

# WINDOWS INTO THE COMEDY OF ERRORS

## DOUBLE FUN OR DOUBLE TROUBLE?

*The Comedy of Errors* doesn't start much like a traditional comedy. The businessman Egeon has come to a city hostile to those from his hometown, searching for his lost twin sons and their twin servants. He's been discovered and will be put to death unless he comes up with a ransom. But from that harsh start, the play kicks into farce. Both sons and their servants are also in residence (one set lives there). As they move about the town, always just missing their identical counterparts, the young men fall prey to the kinds of mistaken-identity mishaps that happen to twins in stories. As the deadline approaches for the execution, all the wildly whirling pieces fall into place.

As sources for the play, Shakespeare borrowed from a pair of comedies about twins by the Roman playwright Plautus, but he took the antics a notch higher by doubling the number of twins. Further conundrums add to the mix: For instance, even allowing for the twins' physical resemblance, what are the odds that they're also wearing the same clothes? And when townsfolk call the visiting Antipholus by his real name but are obviously referring to a different Antipholus, wouldn't it be logical for him to wonder if their confusion might be related to the missing sibling he's looking for? These questions are among the reasons why audiences over the centuries have found this comedy so delicious.

## "THERE'S NONE BUT WITCHES DO INHABIT HERE"

Scholars suggest that Elizabethan audiences would have been familiar with Ephesus (in this production, Harlem) from the Bible. In Acts, St. Paul establishes the Church in Ephesus, a city reputed to be full of sorcerers. Shakespeare gooses up the comedy by making the visiting Antipholus and Dromio interpret the crazy stuff that happens to them as proof that the city is polluted by witchcraft—which makes them want to get out of town.

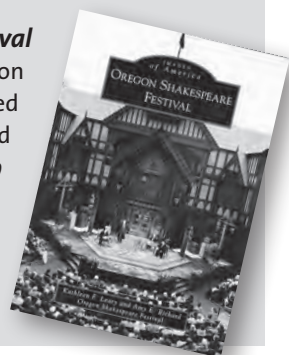
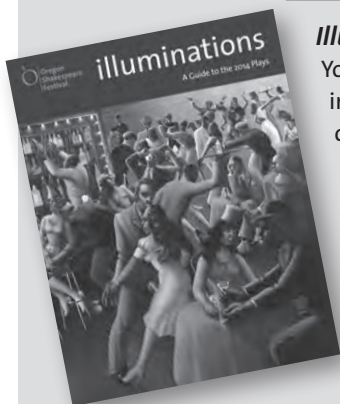
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