THE PROLOGUE OF PLAUTUS' *MENAECHMI* AND THE OPENING SCENE OF SHAKESPEARE'S *THE COMEDY OF ERRORS* (I.1.1-160): A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS*

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to examine how Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*, specifically Scene I.1, diverges from Plautus' *Menaechmi* in its adaptation and interpretation. In his Prologue, Plautus uses Prologus to speak on behalf of the poet and provide valuable information about the plot of the play. In contrast, Scene I.1 of *The Comedy of Errors* introduces several characters on stage, with the most prominent being the father of the twin boys, who explains that he came to Ephesus searching for his lost son. It is a comparative analysis that examines plot elements in these two comedies and proves that, although it is common knowledge among previous scholars that Shakespeare has used Plautine *Menaechmi* as a model, he manages even from the beginning of his play to create a more complex plot.

KEYWORDS: comparative drama, *fabula palliata*, prologue, comedy.

EL PRÓLOGO DE *LOS GEMELOS* DE PLAUTO Y LA ESCENA INICIAL
DE *LA COMEDIA DE LOS ERRORES DE SHAKESPEARE* (I.1.1-160): UN ANÁLISIS COMPARATIVO

RESUMEN

Este trabajo tiene como objetivo examinar cómo *The Comedy of Errors* de Shakespeare, específicamente la escena I.1, se aparta de *Menaechmi* (*Los gemelos*) de Plauto en su adaptación e interpretación. En su Prólogo, Plauto recurre a Prologus para hablar en nombre del poeta y proporcionar información valiosa sobre la trama de la obra. En contraste, la escena I.1 de *The Comedy of Errors* introduce a varios personajes en escena, siendo el más destacado el padre de los gemelos, quien explica que llegó a Éfeso en busca de su hijo perdido. Se trata de un análisis comparativo que examina los elementos argumentales de estas dos comedias y demuestra que, aunque es sabido entre los estudiosos que Shakespeare utilizó la *Menaechmi* de Plauto como modelo, consigue, incluso desde el comienzo de su obra, crear una trama más compleja.

PALABRAS CLAVE: drama comparado, *fabula palliata*, prólogo, comedia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Roman comedy significantly influenced Shakespeare's plays, which often incorporated entire scenes from his Roman predecessors, Plautus and Terence. In other words, *fabulae palliatae* served as a model for many of the central motifs, structural patterns, and stock characters found in Shakespearean comedy[1]. In Plautine plays, for instance, the strategic use of stage objects (*props*) often produces theatrical illusions, unexpected twists, or moments of confusion (Burrow, 2013: 138). As a result, Plautus' comedies are primarily comedies of intrigue, in which humor arises from misunderstandings and the deliberate deception of certain characters. Likewise, the cunning slave (*servus callidus*) of Plautus, who devises a scheme to help his young, enamored master win the girl he loves and eliminate his romantic rival, also appears in the comedies of Shakespeare[2]. He even informs the audience of his cunning plan, which will bring the comedy to its conclusion, thereby making the audience complicit in the deception he orchestrates. Thus, he assumes a metatheatrical role, much like in Shakespeare's works[3].

This paper aims to shed light on the ways that Shakespeare diverges from his Roman model, Plautus' *Menaechmi*, in *The Comedy of Errors*, one of his earliest comedies. Focus will be cast on both Scene I.1 of this play and the Prologue of *Menaechmi*, so that their similarities and differences are highlighted, as well as the role of these parts in the development of the plot.

This can be considered as an innovative concept, as there are only a few references in previous literature. For example, Gill (1925: 79-95) brilliantly attempts to draw a comparison between the two plays. Thus, she focuses on their main differences, in terms of the pattern of doubling, the function of female characters, as well as other secondary roles, such as *medicus*, Erotium or Luciana. At the same time, she documents all of Shakespeare's innovations in character development compared to his Roman model, ultimately concluding that the English playwright's characters are more fully developed and complex than those in Plautus. Moreover, Arthos (1967: 239-253) tries to trace influences from many Plautine comedies on Shakespeare's plays and emphasizes the similarities between Scene III.1 of *The Comedy of Errors* and *Amphitruo*. Finally, Burrow (2013: 144) argues that *The Comedy of Errors* is «a consciously Terentine *contaminatio*, which mingles the plot of *Menaechmi* with scenes and themes from Plautus' *Amphitruo*», after commenting on Shakespeare's use of Plautus and Terence in some of his other comedies, such as the *Twelfth Night*. Last

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[1] See for example, Miola (1994: 1-18) and Burrow (2013: 133-161).

[2] See for example Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or Feste in *The Twelfth Night*. Although these characters are not servants in the conventional sense, they are intelligent, manipulative, address the audience, comment on the events unfolding on stage and evoke consequently the metatheatrical role of the *servus callidus*.

[3] For further reading on the slaves in Plautine comedies, see for example Stace (1968: 64-77).

but not least, Low (2015: 22-41) explores the differences in audience experience between the two plays, emphasizing the unique ways each playwright utilizes theatrical space to shape the relationship between characters and spectators; she also elaborates on the mimetic nature of performance and the role of the audience as accomplices in the narrative. Be that as it may, existing scholarship has largely concentrated on character development and certain dramaturgical techniques, while offering only limited attention to the extent that the Prologue of Plautus' comedy influenced Scene I.1 of Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* – a research question that this paper sets out to investigate.

2. *THE COMEDY OF ERRORS* (SCENE I.1)

It is a fact that many scholars acknowledge the influence of Roman comedy on Shakespeare's plays. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *The Twelfth Night*[4], Shakespeare drew largely on Plautine comedies and, to a lesser degree, on Terence[5]. Although *The Comedy of Errors* seems to be a brilliant adaptation of its Roman model, the English poet differs greatly from his Roman predecessor. *Menaechmi* is one of the most significant examples of comedy of mistaken identity and comic situation[6]. In Shakespeare's comedy, mistaken identity also plays an important role[7], as the twin masters (Antipholus) and the twin servants (Dromio) bear the same name and become entangled in comic situations throughout the play.

According to Bloom (1998: 21), *The Comedy of Errors* is regarded as the shortest (1780 lines) and the most unified of all Shakespearean plays, in which he far exceeded his Roman models. The same point of view is found in recent literature, as well as in many scholars of the English theatre of the Elizabethan era, in contrast

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[4] *The Twelfth Night* has twin heroes and confusions of identity, just as *The Comedy of Errors*. Nevertheless, Roman comedy neither includes a slave or a freedman that falls in love with a citizen woman nor depicts onstage problems that occur inside a household such as Viola's; it is a rigid convention in Roman comedy that households are represented only from the outside by onstage doors or by people who come and leave through these doors. Consequently, the relationship between Shakespeare and his sources in this play is more complex than in *The Comedy of Errors*. See also Burrow (2013: 48) for further reading on this matter.

[5] For Terence's influence on Shakespeare's comedies, see Miola (1994: 19-61), who examines Roman plays in its Renaissance context and elaborates on its important role for the evolution of European theatre, as well as Burrow (2013: 138-143), who focuses on Terence's impact on the construction of Shakespeare's more complex plots, as more subplots enhance the element of misunderstanding in his *palliatae*. Besides, according to Burrow, Shakespeare adopted from Terence his dramatized prologues, where he defends himself against his critics.

[6] For the element of *error* in Plautus' *Menaechmi*, see Segal (2011: 75-94).

[7] As Burrow (2013: 148) states «the word *errors* shows the dialectical vigor that resulted from Shakespeare's attempt to present an 'ancient' play in modern dress».

to earlier criticism, which did not consider it one of Shakespeare's masterpieces. For instance, Hazlitt (1906: 253) claims that «this comedy is taken very much from *The Menaechmi* of Plautus, and is not an improvement on it. Shakespeare appears to have bestowed no great pains on it, and there are but a few passages which bear the decided stamp of his genius». Kerrigan (2016: 147), on the other hand, argues that *The Comedy of Errors* is «a mixture of Roman comedy with Christian features ending up with the solution of misunderstandings by an Abbess». Furthermore, Klein (2022: 121) offers a detailed examination of the similarities and divergences between the two comedies concerning their mechanical structures, character types, plot development, and dramaturgical composition, ultimately concluding that the plays should be understood as 'fraternal' rather than 'identical twins'.

No matter if this comedy is excellent or one of Shakespeare's lesser works[8], it is a fact that it diverges from its Roman model, as the plot becomes more complicated thanks to the element of misunderstanding: the English playwright doubles the pair of Plautine twins by adding one more set of twins (Dromios) as servants to the young boys (Antipholus). At the same time, he innovates by presenting the parents of the twins as being alive, although they are unaware of the existence of each other. Therefore, the final recognition is threefold (sons, twins, the parents Egeon and Amelia).

By comparing the Prologue of *Menaechmi* with Scene I.1 of *The Comedy of Errors*, it becomes evident that the English playwright draws inspiration from his Roman predecessor in several respects. More specifically, the Prologue of *Menaechmi* is recited by Prologus, who wears a special costume (*ornatu prologi*) and does not appear as a character anywhere else in the play. On the other hand, in Scene I.1 of the Shakespearean comedy, the participating characters are more, and also appear in other Scenes of the comedy: Solinus (the Duke of Ephesus), Egeon (the merchant from Syracuse and father of the twins), the Jailer, and some other anonymous attendants. The play begins with Egeon, a merchant of Syracuse, telling his story in almost 100 lines: thirty-three years before the play begins, he was travelling home on a boat with his wife, their twin boys, and the twins (Dromios) that Egeon bought to be the servants of his sons (48-84). Egeon looked at the sky, thought there was going to be a storm, and panicked. Consequently, the crew abandoned the ship, leaving Egeon, one son, and his servant tied to one mast, and his wife, the other son, and his servant tied to the other (85-118). But no storm came. In calm seas, the boat drifted serenely into a rock and was split in two; so was the family. Some years later,

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[8] It seems that *The Comedy of Errors* was performed for the first time on 28 December 1594 at Gray's Inn Law School in London by the Royal Court's Grand Chamberlain's Company, in which Shakespeare himself participated as an actor. On the same day, they performed this play in Greenwich at Queen Elizabeth. It is therefore likely that it is his earliest work, written even before *Venus and Adonis* (1593), a play that Shakespeare himself described as the 'first heir of his invention', probably because he did not consider *The Comedy of Errors* as an original composition.

the two boys who stayed with Egeon, in grief, naming themselves after their lost twin brothers, set off from Syracuse, in search of them (119-184). Some years after that incident, Egeon sets off to find his boys in Ephesus. He is arrested there as an illegal stranger and sentenced to beheading. He narrates his adventures to the Duke, who, to everyone's surprise, pities Egeon and commutes his sentence until sundown, so that he finds someone in Ephesus who might help him get free (185-207).

Going one step further, even from the first lines of Scene I.1 (I.1.1-2: «proceed, Solinus, to procure my fall, / And by the doom of death end woes and all») Egeon's opening addresses the Duke and the audience with solemnity, invoking a sense of ritual proclamation. In *Menaechmi*, the *captatio benevolentiae* of Prologus begins in lines 1-2 with an address to the spectators («salutem primum iam a principio propitiam / mihi atque vobis, spectatores, nuntio»: «now from the very beginning, I announce favorable fortune to me and to you, spectators»)[9] and the narrator's plea to be engaged with the play with benevolence («benignis auribus»: «with favoring ears»)[10]. The Prologue calls upon the audience's goodwill from the very start, treating the stage as a ritual arena and the speaker not just as a performer, but as a 'mediator', invoking collective presence[11]. On the contrary, Shakespeare maintains a tone consistent with the opening lines of the play, while imbuing Egeon's address to Solinus with a more distinctly tragic quality (I.1.2: «And by the doom of death end woes and all»).

Moreover, the use of the verb «adporto» in line 3 of *Menaechmi* evokes laughter in the audience, since it is a pun between the literal meaning of the word («adporto»: «to carry») and the metaphorical use of the verb as a technical term in theatrical contexts («to put on stage, to present»)[12]. Similarly, it is noteworthy that there is an explicit reference to Plautus' name («adporto vobis Plautum» – «I bring you Plautus»). Plautus announces his presence through speech, not props or other techniques, asserting both authorial and performative identity[13]; the audience perceives not only the character, but the poet behind the character. In other words, Prologue is a metapoetic *persona* of Plautus himself. At the same time, with the phrase «verba paucissima» («in as few words as possible») in line 6[14], the narrator in Plautus tries

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[9] For the Latin text of *Menaechmi* the LOEB edition of Nixon (1988: 364-486) is used.

[10] The translations of the Latin texts are my own. I wish to express my gratitude to Gregoria Dama (translator of English language) for her suggestions and her insightful feedback.

[11] See also Low (2015: 22-25).

[12] *OLD* (1982²: 168) *s.v.* «apporto»; *cf.* Ter. *Phorm.* 24-25: «adporto novam / Epidicazomenon».

[13] For metatheatrical techniques in Plautine comedies, see for example Moore (2020: 237-250).

[14] According to Sharrock (2009: 42), line 6 is a clever pun on the nature of dramatic illusion and the relationship between Roman and Greek theatre. More precisely, she claims that it prepares the audience for lines 12-13 («atque adeo hoc argumentum graecissat, tamen / non atticissat, verum sicilicissitat»: «this play is obviously Greek-like; although it's not Athenian, it's indeed Sicilian»), which proves that the plot is «Greeky, but it is not Atticy, rather it is Sicillily». See also Fontaine (2006: 95), who states that this twinning plot «is not only pertaining to Sicily but also is 'double' or 'counts twice' from the Latin noun «sicilicus», a diacritical mark which served as a *nota* for gemination of consonants».

once more to attract the attention of the audience and ensure their favorable disposition for the play that follows, by stating that he is going to unfold the plot briefly. Likewise, the word «paucissima» will generate laughter afterwards, for the introduction of Prologus is not short at all. In my opinion, lines 5-6 do not contradict 14-15, where Prologus states exactly the opposite – that he is going to narrate the plot explicitly. In line 6, the reference to a brief account of the events is intentional, to attract the attention of the audience, which was often boisterous at the beginning of the play. But then, when that goal is achieved, he states that he will narrate the entire plot of the play in detail, an element that goes hand in hand with Plautus' comic irony. In other words, his tendency is to reveal in advance to his audience all the elements that the characters of the comedy will ignore –unlike the audience– thus leading to a series of misunderstandings (*errors*) and comic situations. Then, in lines 17-73, Prologus recounts events that have occurred offstage before the beginning of Act I, which follows; therefore, the audience will be familiar with them and will find it easier to follow the storyline.

Egeon's speech on the other hand, functions like a complete mini-drama within the play (*play-within-the play*), as it includes the main characters of the play, a shipwreck, and its tragic resolution. In other words, Egeon's narration adds a meta-dramatic element to the story and conveys to the audience incidents that unfold outside the dramatic frame. Apart from the audience, the Duke's reaction voices what the audience might feel (I.1.96-97: «do not break off so, for we may pity though not pardon thee») and urges Egeon to complete his story in every detail.

Furthermore, in Scene I.1 of Shakespeare's comedy, neither Egeon's twin sons bearing the same name (Antipholus) have appeared yet, nor their servants (Dromio); the English playwright makes great use of the twin motif and doubles it down. In this way, as already mentioned, the title of the comedy is also confirmed, since in the Elizabethan theater the word *error* indicates the mistaken identity and the misdirection of the heroes of the comedy, by eventually leading, through a series of comic tropes, to the final Scene where the truth is revealed (I.1.51-52: «and, which was strange, the one so like the other, / As could not be distinguish'd but by names»)[15]. Nevertheless, it is not explained in detail in Scene I.1 why they bear the same name (I.1.127: «reft of his brother, but retained his name»). In Plautus' comedy, Prologus also emphasizes the most catalytic element of the plot: the element of misunderstanding (*error*), on which the whole comedy is based (47: «ne mox erretis»: «so as not to be confused thereafter»); the twin brothers have exactly the same name (48: «idem est ambobus nomen geminis fratribus»: «the name is the same in the twin brothers»), because, after the abduction of one of them, his grandfather in Syracuse decided to give to Sosicles the name of his lost brother, Menaechmus (42-44: «illius nomen indit illi

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[15] Segal (2011: 115) claims that in a comedy of errors «we automatically laugh at the bumbling ignorance of characters who are nothing but puppets».

qui domi est, / Menaechmo, idem quod alteri nomen fuit; / et ipsus eodem est avos vocatus nomine»: «he gave his name to the one that was still at home, Menaechmus, that was the same with the other [brother's] / and the grandfather himself was called by the same name»).

Moreover, although his plot is not as complicated as Shakespeare's, Plautus handles the action of his play with considerable dramatic technique. The action takes place mostly in front of Erotium's house, next to Menaechmus', in Epidamnus. This element is given with emphasis in the Prologue of the play in lines 49 («in Epidamnum») and 72 («haec urbs Epidamnus est, dum haec agitur fabula»: «while this story is being told, this is the city of Epidamnus»), in order to point out that the comedy takes place in the Greek-Hellenistic world and not in Athens, as is usually the case in other Plautine *fabulae palliatae*[16]. On the other hand, in *The Comedy of Errors*, there is a reference in I.1.30 to Ephesus, the dramatic setting of the comedy («and for what cause thou cam'st to Ephesus»)[17]. The view of some scholars[18] that Shakespeare chose Ephesus to make an indirect reference to St. Paul's *Letter to the Ephesians* (4: 19-22), because he travelled from Ephesus to Rome through Syracuse, seems unstable[19]. On the contrary, I believe that he wants to follow in this case the tactics of Plautus, who chose Greek locations for his *palliatae*[20]. Likewise, the substitution of Epidamnus with Ephesus suggests a form of Shakespearean redefinition of the Plautine comedy as his model. Besides, this is not the only play that takes place in a distant location (e.g. in the comedy *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the dramatic setting is Athens).

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[16] In lines 75-76, the Prologue ends up with Prologus' enumeration of all the typical characters than may be found in a *fabula palliata*: a *leno* («a pimp»), an *adulescens* («a young man»), a *senex* («an old man»), a *pauper* («a poor»), a *mendicus* («a beggar»), a *rex* («a king»), a *parasitus* («a parasite») and a *hariolus* («a prophet»); the scenery in the *palliatae* can change as easily as the *dramatis personae* in a play. In other words, the Prologue of *Menaechmi* is Plautus' best meditation on the theatricality of Roman comedy's Greek scenery. Plautus confuses here the audience concerning the boundaries between the Greek and the Roman world, so as to make a new 'Plautine' one instead, where he may satirize the social conventions of both.

[17] For the English text of *The Comedy of Errors*, I used the edition of Whitworth, 2002.

[18] St. Greenblatt *et al.* (1997: 685). I also agree with Riehle (2004: 116), who claims that «the assumption that Shakespeare used the locality of Ephesus as a special allusion to St Paul's teaching on marriage in his *Letter to the Ephesians*, namely that the wife has to submit herself to her husband, is not very convincing because it is of course valid for the patriarchal society in Roman comedy, too; and the reactions of the Roman Matrona and the Elizabethan wife in our two texts are comparable».

[19] For further reading, see also the thesis of Minion (2021: 17), who adds that while both comedies employ location in a similar structural manner, the cultural significance each setting holds for contemporary audiences diverges considerably. Plautus situates his play in a Greek location, as established in the Prologue, so that he provides a plausible narrative framework for his Roman audience. Nevertheless, the characters make no attempt to address or rectify the destructive social attitudes that underlie the play's conflicts, nor does Plautus offer any substantive commentary on the society of Epidamnus. In contrast, Shakespeare selects a setting imbued with religious resonance for a 16th-century Christian audience, thereby immediately directing attention toward the underlying societal issues.

[20] Ephesus occurs in *Miles Gloriosus* as well, so Shakespeare's choice should not surprise us at all.

As for the narrator, the use of a character like Prologus speaking on behalf of Plautus to give information about what happened offstage before the beginning of the play (*explanatory prologue*), is apparent in other Plautine comedies[21]. It aims at attracting attention and favor of the viewers and emphasizing, apart from the dramatic setting, the element of the twin brothers with the same name; as a result, the audience may avoid the confusion (*error*) of the heroes who are unaware of this clue. In other words, I believe that the Prologue cites the tragic dimension of the separation of the twins, and at the same time provides all the necessary details about the development of the plot[22]. Nonetheless, to let his audience know the tragic background of the story of the twins, Shakespeare introduces the distressed poetic father. It is through Egeon's speech that Shakespeare, in reply to Solinus' questions about Egeon's whereabouts, narrates the dramatic incidents his family has gone through. His narration acts as an expository monologue, similar to the Plautine Prologue, setting up the background for the confusion that follows, taken that it gives the audience important information that creates dramatic irony in the play, as they will be able to recognize the twins before the characters do[23].

Moreover, Egeon, unlike the father in Plautus' *Menaechmi*, is not dead; in this way, Shakespeare can recite through his monologue all the preceding plot elements that the audience should be aware of. This is a significant deviation of Shakespeare from his Plautine model. Though Shakespeare doesn't choose a formal prologue with an audience address, Egeon's speech about his shipwreck and family separation draws attention to the artifice of storytelling. The audience, unlike the characters, is aware of the larger comedic structure (twin brothers), creating a similar layered awareness to Plautus' performative awareness[24].

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[21] In other cases, the Prologue is pronounced by a god (just as in many Euripidean tragedies): in *Aulularia* by Lar Familiaris, in *Rudens* by Arcturus and in *Cistellaria* by Auxilium Deus. Likewise, the Prologue in *Trinumnus* is composed through a dialogue between Inopia and Luxuria.

[22] See also Klein (2022: 42), who states that «*Menaechmi* offers us a paragon of a Prologue. His is a minor, but scene-stealing role. He cracks metatheatrical jokes, delivers silly puns, and untangles a densely knotted back-story. He is impersonal, but immensely personable, and he shoulders the important responsibility of capturing the audience's attention right from the start and shaping their first impressions of the play».

[23] According to Burrow (2013: 144) «Egeon's long initial speech, which tells how one of his sons called Antipholus was lost at sea, adds several Virgilian echoes to a speech which is recognizably a narrative prologue of the kind frequently found in the plays of Plautus in particular, which is hybridized with the more dialogic 'prologues' of Terence. These transformations of Plautus, oddly enough, show how much technique Shakespeare had learned from Terence: the doubled plot, in which not one set of twins (as in Plautus' play) but two sets of twins are mistaken for each other is not just invented for the fun of it, but to make Plautus seem more like Terence, whose plays regularly have two sets of lovers. *The Comedy of Errors* is a consciously Terentine *contaminatio*, which mingles the plot of *The Menaechmi* with scenes and themes from Plautus' *Amphitruo*».

[24] For further reading, see Low (2015: 22-41).

Likewise, if we focus on the plot, Egeon and his family undergo situations that are quite different from what Plautus presents in his *fabula palliata*. In *Menaechmi*, the father is a Syracusan merchant too, but loses one of his sons in the crowd on his way to Tarentum, while his other boy stays with his wife in Syracuse. He dies from sorrow and desperation a few days later in Tarentum (17-36). Egeon, on the other hand, must die, unless he can pay a ransom of one thousand marks to get his freedom back (21-22: «unless a thousand marks be levied / To quit the penalty and to ransom him»); unfortunately, the goods he has with him are only a few (23-24: «Thy substance, valued at the highest rate, / Cannot amount unto a hundred marks;»). When the Duke of Ephesus Solinus wonders why, despite the obvious peril, he has come to this city, Egeon explains how his wife gave birth to twin boys and bought another pair of twins, so as to become the servants of his sons (31-50). In a shipwreck, which is another innovation of Shakespeare that does not appear in *Menaechmi*, the playwright severs the members of the family from each other; one of each pair of twins (son and servant) remains with one of the parents. When the boys are eighteen years old, however, Egeon decides to search for the lost twins and his beloved wife (I.1.124-131):

> My youngest boy, and yet my eldest care,
> At eighteen years became inquisitive   125
> After his brother, and importuned me
> That his attendant—so his case was like,
> Reft of his brother, but retained his name—
> Might bear him company in the quest of him,
> Whom whilst I labored of a love to see,   130
> I hazarded the loss of whom I loved.

Therefore, in my opinion, the addition of the characters of the father (and the mother) in *The Comedy of Errors* is a catalyst for the development of the plot. Shakespeare keeps both parents alive and separates them from each other, as well as from the twins. On the contrary, as we are informed by Prologus in *Menaechmi*, the parents of the twins are both dead in his play (36: «paucis diebus post Tarenti emortuost»: «few days later he passed away in Tarentum»). However, Shakespeare provides Egeon with an essential role in Act I. Even though we see him only at the beginning and at the end of the play, he gives the play a tragic and emotional sound, because he fights to find his missing son, shattered from the loss of his wife. Finally, as aforementioned, by using the parents as characters in his own play, he creates an excellent final scene in Act V, where the misunderstanding is resolved –just as in his Plautine model– even though it is achieved through a triple recognition (twin brothers, twin servants, Egeon and Amelia).

3. CONCLUSION

In summary, *The Comedy of Errors* is one of Shakespeare's most influenced plays by Roman comedy. If we focus on Plautus' Prologue and Scene I.1 of Shakespeare's

comedy, we will find out that the English playwright adopts many elements from his model, but at the same time keeps his distance from it. Prologus in Plautus does not reappear in the play; he speaks on behalf of the narrator and serves the purposes of a *fabula palliata*. At the same time, we are informed concerning the dramatic setting and many important details, while emphasis is given to the fact that the misunderstanding (*error*) stems from the shared name of the two brothers (*Menaechmi*). The narrator even explains the reason why Sosicles ended up being called Menaechmus, like his brother. On the contrary, in Shakespeare two pairs of twins (boys and their servants) are used, but it is not explained in detail why they bear the same name.

Moreover, in Scene I.1 many characters appear on stage, but the most prominent one is Egeon, the father, who reveals through an extensive monologue everything that happened many years ago offstage and how he ended up in Ephesus, the dramatic setting of the comedy. Egeon is recounting past events onstage to the Duke and others, essentially 'staging' a mini-drama within the main play. This act of narrating his own drama reflects self-referential storytelling and reinforces the metatheatrical nature of his narration. In other words, his role is of utmost importance for the outcome of the play (triple recognition) and adds a tragic undertone to the plot; therefore, it is a typical Shakespearean device. Consequently, both plays are ultimately remarkable examples of comedies where mistaken identity and *error* lead to comical situations. In *The Comedy of Errors*, however, as it is evident from Act I, the plot is more complicated and elaborate; this totally confirms that it is an inflexibly 'classical play'[25].

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[25] For further details, see Burrow (2013: 144-145).

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