

Doubles analysis of the comedy of errors assignment

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**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Shakespeare's *A Comedy of Errors* In our individualistic culture, when asked to identify ourselves or a person, we tend to use various conditions or characteristics of our personality to explain who we are as an individual. In collectivist cultures, when asked to identify themselves or a person, primarily their family background is used. Personal characteristics are secondary in creating one's sense of self. William Shakespeare's play *A Comedy of Errors* suggests that a person's identity isn't only a collection of characteristics of their personality, but also, as well as ultimately established by a sense of family.

Shakespeare uses the doubles devices; the twin double and the alter ego, to help show the importance of a 'whole' family in establishing and revealing a person's identity. At the beginning of the play *A Comedy of Errors*, Shakespeare introduces the twin device to show how characteristics are not enough to establish identity. Antipholus of Syracuse has been wandering around from country to country looking for his exact twin also named Antipholus. Their father, Egeon describes them as "...one so like the other/ As could not be distinguished but by names" (I. . 51-52). The Antipholus twins shared the same characteristics. Not only did they look alike and bare the same name, they also shared the same social status as well as character. Characters used to describe the identity of an individual. This causes great confusion throughout the play. Neither Antipholus pretends to be someone who he is not. We, as readers are amazed at the likeness of the two characters, even through the dramatic irony which we know there are two of the men; we are also only able to tell them apart through their family relations.

Antipholus of Syracuse is not married while Antipholus of Ephesus has a wife and house hold to attend to. Shakespeare also uses the doubles device in the form of an alter ego to further show that a person's identity is not only how someone thinks of themselves and that your true identity can be hidden from even you. Adriana, wife of Antipholus of Ephesus, is introduced to us as a woman in pain because she believes that her husband is being unfaithful. She complains to her sister Luciana, Whilst I at home starve for a merry look.

Hath homely age th' alluring beauty took
From my poor cheek? Then he hath
wasted it. Are my discourses dull?
Barren my wit? If voluble and sharp
discourse be marred, Unkindness blunts
it more than marble hard. Do their
gay vestments his affections bait?
That's not my fault; he's master of my
state. What ruins are in me that can
be found By him not ruined? Then is
he the ground Of my defeatures.
My decayed fair A sunny look of his
would soon repair. But, too unruly deer,
he breaks the pale And feeds from home...
(II. i. 93-106)

Adriana, unknown to herself, in this speech shows that although she entertains the thought that maybe it is her fault that her husband has strayed, that she is no longer appealing to him, quickly turns around and blames him for her faults. She goes through her marriage believing that she is not at fault in any way, and that she is doing the best she can to keep her husband. She nags him in hope that he will change his ways, not realizing that it may be her jealousy as her sister points out, that might be pushing him away. It took the Abbess, her mother-in-law, although unknown at the time, to reveal to her, her true self.

After being scolded by the Abbess, Adriana having an epiphany tells her sister that “ she did betray me to my own reproof” (V. i. 94). She never knew her self until now. Adriana’s mother-in-law was needed to enlighten her and reveal to her, her true nature. Shakespeare stretches the willing suspension of disbelief with the possibility that these mix ups never crossed Antipholus of Syracuse’s mind, to be a cause of him being mistaken for his twin that he has been searching for. Shakespeare does this in order to fully imply that for identity to be established, the whole family is needed.

The play unfolds with a continuous series of mix ups leading up to the climax of the play where finally the Antipholuses and Dromios are face-to-face. With the father recognized by Dromio and Antipholus of Syracuse and both sets of twins present on stage, with a piece of the family still missing, the crisis could not be resolved and identities could be established. It took the Abbess recognizing Egeon as her husband and revealing to both the characters as well as to us readers that she was the mother and hence the last part of the family.

The Duke having heard this and seeing the whole family together, as the authority figure he resolves the crisis stating, Why, here begins his morning story right; These two Antipholuses, these two so like, And these two Dromios, one in semblance??? Besides her urging of her wreck at sea??? These are the parents to these children, Which accidentally are met together. (V. i. 357-362) He reinstates the identities of Egeon, Emilia, the two Antipholuses as well as the Dromios and the confusions of the day then begin to resolve themselves.

Throughout the play, Shakespeare presents us with both dark and comical confusions with double sets of twins-the Dromios and the Antipholuses. He also presents us with doubles of different sorts, for example Adriana's alter ego double. He wants us to understand how easily a person can be mistaken for another and identity can be lost if it is just based in character and how a person views their selves. Through his unrealistic storyline, Shakespeare shows us that the foundation of identity is set in the family.