VYING FOR THE CLAIM of having been Shakespeare’s earliest comedies are *The Comedy of Errors* and *Love’s Labor’s Lost*. Although both have had some success on the stage, neither can be counted among Shakespeare's great comic achievements. Yet, I believe, the two plays warrant more than passing consideration because of the patterns of self-knowledge embedded in them, patterns that reappear, with variations, not merely in Shakespeare’s subsequent comedies but also in his histories, tragedies, and romances.

*The Comedy of Errors*, the subject of the present chapter, is a boisterous farce full of buffoonery and horseplay, surely one of Shakespeare’s happiest comedies; but it nevertheless contains incidents and themes out of which more serious drama can be and has been made, that is, errors and misidentifications that, aggravated by unfortunate accidents, lead to disruptions of family relationships and to general social disorders.¹ The play’s first scene casts an ominous shadow that does not fully vanish until the very end: Aegeon, a grief-stricken father in search of his son—the only family member remaining to him after the earlier apparent loss of his wife and first son—is condemned to die at sunset for entering hostile territory. This melancholy beginning was Shakespeare’s invention; his basic source, Plautus’s *Menaechmi*, had no such searching and suffering father. Shakespeare introduced him from another story, that of Apollonius of Tyre, and with him the idea of the storm and the shipwreck. The second scene, it is true, lightens the shadow by bringing on the stage the son for whom Aegeon has been searching and, through the resulting confusion in Ephesus, indicates that the other son may also be alive—a supposition soon to be confirmed. As the reader or auditor of the play senses that he is experiencing a
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comedy, his anxiety about the unresolved fate of Aegeon lessens, but it is not removed totally until the very end.

This grave beginning emphasizes the serious theme of searching and finding, which Shakespeare developed much beyond anything he found in Plautus. In The Comedy of Errors, there is not only a son who risks his life in search of a brother but also a father who endangers it for his sons, and father and sons are subjected to much pain before they gain happiness in the end, a greater happiness than could have been imagined by any of them because it encompasses and unites the whole family. Further, the movement from initial disruption to final recovery affects in various ways all major characters: Adriana, wife of Antipholus of Ephesus; Luciana, her sister; the Dromios, twin servants to the twin masters; and it even touches some minor figures, such as the schoolmaster, the merchant, the goldsmith, and the sergeant.

Before the happy turn of events occurs, the search to reestablish the severed family ties leads to one error and misidentification after another, each of which brings increasing pain and anxiety and loosens the natural bonds further. But with the help of Aegeon's wife, the Abbess, a kind of dea ex machina, the errors are explained, the identities restored, and a more meaningful order is evolved. When in the end she invites all to a "gossips' feast"—a celebration of baptism—family and society are, as it were, reborn. Those who came into the world as brother and brother—so Shakespeare has Antipholus of Ephesus sum up the meaning of the ending—now go hand in hand, not one before the other. The play thus moves from grief to joy, from disunity to unity, from loss of identity to reidentification, from the confusion of souls to the clarity of minds.

This general movement from threatening self-loss to self-recovery is, of course, common to all of Shakespeare's comedies and tragicomedies. Yet, I think there are some differences in the degree of the danger and in the completeness of the recoveries between Shakespeare's "happy" or "romantic" comedies and his "dark" or "problem" comedies, and there are differences in this respect between these two kinds of comedies and the tragicomedies. In the comedies from The Comedy of Errors through Twelfth Night, the threat of self-loss is much less ominous and the efficacy of the final recoveries can hardly be questioned, but in Troilus and Cressida, All's Well That Ends Well, and Measure for Measure, the heroes come close to losing themselves irrevocably and find themselves either imperfectly
or make us question their staying power. In the tragicomedies, from *Pericles* through *The Tempest*, the self-losses go even beyond the stage of these comedies, and it is not clearly apparent in the course of the plays that there will be recoveries; it takes extraordinary, in some cases supernatural, means to bring them about. On the basis of this theme alone, one could put Shakespeare’s comedies into the three categories that have become conventional for them.

Although in *The Comedy of Errors* self-loss is a relatively harmless matter, the theme is clearly struck. It is adumbrated by “the griefs unspeakable” of Aegeon, with which the play opens, and it is unmistakably formulated in the first soliloquy of Antipholus of Syracuse, who feels submerged in the strange and unhospitable city of Ephesus:

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.  
(I.ii.35-40)

This figure of the waterdrop is a memorable one since it echoes through the play. Shakespeare, as Professor Baldwin has shown, developed it from Plautus’s image of looking for a needle; he gave it the maritime turn perhaps with Aegeon’s story of the storm in mind or because of Plautus’s remark that the two *Menaechmi* resembled each other as water resembles water (1.1089). It should, however, be noted that Plautus spoke only of seeking a needle, not of losing and finding one; the antithetical figure was Shakespeare’s dilation. With it he gained an allusion to the paradox of salvation in Matthew 16:25: “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it” (similarly, Matthew 10:39, Luke 9:24, John 12:25). The side-note of the Genevan-Tomson version marked the paradox as a specific warning against self-loss, saying that those who “would save themselves do not only gain that which they look for, but also lose the thing they would have kept, that is, themselves, which loss is the greatest of all. . . .”

The biblical formula is so simple and artless as to have induced a modern poet to say that it lacks poetic glamor; according to A. E.
Housman, the paradox of salvation is "the most important truth that has ever been uttered, and the greatest discovery in the moral world; but I do not find in it anything that I should call poetical." But for Shakespeare, this most important of all truths belonged to the vocabulary of self-knowledge; just like the Christian humanists, he found it both significant and poetical, and he gave it to Antipholus of Syracuse, who is the more important of the two brothers, the hero of the play, if it can be said to have one, and the character most conscious of the identity problem.

This focus on the searching brother was Shakespeare's own idea. In Plautus, the citizen Menaechmus was the main character, the first to appear and the most frequently present of the two brothers. And not only is Shakespeare's stranger-brother a more important character than Plautus's, he also becomes a recognizable individual, capable of not merely drawing laughter but also of attracting some sympathy. He is a thoughtful, somewhat melancholy man, who would wander in the streets to "lose himself" (I.ii.30) with no idea as yet how thoroughly this desire will be fulfilled. He is at first puzzled about the misidentifications and confusions and then becomes sincerely worried about his identity. It is merely the belief that he is in a city of witches, as Ephesus was assumed to be, that prevents him from completely succumbing to his feeling of alienation.

The strangers around him do their best to thrust on him an identity that he cannot recognize as his own and does not want. First it is the servant who treats him as if he were somebody else; then it is Adriana and Luciana who conspire to make him into the former's husband. He becomes baffled and uncertain: "What, was I married to her in my dream? / Or sleep I now, and think I hear all this?" (II.ii.181-82). He is shaken enough in his self-knowledge to accept the dinner invitation and to feel at least temporarily a stranger to himself, as much an alien on earth as one of Kafka's heroes:

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!  
(211-13)

But he decides that in this case self-alienation has its compensation because it offers him not only an unexpected dinner but also a woman, Luciana, who excites his amorous desire. Were it not for her
insistence that he is married to her sister, he would be willing to accept a kind of Pythagorean transformation into an Ephesian. As he says to Luciana,

Transform me, then, and to your pow'r 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.
(III.ii.40-43)

He is ready to drown his identity—one remembers the image of the waterdrop associated with him—but not through merging into Adriana:

O, train me not, sweet mermaid, with thy note,
To drown me in thy sister's flood of tears.
Sing, siren, for thyself, and I will dote.
(45-47)

True love is the kind of self-loss he will accept even if it means death: "Let Love, being light, be drowned if she sink" (52). And when Luciana attempts to redirect his ardors by asking him to turn his straying eyes to her sister, Antipholus waxes even more eloquent:

It is thyself, mine own self's better part;
Mine eye's clear eye, my dear heart's dearer heart,
My food, my fortune, and my sweet hope's aim,
My sole earth's heaven, and my heaven's claim.
(61-64)

We may stop here for a moment and consider Antipholus's terms of endearment because they are part of an image cluster evolving from the Platonic lore of self-knowledge as the knowledge of the soul. Antipholus identifies his beloved as his "better part," that is, his soul. She is dearer to him than he is to himself, a notion that Cicero in De Amicitia (xxi.80) mentioned as a pardonable lover's exaggeration and that became part of the convention "one soul in bodies twain." Antipholus's amplifying epithets—eye, heart, and heaven—belong to the terminology of the soul as much as they do to lovers' language: the eye was held to be analogous to the soul; the heart, of course, was one of its organs in the body; and "sole" in "my sole
earth's heaven” puns on “soul.” Antipholus knows how to identify himself with his most important substance, and he knows how to identify himself analogously with his beloved; rather than loving her sister as she demands, he asks her, “Call thyself sister, sweet, for I am thee” (66).

But Luciana rejects him, and he is thus prevented from transforming himself into her husband, a transformation he sees now as dangerous; she “hath almost made me traitor to myself” (160). He recalls the reputation of Ephesus for witchcraft. As a melancholy man, he has the more reason to be afraid, for it was believed in Shakespeare's time that men of this type were susceptible to being transformed by their exuberant imagination. John Woolton, among others, warned that a kind of Pythagorean metempsychosis could come to pass “by means of witchcraft and abundance of melancholy humors in man's body, wherewith the devil conjoineth himself often times.”

But the decision to depart from the bewitched city restores Antipholus's self-confidence; he suffers no more self-alienation although the confusions continue. His and Dromio's departure, however, is frustrated by their being taken for the other pair; they flee to the priory, where they take sanctuary—a fortunate circumstance because it will bring them face to face with the other set of twins, who are to arrive at the same location shortly.

When we turn to examining the role of Antipholus of Ephesus and compare it to Plautus's citizen-brother, we note that it is both diminished and changed because of Shakespeare's emphasis on the theme of search. Antipholus of Syracuse does not appear until the third act and takes second place to his brother the searcher. But he is a better man than his Plautine counterpart, and he is more pitifully victimized. Antipholus does not plan to deceive his wife; when he goes to the courtesan for dinner, it is in pardonable anger: he has just been subjected to terrible treatment. He has been excluded from his own house in the presence of a friend whom he had invited, and his wife, while entertaining company inside, has denied being married to him: “Your wife, sir knave! Go get you from the door” (III.i.64). Everybody he meets acts as if Antipholus did not know himself. The goldsmith asks him for payment of a chain he ordered but did not receive and has him arrested; the courtesan thinks him insane and convinces his wife that he is; worst of indignities, he is exorcised by the odious Pinch. These cumulative irritations produce in Antipholus an understandable but excessive reaction. He “trem-
bles in his ecstasy” (IV.iv.47) as he beats the servant and the schoolmaster and vehemently insults his wife.

It is interesting to note that this passionate outbreak of the Ephesian Menaechmus was Shakespeare’s revision. In Plautus, it is the stranger-Menaechmus who is characterized as a man of ungovernable temper (1.269: “ego autem homo iracundus, animi perditi”) whereas the citizen-Menaechmus is and remains fairly even-tempered. When he plays the madman, he does so merely to frighten his wife. By investing the Ephesian brother with the temper of Plautus’s stranger-Menaechmus, Shakespeare combined in the summa epitasis of his play both the climax of confusion and the climax of emotion. The Terentian five-act formula as evolved by Renaissance commentators favored such construction of the emotional curve because it demanded the highest of perturbations for this part of the structure. Moreover and most importantly, Shakespeare thus created another moment of threatening self-loss, the most dangerous of the play. Antipholus comes near to suffering the direst transformation of all, that from man to animal through passion, a transformation against which the moralists never ceased to warn. Because anger was often defined as a “short madness,” his being declared insane symbolizes the danger. Without their fair judgment, as Claudius says of the mad Ophelia, men are “pictures, or mere beasts.” But in a comedy, the summa epitasis, no matter how turbulent, must bring forth the occasion of the catastrophe; and it does so in The Comedy of Errors: the violence of Antipholus of Ephesus makes it possible for him to break away from his captors and escape to the abbey, where the reunion of all characters takes place and everybody finds unhoped-for joy.

In concentrating on the main plot, I have undoubtedly overstressed the serious aspects of the play. All through, the strand of the action involving the two Dromios neutralizes the potential dangers by reminding us that we are witnessing a farce, and an improbable one at that. The servant subplot, it has been said with slight overstatement, keeps The Comedy of Errors from becoming a tragedy. However, it is not generally noted how beautifully this subplot echoes and varies the semi-serious themes of self-loss and self-transformation in a scherzo mood. As one master suffers an identity crisis, so does his servant, and both comic convention and the way in which these crises are expressed keep them from having the same weight as the masters’ anguish. Just as Antipholus of Ephesus comes close to losing his
reason and thus to transforming himself into an animal, so his servant suffers a painful metamorphosis of his own. First beaten by one master for inviting him to dinner, he is called an ass by the other and beaten again for merely truthfully claiming to have been beaten before. As he says, it appears he is becoming an ass, and thus he should be free to kick when being kicked so that “you would keep from my heels, and beware of an ass” (III.i.15–18). Mistaking and mistiming play another painful trick on him when the man he supposes to be his master sends him for a rope; he delivers it only to find his master now asking for a sum of money of which he knows nothing since the other Dromio was dispatched for it. Beaten and called “senseless,” Dromio protests:

I would I were senseless, sir, that I
might not feel your blows.

E. Ant. Thou art sensible in nothing but blows,
and so is an ass.

E. Dro. I am an ass indeed; you may prove it by my long ears.
I have served him from the hour of my nativity to this
instant, and have nothing at his hands for my service but
blows.

(IV.iv.25–31)

By saying that Dromio is sensible in nothing but blows, Antipholus grants Dromio only a sensitive soul and denies him the distinctive mark of a human being. Antipholus thus degrades Dromio into an animal, just at the moment he is in danger of becoming one himself. Both incidents derive their meaning from the Renaissance pride in human identity and from the Renaissance fear of human self-loss. However, the servant’s travesty helps to lessen the serious implications in the master’s change.

Dromio of Syracuse too suffers a pseudo-Ovidian metamorphosis. Just after his master has declared that he is willing to change his identity if he can thereby gain Luciana, the latter, whom he had never seen before, addresses him by his own name. What else can he do except to believe in a metamorphosis:

I am transformed, master, am not I?

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

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

S. Ant. Thou hast thine own form.
S. Dro. No, I am an ape.

Luc. If thou art chang'd to aught, ’tis to an ass.

S. Dro. ’Tis true; she rides me, and I long for grass.

’Tis so, I am an ass; else it could never be.

But I should know her as well as she knows me.

(II.ii.194–201)

In an even more notable parallel to his master’s plight, Dromio of Syracuse is claimed as a husband by a woman he does not know, and that by the spherical and unappetizing kitchen wench Nell! He cries out in despair: “Do you know me, sir? Am I Dromio? Am I your man? Am I myself?” (III.ii.73). Although Antipholus tries to reassure Dromio, the latter feels he has lost his identity altogether: “I am an ass, I am a woman’s man, and besides myself” (76).

The scene makes its point by itself; to elaborate on it is to run the risk of making an obvious joke a matter of great profundity. But one cannot escape the feeling that Shakespeare suggests here that such “errors” as happen in this play could on a more serious level bring about more dangerous transformations. The denial of man’s identity can lead to self-loss in ignorance, passion, and madness. *The Comedy of Errors*, it is true, does not permit the characters to experience states of metaphysical anxiety as do the later dark comedies and the tragedies, but it does make them visible in the distance. Dromio of Syracuse’s amazed question, “Do you know me, sir? . . . Am I your man? Am I myself?” anticipates at least faintly the identity question asked by the tortured Lear: “Does any here know me? . . . Who is it that can tell me who I am?” (I.iv.225 ff.). But it is no accident that in *The Comedy of Errors* the identity question is asked in its most impressive form by a servant, whom, according to comic convention, we cannot take altogether seriously. We never cease to laugh even when we feel his plight.

Both the Dromios’ and the Antipholuses’ identity problems are solved when they are confronted with their mirror images, and they are solved in a way of which Plautus knew nothing. Shakespeare’s happy comedies not only provide joyous endings but they also re-assert social norms. It is presumably for this reason that *The Comedy of Errors* has an elaborate domestic-romantic setting. Shakespeare was not merely interested in the external confusions and their potential threat to identity; he was also concerned with making his characters find themselves in the end in a proper human and social
context. Self-knowledge is achieved only when the positioning of each self toward the other selves has taken place.

There are in *The Comedy of Errors* also some indications that such a reestablishment of relationships must proceed in the kind of framed and articulated Renaissance universe described in the preceding chapter. The confusions have "tangled" the chain that had previously linked the characters to family and society and have even threatened to break the links, but the recovery brings about the kind of organic unity idealized by the Elizabethan moralists. Notably, Shakespeare chose a chain (rather than, as in Plautus, a coat) for the main prop of misidentification and reidentification; and images of tying, attaching, and fastening flowed from his pen. The chain is delivered to the wrong Antipholus, and the rope is about to land on the back of one of the Dromios. But in the happy catastrophe, the chaos is avoided. To speak with the moralists, everybody is again properly linked to society, and the knot of friendship is retied.

The theme of the individual's bonds with the larger units, with family and city, is developed primarily in the domestic-romantic subplot, which was entirely Shakespeare's own. Its central character, Luciana, has no equivalent in Plautus, and her part-time occupation as marriage counselor and *nosce teipsum* preacher make her into a figure inconceivable in Roman comedy. But even Adriana assumes a more important role than does the Citizen's wife in Plautus. She is a loving spouse rather than a mere shrew, and she would like to make her husband cherish her. But by harassing him, she goes about it the wrong way and creates family disunity. Luciana serves as her confidante, as recipient of her laments, and as her adviser. Primarily, however, she is the object of the amorous attention of Antipholus of Syracuse, making a romantic love intrigue possible and offering an opportunity for the bachelor Antipholus to find himself in the haven of marriage. And, like the princess in *Love's Labor's Lost*, she is an early, if slight, sketch of Shakespeare's later romantic heroines, of Rosalind and Viola, who, though involved in the confusions, have enough self-knowledge to help others to find themselves.

In a manner quite foreign to Plautus but resembling the debates of some Tudor interludes, Adriana and Luciana are introduced in a discussion about a marriage problem. Adriana is angry with her husband for not returning home promptly after being sent for. She is something of a rebel against the social order that subordinates her to him. Luciana becomes her marriage counselor, a role in which she
must have seemed most competent to Shakespeare's audience, for she
preaches the official Elizabethan position on marital order as given
in "An Homily of the State of Matrimony" when she admonishes
Adriana to let her husband be the bridle of her will. When Adriana
perversely rejoins, "There's none but asses will be bridled so," Lu­
ciana lectures her on the duties of a true wife:

Why, headstrong liberty is lash'd with woe.
There's nothing situate under heaven's eye
But hath his bound, in earth, in sea, in sky.
The beasts, the fishes, and the winged fowls,
Are their males' subjects, and at their controls.
Man, more divine, the master of all these,
Lord of the wide world and wild wat'ry seas,
Indu'd with intellectual sense and souls,
Of more pre-eminence than fish and fowls,
Are masters to their females, and their lords;
Then let your will attend on their accords.

(II.i.15-25)

This is the same theory the remorseful Kate in The Taming of the
Shrew proclaims unexpectedly in the end: the wife's duty to obey
her husband is the divine law of the universe that prescribes a
hierarchical order. Luciana appropriately evokes the subjection of
animals to men as an analogy because it had established the general
principle of subordination in the orderly Christian world: God
created man to "have rule of the fish of the sea and the fowl of the air,
and of cattle, and of earth, and of every creeping thing that creepeth
upon the earth" (Genesis 1:26). Also, God "put all things in sub­
jection under their feet; all sheep and oxen; yea, and the beasts of
the field, the fowls of the air, and the fish of the sea; and whatsoever
walketh through the paths of the seas" (Psalms 8:6-8). Luciana
properly refers to this triplicity of subjected animals: "the beasts, the
fishes, and the winged fowls."

Luciana takes a Renaissance view of the world that is theologically
sound when she sees every creature's place in the universal order as
allocated and circumscribed; each, she says, has its "bound." In a
paraphrase of a passage in Cicero on the law of nature, Woolton
noted similarly that all animals, "for that they cannot usurp the
trade and conditions of other kinds, do contain themselves within the
enclosures of their own natures." The general argument that the
subjection of female to male was the plan of Creation had formidable
theological and legal authority. Luciana expounds what generally passed for an account of order based on the Creation even though she may be overdoing the praise of the masculine species by calling it “more divine,” for that epithet (although certainly not the idea of greater divinity) seems to have been reserved for man in the generic sense—Shakespeare may well have been having his fun with the male chauvinists of his time.

But for generic man it was quite correct to claim that he was, as Arthur Golding put it, “far more divine, of nobler mind,” and that he was a creature that passed all others “in depth of knowledge, reason, wit, and high capacity, / And which of all the residue should the lord and ruler be.” The greater divinity of men, according to Luciana, depends on their possession of “intellectual sense and souls”—a phrase that demonstrates a careful and technical terminology. Luciana appropriately divides the psychic apparatus by which man excels into a superior sensory mechanism (“intellectual sense”) and the strictly human and immortal soul. John Woolton similarly explained that “there was also in this image of God in man a pre-eminence and superiority above all other inferior creatures, whom he excelled in many ways, both in reason and quickness of senses.” And Luciana, like Woolton, knows the proper biblical term for male and human superiority when she speaks of “preeminence.” Altogether, her lecture is good advice to a wayward wife and a competent disquisition on the Renaissance frame of the world in which the marriage unit was a clearly defined and bounded part of the structure.

Even if one can, to some degree, sympathize with Adriana’s retort that, after all, Luciana knows about these matters only through theory, Shakespeare made it abundantly clear that Luciana points out a weakness in her sister. Adriana does not know herself and wishes to assume a hegemony in marriage that she cannot properly claim. When she lectures Antipholus (it happens to be the wrong one) on his “estrangement,” she betrays that she does not really understand her place in the scheme of things:

How comes it now, my husband, O, how comes it,
That thou art then estranged from thyself?
Thyself I call it, being strange to me,
That, undividable, incorporate,
Am better than thy dear self’s better part.

(II.ii.118-22)
In a way, Adriana is not wrong when she seeks to identify herself with her husband; their marriage vows have made them "incorporate," that is, one flesh. She might even be forgiven for claiming to be his "better part," that is, his soul—a claim that is underlined by "undividable" and "incorporate," for indivisibility and noncorporeality were common attributes of the soul. But Adriana says to Antipholus she is "better than thy dear self's better part"; she claims superiority, a reversal of roles particularly reprehensible in a society that believed, in Guazzo's words, that the husband was united with his wife to rule over her in the same manner as does "the mind over the body, which are linked together by a certain natural amity." By making herself into the super-soul of the Antipholus family, she would establish a discordia discors; it is not he but she who suffers from self-estrangement.

Adriana goes on to depict herself as the soul of the Antipholus family in a metaphor that recalls Antipholus of Syracuse's earlier self-characterization as a waterdrop lost in the sea (I.ii.35 ff.)—the similarity should be enough to make him wince:

Ah, do not tear away thyself from me;  
For know, my love, as easy mayst thou fall  
A drop of water in the breaking gulf,  
And take unmingled thence that drop again  
Without addition or diminishing,  
As take from me thyself, and not me too.  

(II.ii.123-28)

Here again, Adriana presumes; the "breaking gulf" toward which the "drop," that is, her husband, has fallen stands not only for her own person but also metaphorically for the soul of the incorporate Antipholus family she fancies herself to be. Palingenius illustrated the indivisibility of the soul in very similar terms:

But soul is indivisible and of no gross degree;  
But as a center does she seem, where many lines do meet,  
Which senses do convey to her, as floods to seas do fleet.

Adriana's desire to fasten herself to Antipholus's sleeve (175), however, is evidence that her wish to be the soul of the Antipholus family is not based on independence and self-reliance. She resembles
more a body knitting itself to a soul than a soul to a body. Her next metaphor emphasizes this weakness:

Thou art an elm, my husband, I a vine,
Whose weakness, married to thy stronger state,
Makes me with thy strength to communicate.

(173-75)

Adriana here adapts a common *topos* for the soul; in Sir John Davies's version, "She [i.e., the soul] is a vine which doth no propping neede / To make her spread herself or spring upright." 18 Clearly, Adriana lacks comprehension of her destined role in marriage. In the end, she finds herself; she is subdued enough even to accept responsibility for her husband's madness and to acknowledge the Abbess's harsh sermon against the "venomous clamours of a jealous woman" as justified: "She did betray me to my own reproof" (V.i.90). A new Adriana has emerged. She understands her proper relationship to her husband just at the moment when Antipholus of Syracuse finally finds Luciana, the Abbess is miraculously revealed as the wife of Aegeon, and all self-estrangements and self-transformations come to an end.

Thus the ending is something more than the happy resolution of classically conceived comedy. We are made to feel, as we always are at the end of Shakespeare's happy and romantic comedies—my reader will be aware that I think of them as specifically his *Renaissance* comedies—that a benevolent world order has reasserted itself. The frame is rebuilt. The clearly defined selves are put into an equally clearly structured society that reflects the order of the universe. In the end, both masters recognize each other and so do both servants, but they go out hand in hand not only as brother and brother but also as masters and servants according to their proper role. And besides the restored relationships, in particular the restored marriages, a new alliance is soon to take place between Luciana and Antipholus of Syracuse. Thus the stability and continuity of man and society are asserted.

There is, I believe, in this respect a fundamental difference between *The Comedy of Errors* and the plays of Shakespeare's later periods. I shall be more explicit on this difference when discussing these plays; at present I wish merely to suggest it. It is not only that in watching them we do not have the same kind of assurance we have
in *The Comedy of Errors* that all will be right with the world even when a great many things are temporarily wrong, but also that we are never assured during and after the plays that the heroes' selves can find their proper places in a firmly structured societal and cosmic frame or could have found them if they or the circumstances had been somewhat different. After the Forest of Arden and Illyria, Shakespeare never returned to Ephesus.

Actually, the skies may already have been darkening during the time Shakespeare wrote his high comedies if I am correct in seeing in *Julius Caesar* signs of his distress about the incongruity between a hero's self-knowledge and the functioning of state and universe. And the change is evident in *Hamlet*, which may have been written no later than the high comedies. It takes, I think, some very strained interpretation of the play and particularly of its ending to attribute to the prince an insight into who and what he is in the frame of the universe; and for us to be certain about the answer is hazardous—critics who are certain use their own assumptions and value systems for those of Hamlet and the play. If it be objected that *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet* are tragedies and cannot be compared with comedies, it should be said that Shakespeare's early tragedies—we may, for the purposes of this argument, disregard the artistically inferior *Titus Andronicus*—are quite different from the later tragedies but resemble *The Comedy of Errors* in providing a clear orientation of the main characters toward the societal and cosmic frame, even when, as in *Romeo and Juliet*, the frame is in temporary disorder. That the disorder is temporary we are told in the prologue to the play, and both prologue and ending carry explicit statements on the restoration of order and the improvement of life in Verona. In *Richard II*, which is both a history and a tragedy, Richard's road to self-knowledge is firmly entered on the map even though he walks it only part of the way, and, as I shall argue, the play holds out a distinct hope of future harmony. By contrast, the later comedies *All's Well* and *Measure for Measure* (not to speak about *Troilus and Cressida*) are distressing and puzzling plays that, like *Hamlet*, pose questions on whether things will ever be right in the world. The heroes, Bertram and Angelo, as well as some of the other characters, are released in the end into a quite undeserved but also strangely conditional happiness.

It is true that some of the later tragedies make the road to self-knowledge clearer and the goal more desirable, but they also disconnect road and goal from the cosmic frame or draw into question
the existence of a design. It is obvious that Lear achieves some insight into himself, but it is quite difficult to say whether this includes an understanding of "the mystery of things" if by that is meant the way of God with men; one cannot even be sure that God's in his heaven. Attempts at attributing a cathartic quality to the ending of these tragedies seem doomed to failure. Few critics are nowadays willing to accept Bradley's benevolent and, to some at least, comforting idea that Lear "dies into joy." And although the ending of Antony and Cleopatra is often said to have a "transcendence," those who use this term generally mean by it an aesthetic gratification rather than a reassurance about the universe or the future of Rome and Egypt. The romances do indeed have joyful endings, brought about by more or less miraculous means, endings which like those of All's Well and Measure for Measure are more forced than those sanctioned by the comic convention and practiced in Shakespeare's earlier comedies. For this and other reasons, I do not think that the romances comfort us about the existence of a rational cosmic design as does The Comedy of Errors. If they make us believe in a design at all, it is because of a certain faith they create in the triumph of goodness—a faith, not an expectation stemming from a knowledge of how things generally are. When at the end of The Tempest Prospero returns to Milan, it is to a city fraught with uncertainties, and he is accompanied by a villainous brother who gives no clear indication that he will, from now on, walk in hand with him. Most of us trust that Prospero will succeed in Milan; but we must take it, as in fact he does himself, on faith. Prospero does not return to a city, a state, and a universe that have reassumed their God-given order as has Ephesus.