the courtesan and the officer. Alone on stage, Antipholus comments that "these witches are afraid of swords." He tells Dromio to get their things from the Centaur Inn so they can leave immediately, but Dromio jokes that he would like to stay, as strangers here give them gold, but then he remembers that there is a "mountain of mad flesh" that claims his hand in marriage here. Antipholus says he wants to leave immediately.

ACT 5, SCENE 1

Angelo apologizes to the merchant for making him wait for his money. He says that Antipholus is "of very reverend reputation" and usually good for his money. Antipholus of Syracuse enters with Dromio of Syracuse. Angelo sees his **chain** around Antipholus, and asks Antipholus how he can deny that he has the **chain**.

Confused, Antipholus says that he never denied it. The merchant swears that he did, and Antipholus prepares to duel to defend his honor. He and the merchant draw their swords, but then Adriana, Luciana, and the courtesan enter. Adriana says that Antipholus is mad and asks for help in tying up Dromio and him. Antipholus and Dromio flee to a nearby priory (a kind of monastery).

The abbess of the priory comes out to see what is going on. Adriana says that she wants to get her husband from the priory, as he is mad. The abbess asks what is wrong with Antipholus—whether he has lost money in a shipwreck, lost a friend, or has become adulterous. Adriana admits that the last one may be true. The abbess says that Adriana should have scolded him more for this, but Adriana says she did so all the time. The abbess says this is probably why Antipholus cheated on her: she nagged him too much.

Adriana learns about the complicated chain of debts and exchange involving her husband.



Adriana and Luciana mistake Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse for their twins. Antipholus and Dromio think that Adriana and Luciana are witches, as a way of explaining their apparently strange behavior.



The gold chain continues to be at the center of the dispute between the merchant, Angelo, and the two Antipholuses. The dispute over the chain, though, is really the result of people's mistaking each Antipholus for the other.



Antipholus of Syracuse is willing to duel over his honor, unaware that this whole dispute is the result of coincidences and his resemblance to his lost twin.



Adriana admits to a possible problem in her marriage, and the abbess places the blame for Antipholus' apparent infidelity on her. It says a great deal about the gender disparity of the time in that Adriana is made the scapegoat for the issue regardless of whether she scolded her husband too much or not enough.



The abbess refuses to let anyone into the priory, honoring Antipholus and Dromio's right of sanctuary there. She says that she will bring Antipholus "to his wits again," with "wholesome syrups, drugs, and holy prayers." The abbess leaves, and Luciana suggests that Adriana go to the Duke to complain. Adriana agrees with the plan. The merchant notes that the Duke is due to come by this way anyways to execute a Syracusian merchant.

The Duke enters with Aegeon, and repeats his offer that if anyone can pay the fee for Aegeon, he will live. Adriana interrupts him to call for justice against the abbess. She explains that her husband Antipholus has gone mad and stolen things. She had him bound and sent home but he escaped and chased her and Luciana with swords. They then fled into the priory, where the abbess won't let anyone enter. Adriana asks the Duke to have Antipholus brought forth so they can help him.

The Duke sends for the abbess, to get to the bottom of the matter. A servant arrives from Adriana's house and announces that Antipholus and Dromio have escaped their binds and attacked Pinch. Adriana says that this can't be true, as the two are in the priory. The servant insists he is telling the truth, and tells Adriana Antipholus is threatening "to scorch your face, and to disfigure you."

Just then, Antipholus of Ephesus and Dromio of Ephesus arrive, and Adriana is frightened. She exclaims that he "is borne about invisible." Antipholus asks for justice. Aegeon says that he recognizes his son and his son's servant, but no one listens to him. Antipholus tells the Duke that his wife shut him out of his own house. Adriana and Luciana both deny this, but Angelo says that he saw it happen.

Antipholus insists that he is not mad, and summarizes what has happened to him: his wife locked him out of his home; then, Angelo did not deliver him his **gold chain**, so he went to find him and Angelo said that he had already given it to him; he was arrested and sent Dromio to get **money for bail**, but Dromio returned with none; then, he ran into Adriana, Luciana, and Pinch, and Pinch tied him up and put him in a "dark and dankish vault at home"; Antipholus and Dromio had to gnaw through the ropes tying them, and finally came running here to the Duke for justice.

Like Adriana, the abbess thinks that Antipholus and Dromio are mad, when they are actually the victims of mistaken identity and a series of comic errors.



The Duke's offer again establishes the importance of monetary exchange, which can save Aegeon's life. Adriana narrates to the Duke her version of the day's events, ironically unaware that she has continually mixed up her husband and his twin.



Adriana doesn't believe the servant, and treats him as a bit of a scapegoat, calling him a liar, because she doesn't realize that she and the servant are each thinking of a different Antipholus. Antipholus of Ephesus continues to threaten violence against his wife, blaming for the mixed-up events of the day.



Adriana resorts to another supernatural explanation for the coincidence of Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus arriving just when she thinks they are in the abbey. No one can agree on what happened during the day, because of all the errors and mixed-up identities throughout the day.



Antipholus' version of the events shows his perspective on all the mixed-up events and coincidences of the day, highlighting the importance of the exchange of the gold necklace and of his bail money.



Angelo says that Antipholus was indeed locked out from dinner, but insists that he gave Antipholus the **chain**. The merchant says that Antipholus even admitted to having the **chain** and was ready to duel him before he fled to the abbey. Antipholus says he has never been in the abbey, and denies all that the merchant says.

The Duke asks what Dromio thinks has happened. Dromio says that Antipholus dined not at home but with the courtesan. The courtesan agrees and says that he then stole her **ring**. The Duke calls for the abbess, and says he thinks everyone is “stark mad.” Aegeon interrupts to say that he sees someone who will surely pay his fine: he sees Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus but thinks they are his son and his son's servant. They, of course, don't recognize him.

Aegeon thinks that his appearance has changed in the seven years since he has seen his son and bemoans the passage of time. He tells Antipholus that he is his father, but Antipholus says he has never seen his father and his never been to Syracuse. The Duke says that it is true Antipholus has never gone to Syracuse and thinks that Aegeon is senile.

The abbess enters with Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse, much to everyone's confusion. The Duke thinks that they must be spirits, not the real Antipholus and Dromio. Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse recognize Aegeon. The abbess calls Aegeon her husband and identifies herself as Aemilia, his long lost wife. She explains that after the shipwreck, Corinthian fishermen took Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus from her and left her with people from Epidamnum. She then became an abbess.

The Duke begins to understand what has happened, and Adriana asks whom she dined with earlier. Antipholus of Syracuse tells Luciana that, now that she knows he is not her brother-in-law, he would like to pursue her love. Angelo sees his **chain** on Antipholus of Syracuse, and Antipholus of Syracuse also produces the **bail money** that Adriana had meant to send to Antipholus of Ephesus.

Antipholus of Ephesus says he will use the **bail money** to pay Aegeon's fine, but the Duke says that he will simply pardon Aegeon. Antipholus of Ephesus returns the courtesan's **diamond ring** to her. Aemilia suggests that everyone goes into the priory so they can “hear at large discoursed all our fortunes,” and sort everything out. Dromio of Syracuse asks if he should get his master's things from the boat, but mistakenly addresses Antipholus of Ephesus.

Different characters all have different versions of the day's events. The escalating series of errors and mistakes that has been building throughout the play is reaching its peak.



The mix-ups about what has happened continue. The courtesan is upset over the theft of her valuable ring. Meanwhile, Aegeon himself is dumbfounded when the man whom he believes to be his own son doesn't recognize him.



Aegeon correctly identifies his son, but Antipholus needs both to identify as Aegeon's son himself and to be recognized by others as such in order for him to truly adopt this identity.



The series of errors and mistaken identities reaches its climax as both sets of twins are finally on stage at the same time. The Duke quickly resorts to a supernatural explanation for this strange occurrence. Aemilia finally reveals her true identity, and begins to unravel the tangled mess of mistakes that has driven the plot of this comedy.



The resolution of the comedy of errors involves both the establishment of people's true identities and the return of important objects to their rightful owners.



Antipholus of Ephesus values the life of his father over his money. Aegeon and Aemilia's family has finally been reunited, and the courtesan is reunited with her valuable diamond ring.



Everyone but Dromio of Ephesus and Dromio of Syracuse leaves to go into the abbey. Dromio of Syracuse says that there is a “fat friend” at Antipholus of Ephesus’ house that claimed him as her husband, but will now be his sister-in-law. They leave to go into the abbey with everyone else, and Dromio of Ephesus speaks the play’s final lines: “We came into the world like brother and brother: / And now let’s go hand in hand, not one before another.”

Now that the mistakes and coincidences of the play have been explained, the valuable objects have been given to their rightful owners, and the various marriages and romantic relationships have been sorted out, the two identical Dromios leave the stage hand in hand as brothers, highlighting the importance of familial bonds at the conclusion of the comedy.





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