

## 読者である観客を操る

—『間違い続きの喜劇』のプログラムを通じて読者観客の解釈を導く—

松山 響子\*

### Manipulating the Reading Audience

— Guiding of reading audience via programs in *The Comedy of Errors* —

Kyoko MATSUYAMA\*

#### 要約

演劇公演におけるプログラムは、現在では公演にかかわる様々な情報を観客へと媒介するためのものとなっている。古典作品を上演する際には戯曲に関する情報や注目すべき点が研究者によって執筆される様々な小論となって、プログラムの中に挿入されている。これらの小論がプログラムに挿入されることによって、どのような効果を観客に与えることが期待されているのか。観客の反応という点においては、どのような効果を得ているのか、2014年の夏季シーズンに上演されたシェイクスピアの『間違いの喜劇 (*The Comedy of Errors*)』のパンフレットを使って分析してみる。

#### Introduction

Programs have become an easiest tool to communicate with the audience. And to the audience programs are the source to understand the play being performed in front of them. However such usage of programs have another feature : that is to steer the audience's perception of the play to a particular way and pass over the features that doesn't fit in, or ignore the discomfort or contradiction and inconsistency in the interpretation of the play. It is too difficult to measure the understanding and perception of general audiences, but by looking at the review of theatre critics will at least have the glimpse of what the director was trying to communicate. Theatre critics can be considered as a kind of general audience : although they are highly sophisticated audiences who are more experienced in reading the subtle points and under-plots calculated by the theatre director to elicit a particular reaction. Also they can differentiate the interpretation uniquely original to the director and the more generally used techniques seen in any Shakespearean or Renaissance plays. And the critics mixed reviews are proofs, that like the general audience their perceptions, acceptance and reactions vary.<sup>1</sup>

The timing of reading the program is not crucial. If the audience reads the program before

---

\*人文学部 国際文化学科

the performance starts it is most advantages to the actors and the director. It is quite possible to assume that by reading the program is helpful in understanding the concept or the aim of the director and the actors. Then the audience can watch for the subtle details that are pointed out in the article in the program. By distinguishing such points, it will surely lead the audience to have a better understanding of the play or notice the structure or other factors of the play that they wouldn't have noticed. Shakespearean play can be enjoyed without any prior knowledge. However some questions may arise while watching the play. For one thing it is a play considered as a canon in the history of English literature, and furthermore it is written in a time where moral and social structure was greatly different from present-day society. Therefore programs may work to fill in that gap especially when the audience reads it after they saw the performance. It cannot be denied that programs are just a souvenir, but they can still provide supplemental information in the form of short paper or essays. When an audience read the program after the performance it will work, possibly, as a guide or provide answers to the play that they have seen. Such as the sudden change of mood from the comic pre-opening scene<sup>2</sup> to a serious scene, act1 scene1, where the setting is suddenly moved to a jail and a trial starts, then back to comedy. If the knowledge about the condition in which the first *The Comedy of Errors* were performed are to be provided, it may be more helpful for the audience to understand the structure of the play. And over all by reading the articles whether it was before or after they have seen the play the articles may guide the audiences into interpreting the plays in a particular way so that they will accept the way in which the play is interpreted by the director.

### **The Articles in the Program**

The three articles written in the program for Shakespeare's Globe's 2014 season's *The Comedy of Errors* clearly emphasises the 'confusion' and 'identity' factor of the play. Also two out of three articles in the program gives emphasis on the atmosphere of the play : This has rather a serious and strict prologue starting with the trial scene of Egeon. Both article states that the historical background of which *The Comedy of Errors* was performed has owed much to its structure. That is the first performance of *The Comedy of Errors* was performed as a part of Christmas festivities at the Grey's Inn, one of London's ancient law schools. Although Grey's Inn, was known for its lavish entertainment it is impossible to deny that the condition in which the play may have been commissioned would have affected the structure and nature of the play. This gives audiences the explanation to the sudden mood change from court scene to comedy full of confusion and farce.

The article "The Night of Errors" by Will Tosh, research fellow at The Globe, gives an introductory, yet a very detailed, account of the possible first night at Grey's Inn, and the circumstance and social condition surrounding the theatre and their men involved at Elizabethan England.

The play, we might assume from this beginning, is to be an ethical courtroom drama—perhaps a cautionary tale that explores the abrasive point of contact between inflexible law and the complexity of human experience./It isn't, of course. Thankfully, the play is much more fun than that.<sup>3</sup>

This article guides the audience into thinking about the structure, or sometimes reflecting on the structure of the play that they have seen or are going to see. And if they read it before the performance they may be braced for a rather serious court drama and if they read the article after the performance they may understand the sudden mood change cause between act 1 scene 1 and scene 2. The audience may even accept the slapstick presentation that to the theatre critics may have been over the top due to the timing in which the play was first performed.

Kiernan Ryan, Professor of English Language & Literature and Director of the Shakespeare MA at Royal Holloway, states in his article “Playing Fast & Loose” many features contributing to the confusion within the play. It is even stated that the title of the play *The Comedy of Errors* itself is a bold statement in distinguishing the play from other comedies :

The play's own claim to precedence is inscribed in its title, which is the only title of a comedy by Shakespeare to feature the term 'comedy', to which it boldly prefixes the definite article. By billing itself as *The Comedy of Errors* instead of *A Comedy of Errors*, the play presents itself as the epitome of a distinctive type of comedy : this, like its successors, will be a comedy not merely of mistakes and confusions, but also of 'errors' in the word's original Latin sense of wandering, straying transgressing. It will be a comedy in which boundaries are crossed and identities confounded, in which abnormality is the norm and exceptions rule.<sup>4</sup>

Also in the article it is said that having two sets of identical twin rather than one can create more emphasis on the fragility of a person's identity instead of using just one set of twins. It is possible to assume from that program which contains an explanation about the source of the play<sup>5</sup> that readers are expected to read both the source and the synopsis and consider the level of confusion, or the problem of identity mix-up created by two sets of twins. Ryan's article then discusses the time-frame in the play and how it adds into the comedy and its resolution.

The last article in the program “Dispossessed in Ephesus” by Will Tosh discusses the problem of mistaken identity in 16th-century Renaissance society. And by discussing Martin Guerre, the actual case of an imposter in the Renaissance society, and the problem concerning such activities it is obvious that to the Renaissance audience the fears of one's identity being stolen was quite real and their fear of such case was exptent. To the modern audience, with

such supplementary information makes it much easier to understand the problem of identity, especially in the case of identical twins. Also the confusions brought in by the twins can easily lead the audience into considering the serious nature the identity confusion may possess and their effects on the characters. Which gives the finale of the play a more serious nature than just the problem of mistaken identity or confused sets of twins being resolved nicely or a joke that concerned the people in town.

By the time the audiences finish reading the program it is clear that 'identity' and 'confusion' is the key in understanding, or even enjoying, *The Comedy of Errors*. That is, although it may be difficult to control the timing, in reading the program but it is still possible to let them see that 'identity' and 'confusion' is the source of comedy in the play. These points can also be seen by the reviews written by theatre critics who emphasise the problem of 'identity' and consider 'confusion' or seeing the 'confusion' of the people of Ephesus involved in is the source of laughter.

### **The Reviews**

Theatre critics as stated before can be considered as a very sophisticated and knowledgeable audience. For they have seen numerous plays which is much more than an ordinary audience would see. Therefore it is difficult to measure the reaction of an ordinary audience from the theatre critic but on the other hand they tend to notice more subtle nuances in the way the director or actors interpret the play. So the impact of an interpretation of a play is understood by the audience or not and whether the effect of a program can be seen or not may be seen through the reviews written by theatre critics.

In Michael Billington's theatre review the play is given a four star. He states in his September 5th 2014's reviews the impression of the play as "Blanche McIntyre handles Shakespeare's beautifully crafted farce with delight, humour and a touch of magic". It can be understood from these lines that the nature of the play is well understood and Billington sees the points that are considered important, and this suggests that. It must be understood or noticed by the audience.

What is refreshing is to find it [most beautifully crafted farces] given a near-perfect production by Blanche McIntyre—one that evokes its Greco-Turkish setting, is exuberantly funny and yet reminds us this is also a play about impending death and the nature of identity.<sup>6</sup>

The part about the problem of identity overlaps with the articles in the programs. Therefore it is a point shared both by the director and the audience that are crucial to the presentation of the play. Also in the same review Billington states his observation concerning the identity of the character.

My only minor cavil about this production is that Matthew Needham as the resident Ephesian Antipholus and Simon Harrison as his visiting Syracusan counterpart looks so astonishingly alike that we are sometimes baffled as the people on stage : the trick in comedy, however, is for the audience always to be one step ahead of the game.<sup>7</sup>

This statement can be considered that the comedy, or the laughter on stage, is born when the audience can distinguish which actor is Antipholus of Ephesus and which is Antipholus of Syracuse, if they are put in the exactly same position as the towns people of the play it is difficult to laugh at the confusion caused by the twins. For the laughter in this case is brought on by enjoying the confusion of others caused by the mixed identity of the twins. If the audience is experiencing the same confusion or does not expect to notice the mixed identity it is difficult for a person to laugh at themselves while experiencing confusion. This is quite clear since Billington states “the trick in comedy, however, is for the audience always to be one step ahead of the game” therefore having an near identical actor may truly confuse the audience as the citizens of Ephesus were confused and that would not bring on the comic laughter to the audience. Overall view to the presentation of the play is “it’s a production that suggests Ephesus is a place of magic and mayhem where the sense of self is constantly, and often hilariously, under threat”. This clearly points out the problem of identity and therefore it also proves that ‘identity’ is the key factor in understanding the play. And emphasis of the articles in the program on ‘identity’ is to let the audience see, whether it is before or after they have seen the play that understanding the problem of “mixed identity” is essential in watching and understanding the source of comedy in *The Comedy of Errors*.

In Billington’s review there are other factors that are discussed which is not mentioned in the program. It is the marital problem between Antipholus of Ephesus and his wife Adriana. According to Billington the condition of marriage between them is stated as follows :

The marriage of the Ephesian Antipholus and his wife is clearly going through a rocky patch, which allows Hattie Ladbury as Adriana to explode with rage at her husband’s absence—and then greet him with rapturous intensity when she thinks, mistakenly as it happens, he has returned.<sup>8</sup>

However the tension between Antipholus of Ephesus and his wife Adriana could be considered as a problem of interpretation. Since it is not discussed in the program, it could be taken that it is up to the audience to consider the act due to “difficult marriage condition” or her being a little possessive than the average wife. And the way the audience accept their relationship is uncontrollable. Therefore it may not have been discussed and of course when watching the

performance problem of 'identity' may have precedence before the marital statue. Another factor that is also discussed in the review is "speech" but like the problem of marital statues it is more inclined to depend on the actor and the interpretation of the director and also an average audience may not notice this effect so it is also not discussed in the program.

The review by Dominic Cavendish in *The Telegraph* is vastly different from Billington's review. However in this review the problems discussed in the program, the problem of 'identity'<sup>9</sup> and the serious tone at the opening of the play<sup>10</sup>, are discussed. Clearly proving the points to be understood or explained to the audience.

mistaken identity—twin masters, twin servants, long separated and suddenly, unwittingly crossing paths in Ephesus—suffers an identity crisis of its own in Macintyre's hands. Total uncertainty sets in early on, when James Laurensen's stranded, captive Egeon—father to the two masters (both called Antipholus)—explains his sorrowful quest to find them.

The Comedy of Errors relies on a quality of naturalness to cut against the artifice : there has to be a genuine air of mystification as things go well for the Syracusan outsiders or awry for their Ephesian doppelgangers and vice versa.<sup>11</sup>

Although the review does not go in detail to discuss both issues, it is clear that Cavendish strongly disagrees with the director's interpretation and presentation of the play, but mentioning these issues show that the points discussed in the article is crucial to the presentation and understanding of the play, and if those points are not well presented or understood by the audience the essence of the play is lost. And according to Cavendish the presentation did not work :

I counted the number of times I laughed out loud. I didn't even make it to one finger. Was it where I was sitting, or even the fact that I was sitting ? ...I don't think I was having a sense of humour failure: this show simply isn't much to write home about.<sup>12</sup>

Although he points out that some of the audiences were laughing and Cavendish considers that this laughter owes its source to the 'slapstick' trick to draw outlaughter from the audience, instead of drawing out laughs from the presentation of confusion and mixed up identity in the play. Similar point is also pointed out in Billington's article as mentioned above so both critics share the idea that the presentation of mistaken identity is sometimes not working well.

Other reviews may not openly discuss the problem of 'identity' or 'confusion' however it is quite clear that they share the idea that the two issues are the key in making the comedy work.

In *Time Out* review by Andrzej Lukowski states “The four, having been separated soon after birth are unknowingly reunited to much confusion<sup>13</sup>”, however the outcome of the production was not satisfactory to Lukowski :

But it takes Globe débutante McIntyre too long to find her feet in a night that frequently feels underpowered. . . when McIntyre’s production does get going it’s really very funny. Even when it’s not quite there, the four leads offer a great line in aggrieved confusion that paper over most of the cracks.<sup>14</sup>

And in some cases reviews does not mention ‘identity’ or ‘confusion’ and gives a completely different label to the play, it could mean that the production lacks such points.

Right from the outset amidst the solemn opening as Aegeon tells his sad story, the chorus mass behind, hissing disapproval ; one can sense the repressed excitement, as if waiting for the madness to unfold. . . McIntyre emphasises the physical nature of the comedy,<sup>15</sup>

This may be possible to emphasise that the play could be enjoyed without knowing the issue of ‘identity’ or ‘confusion’ since the review states that “you can often judge a Globe production by how many people are there at the end, and scarcely anyone had stirred<sup>16</sup>” but it may be possible to assume from this article that the audience was just laughing at the physical nature of the comedy. Which would completely lose its footing about the solemn or serious trial scene in act1 scene1 and the comedy that follows. Which would according to Billington or Cavendish may lose the source of laughter or comedy that were provided by Shakespeare.

## Conclusion

The program encourages the audience to see what may have been long considered important in understanding the play, which is clearly seen by the fact that the same idea is shared by theatre critics. And by understanding such factors it gives a better understanding of the play that is being performed. It is not possible to deny the souvenieristic nature of the program but by reading the articles in the programs is sure to see that ‘identity’ and ‘confusion’ is the important factor in understanding the play. Which will eventually lead to understanding of the structure of the play and the seriousness of ‘identity’ within the Renaissance society. And by specifically pointing some factors in the article the emphasis of the director of the play can be understood by the audience. The variety of issues discussed in the reviews that are not mentioned in the program will emphasise the point concentrated by the director. And to the audience who bought the program they would surely concentrate or recall the points discussed in the play and would naturally consent to the ideas written in the program, which as a

consequence manipulates the understanding of the play fitting to the intention of the theatre director.

#### Bibliography

*The Guardian*

*The Telegraph*

*Time Out London*

*What's on Stage*

#### Program

*Comedy of Errors* by Shakespeare's Globe 2014 summer production

- <sup>1</sup> The review of 2014 production of *The Comedy of Errors* are given 4-star by Michel Billington, who is a theatre critique to *The Guardian*, and 2-star by Dominic Cavendish, who wrote the review for The Telegraph.
- <sup>2</sup> In the 2014 production at the Globe the play opens with Dromio, whether he is the Ephesus or Syracuse is not clear, trying to finish his domestic duties. The audience is brought to laughter when he cannot pinch off underwear from the washing string and it is left hanging at the sealing of the stage.
- <sup>3</sup> Tosh, Will, "The Night of Errors", Program of Shakespeare's Globe's 2014 production of *The Comedy of Errors*, 2014, pp. 6-7
- <sup>4</sup> Ryan, Kiernan, "laying Fast & Loose", Program of Shakespeare's Globe's 2014 production of *The Comedy of Errors*, 2014, pp. 8-9
- <sup>5</sup> Plautus's Menaechmus and Antipholus is clearly stated in the program directly above the synopsis (pp. 2-3) and more detailed account of the source (p. 4) is stated in the page next to the synopsis.
- <sup>6</sup> Billington, Michael, The Guardian, Friday 5September 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2014/sep/05/the-comedy-of-errors-review-a-near-perfect-production>
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup> Ryan, Op cit
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>11</sup> Cavendish, Dominic, Friday, 5th, September, 2014, *The Telegraph*, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/11077107/The-Comedy-of-Errors-Shakespeares-Globe-review.html>
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>13</sup> Lukowski, Andrzej, Friday, 5th, September, 2014, Time Out, <http://www.timeout.com/london/>

theatre/the-comedy-of-errors-18

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Cooter, Maxwell, Friday, 5th, September, 2014, What's on Stage,

[http://www.whatsonstage.com/london-theatre/reviews/comedy-of-errors-globe\\_35606.html](http://www.whatsonstage.com/london-theatre/reviews/comedy-of-errors-globe_35606.html)

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.