



AIM: To consider the comic conventions Shakespeare used in his plays, within the broader context of comedy vs. tragedy, and the historical influences of Commedia dell'arte.

DEBATE



“ *The Comedy of Errors* is more of a tragedy than a comedy. ”

OR



“ Comedy is for those who think; tragedy for those who feel. ”

Find excerpts of dialogue from the play and snippets of footage from previous interpretations of the play on youtube to support your argument.



SHAKESPEARE RE-TOLD



Watch one of the four plays by Shakespeare's plays that were adapted for *Shakespeare Retold*, a BBC series that includes fascinating and hilarious appropriations of *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Macbeth*.

Download and watch one of the snippets below to give you an idea of the style of each adaptation.



Shakespeare Retold – *Much Ado About Nothing* – Part 1
www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lx6EI4xDQw8



Shakespeare Retold – *The Taming of the Shrew* – Part 1
www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJ1U5XTR148&feature=related



Shakespeare Retold – *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – Part 1
www.youtube.com/watch?v=mX1boc-Bga8&feature=related



Shakespeare Retold – *Macbeth* – Part 1
www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fgj8GhcxDeo&feature=related

THE COMEDY OF ERRORS

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LAZZI

Lazzi is most commonly associated with the traditions of Commedia dell'Arte performers. A lazzi is any bit of stage business from a simple single action or word through to a whole scene, which is

devised and rehearsed beforehand and inserted into an improvised or scripted performance, and usually called for by the needs of the particular scenario. Most lazzi have been passed down to us via pantomime, circus, music hall and silent film.

“

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

Thou hast thine own form.

DROMIO OF SYRACUSE

No, I am an ape.

Act Two, Scene Two
The Comedy of Errors

”

The rehearsed stage business we call lazzi today are by their very nature familiar and stereotypical, borrowed, stolen, appropriated, adapted and amended, so that the original scenario can rarely be identified. They have

been handed down from Commedia player to Commedia player, from clown to clown, from pantomime dame to panto horse, from music hall artiste to holiday camp comedian; each taking what was useful and adding something of their own.



Research the lazzi traditions of Commedia dell'arte.

Write a 'recipe book' for an actor performing as a member of a Commedia dell'arte troupe.



Include a list of 'rules' around improvising.

Hint: see what you can find about the rules for playing theatresports – a contemporary version of Commedia dell'arte.

Suggest some ideas for characters, relationships or situations that you could 'default' to if you get stuck. (This may seem like cheating, but you'll notice that the Commedia dell'arte performers had some set structures they could invoke for a lazzi, ensuring that the players all had the same understanding of the basic structure their improvisation would follow. You'll also note that theatresports employs a similar technique: by choosing a particular game, players are given a framework on which to build their improvisation.

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MISTAKEN IDENTITY LAZZI

Use your lazzi 'recipe'.

Build a lazzi around a scene from *The Comedy of Errors*.

Reread Act Four, Scene I (below). This is a marvellous scene for you to explore mistaken identity.

To summarise: Antipholus of Syracuse is again approached by someone who thinks they know him, but is mistaking him for the other Antipholus. This time it is Angelo the goldsmith, with the chain he was to deliver to Antipholus of Ephesus at the Porpentine.

Perform the scene as written.

Improvise a continuation of the scene, building on the feelings of madness and confusion.

Introduce a range of characters, who enter the scene one by one, each claiming to know Antipholus of Syracuse from past encounters.



DISGUISE LAZZI

This Commedia dell'Arte interlude was beloved by Shakespeare, as can be seen in the mask work involving the two sets of twins in *The Comedy of Errors*. This lazzi became particularly prevalent during the last years of the seventeenth century when both Arlecchino and Colombina took on various identities, such as Colombina, Lawyer for the Prosecution and for the Defence.

“

DROMIO OF SYRACUSE

I am transformed, master, am not I?

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

I think thou art in mind, and so am I.

DROMIO OF SYRACUSE

Nay, master, both in mind and in my shape.

Act Two, Scene Two
The Comedy of Errors

”

You will find that the main factor in all such disguises is that they are rarely, if ever, complete. By convention, however slight the camouflage may be, it is sufficient to fool the intended members of the cast, but no one else – least of all the audience.

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COSTUME CHANGE LAZZI

While the other characters are fooled by Arlecchino's costume changes, the audience can always see part of his distinctive costume beneath his attempted disguise. This convention is known as a 'token change,' requiring beards and moustaches to be patently false, wigs and hats to be ill fitting, and clothes clearly made for someone of another size and shape. Cross-dressing in a lady's bonnet is made ridiculous by facial hair, false breasts are expected to slip around, or out, and the final joy is the obvious masculinity of the impersonator.

“

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

Am I in earth, in heaven, or in hell?
Sleeping or waking, mad,
or well-advis'd?
Known unto these,
and to myself disguis'd!

”

Act Two, Scene Two
The Comedy of Errors

Perform improvisations around the two sets of twin brothers: Antipholus of Ephesus and Antipholus of Syracuse, and their servants: Dromio of Ephesus and Dromio of Syracuse.

Remember that the twin Dromios are the clowns of the piece.

Play around with facial hair, padding and other easily seen-through or removable disguises.

Design a trick costume. For example, can a skirt be pulled up to make a dress?

Replace traditional solutions with your individual ingenuity. *Hint: make the most of velcro!*

Decide how your character will disguise him or herself:

1. **Onstage**, in full view of the audience.
2. **Attempt** to hide while assuming your disguise – perhaps behind a screen, curtains or scenery.
3. **Obscure** the audience's view of the costume change by having several of the other actors surround you as you complete your disguise.

Consider the following implications of your disguise choice for the plot of your improvisation:

1. The audience is in on the joke – how will this effect your character?
2. The audience is not supposed to know you are in disguise – how do you keep up the pretence?
3. Other characters now know that you are in disguise – how does this impact on your relationship?

Give free rein to the absurdity of the improvised scenes you come up with!

THE COMEDY OF ERRORS

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ACT FOUR, SCENE ONE

[Enter a MERCHANT, ANGELO, and an OFFICER.]

MERCHANT

You know, since Pentecost the sum is due,
And since I have not much importun'd you;
Nor now I had not, but that I am bound
To Persia, and want guilders for my voyage;
Therefore make present satisfaction,
Or I'll attach you by this officer.

ANGELO

Even just the sum that I do owe to you
Is growing to me by Antipholus;
And in the instant that I met with you
He had of me a chain; at five o'clock
I shall receive the money for the same:
Pleaseth you walk with me down to his house,
I will discharge my bond, and thank you too.

[Enter ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHESUS, and DROMIO OF EPHESUS.]

OFFICER

That labour may you save: see where he comes.

ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHESUS

While I go to the goldsmith's house, go thou
And buy a rope's end; that will I bestow
Among my wife and her confederates,
For locking me out of my doors by day.--
But, soft; I see the goldsmith: get thee gone;
Buy thou a rope, and bring it home to me.

DROMIO OF EPHEBUS I buy a thousand pound a year! I buy a rope!

[Exit DROMIO.]

ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHEBUS A man is well help up that trusts to you:
I promised your presence, and the chain;
But neither chain nor goldsmith came to me:
Belike you thought our love would last too long,
If it were chain'd together; and therefore came not.

ANGELO Saving your merry humour, here's the note,
How much your chain weighs to the utmost carat;
The fineness of the gold, and chargeful fashion;
Which doth amount to three odd ducats more
Than I stand debted to this gentleman:
I pray you, see him presently discharg'd,
For he is bound to sea, and stays but for it.

ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHEBUS I am not furnished with the present money;
Besides I have some business in the town:
Good Signior, take the stranger to my house,
And with you take the chain, and bid my wife
Disburse the sum on the receipt thereof;
Perchance I will be there as soon as you.

ANGELO Then you will bring the chain to her yourself?

ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHEBUS No; bear it with you, lest I come not time enough.

ANGELO Well, sir, I will: have you the chain about you?

ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHEBUS An if I have not, sir, I hope you have,
Or else you may return without your money.

ANGELO Nay, come, I pray you, sir, give me the chain;
Both wind and tide stays for this gentleman,
And I, to blame, have held him here too long.

ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHEBUS Good Lord, you use this dalliance to excuse
Your breach of promise to the Porcupine:
I should have chid you for not bringing it,
But, like a shrew, you first begin to brawl.

MERCHANT The hour steals on; I pray you, sir, despatch.

ANGELO You hear how he importunes me: the chain,--

ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHEBUS Why, give it to my wife, and fetch your money.

ANGELO Come, come, you know I gave it you even now;
Either send the chain or send by me some token.

ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHEBUS Fie! now you run this humour out of breath:
Come, where's the chain? I pray you, let me see it.

MERCHANT My business cannot brook this dalliance:
Good sir, say whe'r you'll answer me or no;
If not, I'll leave him to the officer.

ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHEBUS I answer you! What should I answer you?

ANGELO The money that you owe me for the chain.

ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHEBUS I owe you none till I receive the chain.

ANGELO You know I gave it you half-an-hour since.

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

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

MERCHANT Well, officer, arrest him at my suit.

OFFICER I do; and charge you in the duke's name to obey me.

ANGELO This touches me in reputation:
Either consent to pay this sum for me,
Or I attach you by this officer.

ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHEBUS Consent to pay thee that I never had!
Arrest me, foolish fellow, if thou dar'st.

ANGELO Here is thy fee; arrest him, officer:--
I would not spare my brother in this case,
If he should scorn me so apparently.

OFFICER I do arrest you, sir: you hear the suit.

ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHEBUS I do obey thee till I give thee bail:--
But, sirrah, you shall buy this sport as dear
As all the metal in your shop will answer.

ANGELO Sir, sir, I shall have law in Ephesus,
To your notorious shame, I doubt it not.

[Enter DROMIO OF SYRACUSE.]

DROMIO OF SYRACUSE Master, there's a bark of Epidamnum
That stays but till her owner comes aboard,
And then, sir, bears away: our fraughtage, sir,
I have convey'd aboard; and I have bought
The oil, the balsamum, and aqua-vitae.
The ship is in her trim; the merry wind
Blows fair from land; they stay for nought at all
But for their owner, master, and yourself.

ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHEBUS How now! a madman? Why, thou peevish sheep,
What ship of Epidamnum stays for me?

DROMIO OF SYRACUSE A ship you sent me to, to hire waftage.

ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHEBUS Thou drunken slave! I sent thee for a rope;
And told thee to what purpose and what end.

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

ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHEBUS 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.
On, officer, to prison till it come.