

## The Travails of *The Comedy of Errors* in Athens

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*The Comedy of Errors* begins with the description of a shipwreck, presenting the significance of the sea and sea travel as forces both separating and reuniting characters and families. The trope of the shipwreck, according to Steve Mentz, represents “a swirling loss of direction that is also a redirection, a sudden shock, a violent encounter with disorder” (*Shipwreck Modernity* xx). In Shakespeare’s plays, starting with *The Comedy of Errors*, shipwreck stories often instigate plots: in the opening scene of the play, the shipwreck narrated by Egeon (whose name invokes the Aegean Sea) splits his family, scattering its members across the Mediterranean, from Epidamnus to Corinth and from Syracuse to Ephesus. Yet, in *The Comedy of Errors* the shipwreck is not just a plot device; it is a force that on the one hand divides characters from their home and family and on the other, since the play’s protagonists are twins, separates them from part of themselves.

For Katerina Evangelatos, who directed *The Comedy of Errors* in Athens during the 2018-2019 season, it is the sea imagery of the play, encapsulated in Antipholus of Syracuse’s soliloquy in act 1, that represents the essence of her performance:

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 (1.2.35-40)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> All references to the play are from the Oxford Shakespeare edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

Evangelatos, who has herself experienced the successive losses of mother, brother and father at a relatively young age, reflected on the importance of the above lines in an interview, explaining that she read them as emblematic of the loss of identity, which has always been in the “centre of her quest” as a director (Evangelatos “The Theatre Does Not Have to Follow the News”).<sup>2</sup> The sea imagery in Antipholus’ soliloquy connects the story of shipwreck told by his father Egeon in the previous scene with the sense of being separated from oneself. The twin envisions the loss of self through the image of a drop of water, identical with countless others. The sea that caused the family to split apart becomes for Antipholus, as Gwilym Jones argues, “the only medium for imagining the scale of that separation” (4). Therefore, from the beginning of the play, the sea is not merely portrayed as a destructive force<sup>3</sup> but also implies that the very notion of individuality is fluid and elusive.

At the same time, the divided family of Egeon is reflected on the setting of the play, the port city of Ephesus in the Eastern Mediterranean, which evokes the diverse and fractured Greek world and the political chaos of the Hellenistic era. By situating his play in Ephesus, Shakespeare not only changes the setting of his main source, Plautus’ *Menaechmi*, from the Adriatic to the Aegean, but also opens up a magical fairyland; Ephesus appears as a Hellenistic cosmopolitan city, at the intersection of East and West (Cartwright 48), representing the religious syncretism and the fusion of cultures, worships and rituals of late antiquity. Egeon’s fate, condemned to death right after he lands at Ephesus, also shows the divisions and conflicts between cities and reminds that xenophobia still exists in a divided world and in a sea of continuing shipwrecks.

The setting of *The Comedy of Errors* and its palimpsestic nature, suggesting perhaps a lost Greek play underlying the *Menaechmi*,<sup>4</sup> inspired the fantastic world of the performance directed by Evangelatos, featuring a new verse translation by poet Dionysios Kapsalis. This was a “syncretic” performance that united diverse theatrical

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<sup>2</sup> All translations from the Greek sources used in the essay are mine.

<sup>3</sup> The role of the sea is ambiguous in the play, since it also unites the family. Both Antipholus of Syracuse and his father Egeon have crossed the Mediterranean, arriving at Ephesus, the home of Antipholus of Ephesus as well as the Abbess, who turns out to be the lost Emilia at the end of the play. Geraldo de Sousa has emphasized the duality of the Mediterranean in the play, arguing that “the sea serves as a vehicle for separation, alienation, fear, loss, shipwreck, tragedy, loss of control, and suffering. It destroys homes. But it also creates a re-enchanted world,—reunion, regaining control, recovery, joy, pleasure, love, and happiness” (156).

<sup>4</sup> Scholars have argued that Plautus may have used a Greek play as a model, which he adapted and changed. See for example Gratwick 23-30; Fantham 3-14.

traditions, ranging from the magical world of the circus to Kyogen, and from slapstick comedy – replete with allusions to Charlie Chaplin's *The Cure* and *The Circus* – to Vsevolod Meyerhold's biomechanics. The two concentric swing doors of the set, the larger of which was a dazzling mirror, emphasized the doubling of the idols and the transformation of characters and situations and recreated the "violent encounter with disorder" (Mentz, *Shipwreck Modernity* xx) introduced through the story of the shipwreck. This essay will analyse the Athenian *Comedy of Errors* through the perspective of syncretism suggested by the play's setting and generic uncertainty, oscillating between romance and farce. Focusing on the visual and sound devices of the performance, it will also consider to what extent its frenetic rhythm and excessive mixture of comic genres shaped new horizons for the Greek audience, exposing the composite material and lineage of the text.

### **The sea and the city**

The sea of *The Comedy of Errors* is the Mediterranean of the ancient Greek world, a literary sea of ancient narratives and myths, a setting of history and romance. Egeon's tragic narration, describing how the family (his wife Emilia, his new-born twin sons, both named Antipholus, as well the new-born twin servants, both called Dromio) were shipwrecked sailing from Epidamnus, on the Adriatic coast, towards their home in Syracuse, conjures this entire world on stage. From Epidamnus to Syracuse in the west and from Corinth to Ephesus in the Eastern Mediterranean, Egeon's story reveals the variety as well as the fragmentation, conflict and instability of the Greek world. After the Antipholus raised by Egeon left Syracuse, along with his slave Dromio, to look for his lost twin brother without returning home, his aged father sets out on his own quest, wandering in the Mediterranean to the "farthest Greece" (1.1.131) until he ends up in Ephesus. As Kent Cartwright points out, the Greek elements in the play illuminate its "generic sophistication" and "constitute a little recognized instance of [its] famous doubleness, as in twin characters and mirrored scenes" (45-6).

The Greek city of Ephesus is itself a place "with a divided identity" (Maguire 361), a centre of both commerce and magic. Laurie Maguire suggests that the city's duality as well as division between Christians and Jews in Ephesus informs the *Letter to the*

*Ephesians*,<sup>5</sup> which advises Christians to get along with each other, emphasizing social and racial unity (361-3). Shakespeare's play makes use of the reputation of Ephesus in the New Testament as a place of sorcery, danger, decadence and deceit, also evoking St. Paul's travels and travails, the storm and shipwreck, narrated in Luke's book of Acts (see Whitworth 38-41). In the beginning of *The Comedy of Errors*, Antipholus of Syracuse is afraid of the city's reputation for "cozenage" and "sorcery" (1.2.95–105), while later on he is convinced that it is in fact controlled by "witches" (4.4.149).

The dual nature of Ephesus is also manifested in the Temple of Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders of the World: this massive temple, which had been at first dedicated to an ancient fertility goddess, was built over a period of 120 years and filled with works of art, combining the spiritual with the mercantile element. Tourists from all around the Greek and Roman world travelled to the temple, making Ephesus a cosmopolitan city full of ways to spend money, until it was closed down by the Byzantine emperors, and finally demolished by a Christian mob in 401 CE. The market and all kinds of mercantile exchanges based on credit play a very important role in *The Comedy of Errors*, as several critics have already pointed out (see Perry; Gordon). It is the flourishing of Ephesus as the largest city and commercial centre of Asia Minor during the Hellenistic and Roman periods that brings about the relentless material exchanges of Shakespeare's play underpinning the core of the farce and the instability of identities. As a merchant from Syracuse, Egeon has landed illegally in Ephesus, and is apprehended and condemned to death for violating the law that forbids trade and travel between the two cities unless a ransom is paid by sunset. According to Martine Van Elk, his misfortune is related to "the mercantile hunger for profit embodied in the cruel, arbitrary trade laws of the two cities, which falsely substitute people for money" (51).

Egeon's response to the Duke's request to tell his story of shipwreck, loss and quest in the play's first scene not only highlights the element of romance (in opposition to the farce dominating the following middle acts), and the play's debt to Apollonius of Tyre,<sup>6</sup> but also marks the conflict between Ephesus and Syracuse and

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<sup>5</sup> It is debatable whether St. Paul is the author of *Ephesians*, as many biblical scholars today question its authorship.

<sup>6</sup> On the influence of Apollonius of Tyre on *The Comedy of Errors* and on whether Shakespeare had found the Apollonius narrative in John Gower's *Confessio Amantis* or Lawrence Twine's *Pattern of Painful Adventures*, see Whitworth 27-37; Van Elk 49-59.

the division of the Greek world, creating a dark, political background to the comedy of mistaken identities. Yet, the darkness is not only caused by Egeon's misfortune. According to de Sousa, the appearance from the sea of one long-lost twin "unsettles and throws into chaos the other twin's married life," by creating a crisis of identity and threatening his prosperity and happiness (153). While mistaken identity leads to accusations of adultery, imprisonment and demonic possession, Ephesus emerges as a place of transformation, where characters can lose but also reinvent themselves.

### **"here we wander in illusions": The Athenian *Comedy of Errors***<sup>7</sup>

Evangelatos' interpretation of *The Comedy of Errors* makes ample use of the "Ephesian transformative magic" and the combination of "estrangement and enchantment" which the sea (as well as the city) offers to the characters (Mentz, *At the Bottom of Shakespeare's Ocean* ix). The director, currently in her late thirties, has studied acting at the National Theatre of Greece and directing for her postgraduate studies at Middlesex University as well as at the Russian Academy of Theatre Arts GITIS. Having already directed many critically acclaimed and awarded productions, Evangelatos has stated that choosing "difficult" plays like *The Comedy of Errors* and *Woyzeck* (both produced during the 2018-2019 theatrical season) is "part ... of [her] mission," which is "to acquaint the audience with less well known plays through readings that might often be disturbing or seem inaccessible. It is my duty to do it" (Evangelatos, Interview by Mia Kollia). Performed at Katerina Vasilakou Theatre, *The Comedy of Errors* was produced by Lykofos, a production company that has staged many of the director's works, such as Euripides' *Rhesus* (2015), *1984* (2016), *Faust* (2016), *Woyzeck* (2018-2019) and *Hamlet* (2019-2020).

When Evangelatos was asked why she chose to direct *The Comedy of Errors*, a play which has been rarely performed in Greece,<sup>8</sup> she replied that she had been looking for a "classical" comedy for two years, and was attracted to the play's farcical elements, which "create a strange magical universe" but also "make it sometimes dark" ("A Gun Was Always Pointed At Me"). Emphasizing the significance of the twin protagonists, Evangelatos argued that Shakespeare "did not want to talk about the

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<sup>7</sup> A short preview is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0VJ5UQJl3r8>

<sup>8</sup> Past productions of *The Comedy of Errors* in Greece include a performance at the National Theatre in 1965, directed by Takis Mouzenidis, and another at Teatro Technis (Art Theatre) in 2007, directed by Dimitris Degaitis. Both productions received mixed reviews. The program and reviews of the National Theatre's 1965 performance are available at the theatre's digital archives <http://www.nt-archive.gr/playMaterial.aspx?playID=151>

game of similarity but of identity, the essence of identity. [The play's] entanglements create such confusion to the characters that they reach the point of wondering 'who am I?'. What interests me is the question, 'Am I the one I think I am or the one that others think I am?'" ("A Gun Was Always Pointed At Me"). In the end, the director found *The Comedy of Errors* "intriguing" as "it was a strange work that was not often produced" that gave her the opportunity to "deal with its [mixed] genre" ("The Theatre Does Not Have to Follow the News"). The re-acquaintance of the Greek audience with the play depended on the new verse translation by Kapsalis, an eminent Greek poet and translator, who has translated Shakespeare's sonnets and many of his plays for the stage, including *Romeo and Juliet*, *King Lear*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Hamlet*.

Since much of the farcical comedy of the play depends on puns and other kinds of wordplay, the theatricality and playfulness of Kapsalis' translation was an integral part of Evangelatos' staging of the *Comedy of Errors*. The twin Dromios for example, recall the Fool part of other plays by amusing the audience through wordplay and jokes that reinforce their comic doubling. As the linguistic playfulness of the text is interwoven with the action on stage, if this were lost in translation, then the comedy's liveliness would also be lost. Based on his poetic and theatrical experience, especially his work on the figurative language and the Petrarchan conventions of the sonnets, Kapsalis succeeded in conveying the puns, metaphors, similes and sexual connotations which abound in the play. In an interview discussing his translation of *Hamlet*, Kapsalis has emphasized that the translator must bring the text into his own language and poetic identity. The Greek language cannot be abused, he argued; the target text should be intelligible, performative and poetic at the same time ("The Multiple Dilemmas of Dionysis Kapsalis"). And he has described his translations of Shakespeare as a process in which "one loses to win; and the more he suffers for the loss, the greater are his chances – along with his desire – to recover what has been lost in another way, not always the most honest way" ("The Language of Literature and the Language of Translation").

Armed with a vibrant verse translation, Evangelatos was able to concentrate on her personal vision of the play that drew upon the images evoked by the magical city of Ephesus, "mingling the fantastical with the mundane" (de Sousa 147). This

successful performance<sup>9</sup> emphasized syncretism, as suggested earlier, fusing not only a variety of theatrical styles but also ideas and images from the performing and visual arts, such as the circus, the ballet, silent movies and slapstick comedy, Russian constructivism and the Bauhaus. Mixing traditional forms such as Commedia dell' arte with the theatrical idioms of the European avant-garde, namely Meyerhold and Oskar Schlemmer, and at the same time making references to Kyogen<sup>10</sup> and Kabuki, the latter through the white mask-like make-up of actors, Evangelatos reflected on the theatre as a performing and popular art through history. Her self-reflexive, meta-theatrical approach materialized through the set, designed by Evita Manidaki, which consisted of a central double mirror with revolving doors on a rotating base, as well as through the doubling of actors [see figure1]. Evangelatos has admitted that what fascinated her in *The Comedy of Errors* was:

the game with the double protagonists. From the beginning I thought of using two actors rather than four. The play is written to be performed by four actors. But I was very interested in making a comment on the contemporary theatrical praxis and what theatre is (“The Theatre Does Not Have to Follow the News”).

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<sup>9</sup> The play premiered on 9 November 2019 and enjoyed success with audiences and critics alike. The reviews in the press and web were overwhelmingly positive (see for example Sella; Sampatakakis; Kaltaki; Ioannidis; Georgousopoulos). There were very few mixed reviews (see Arkoumena and Karaoglou), mainly objecting to the formalism and “hyperactivity” of the performance. An examination of 102 audience reviews in the site [athinorama.gr](https://www.athinorama.gr) shows that 44 spectators gave the performance the highest evaluation of five stars, while 21 more gave it four or four and a half stars; only 23 audience reviews criticized it as tiresome or boring (<https://www.athinorama.gr/theatre/performanceratings.aspx?id=10062569&cp=6>). Playing to a full house for months, *The Comedy of Errors* extended its performances to mid-April 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, the Mansaku Company explored the play’s similarities to this classical Japanese farce style in a 2001 performance at Shakespeare’s Globe entitled *The Kyogen of Errors*.



**Figure 1. The revolving doors of Manidaki's set. Courtesy of Lykofos**

Although the idea of using two rather than four actors for the two pairs of twins has already been tried in the past by James Cellan-Jones for the BBC television series of Shakespeare's plays in 1983, by Ian Judge in 1990 at the RSC, and by Kathryn Hunter for the Globe in 1999, Evangelatos' decision succeeded in reinforcing the constant doubling and repetition that characterizes *The Comedy of Errors*. Whereas Judge's and Hunter's doubling of the parts of the two Antipholuses and the two Dromios was deemed unsuccessful and "distracting" by theatre critics (see Whitworth 74, 76), in the Athenian *Comedy of Errors*, Nikos Kouris playing the two Antipholuses and Orpheas Avgoustidis the two Dromios effectively conveyed to the audience the confusion and anxiety experienced by their characters.

The plot of *The Comedy of Errors* allows the extra doubling of the protagonists; as Kostas Georgousopoulos pointed out in a review of the performance, the twins never meet on stage until the ending of the *Comedy of Errors*, thus enabling the actors to play both parts. In that final scene, when all is revealed, the two Antipholuses and the two Dromios confront and stare at each other, surprised at the similarity. Then, in a *coup de théâtre*, the set's mirrors turned the crucial flash of recognition into a game



of reflections; the recognition unravelled the core of the farce – the errors of misrecognition, also displaying the theme of multiple and fluid identities. Therefore, the mirrors became the protagonists of the action (Ioannidis), creating distorted images on their dim glass surface and, together with the illusions shaped by the lighting and the constant sound and noise, transformed the reality viewed by the spectators. The mirror effect highlighted the spe(cta)cular and labyrinthine world of the play, in which, as Cartwright points out, “characters who are doubles of each other repeat, over and over, variations on the same actions” (61). Experimenting with optical duplicity, the final scene of Evangelatos’ performance revealed the significance of optical illusion resulting from identical appearances in *The Comedy of Errors*, a technique that Shakespeare borrowed from Plautus, who had developed the technique of the doubling and mirroring of characters from the earlier New Comedy tradition.

By merging the two Antipholuses into one, Evangelatos also played with the notion of the “drop of water/ That in the ocean seeks another drop,/ Who, falling there to find his fellow forth,/ Unseen, inquisitive, confounds himself” (1.2.35-8), the lines that inspired her vision. Used both as doors and as reflecting surfaces, as the front doors of Antipholus’ home, of the *Phoenix* and the *Porcupine*, as home and marketplace, and as court and priory, the mirrors intensified the play’s frantic repetition and doubling. In this way, Manidaki’s set design, probably inspired by the famous scene of the revolving door in Charlie Chaplin’s 1917 short film *The Cure* (Sella; Kaltaki; Sampatakakis), served plot and theme and underpinned the concept of doubling and optical illusion.

Besides the revolving doors in *The Cure*, the set and staging recalled another famous comic scene, the “Mirror Maze” clip from Chaplin’s *Circus* (1928). There, Chaplin, chased by policemen, enters into a funhouse Mirror Maze, where mirrors reflecting mirrors kaleidoscopically reproduce so many images of the Tramp that he is confused about who and where he is, trying in vain to get out. This scene is then repeated with the chasing policeman, enhancing the sense of the endless reproduction of images. In this self-reflexive moment, the artist holds a mirror up to his creation and to his medium, while distancing the audience from the subject of representation. In the same way, Evangelatos uses the slapstick element to emphasize the farce as well as comment on the doubling, creating the distancing effect, which has always been present in her work. What the doubling of the actors

and the mirror effect also suggest is that the brother is not a brother, but the other/absent self. And it is only in the realm of comedy that the lost ideal “I” may be recovered, or rather reconstructed and reproduced.

At the end of the play, Dromio of Ephesus tells his twin “Methinks you are my glass and not my brother. / I see by you.” (5.1.419-20). His statement concludes the anxious quest expressed in act 3 by Dromio of Syracuse, when he asks his (real) master: “Do you know me sir? Am I Dromio? Am I your man? Am I myself?” (3.2.73-4). Each twin desires to see his idol in the “mirror” in order to find who he is and finally say “I am”. The mirror moment resolves the assault on identity confronted by both sets of twins when one twin was mistaken for the other through the farce, a genre, which according to Douglas Lanier “entertains the unsettling possibility that character is perhaps never more (and no ‘deeper’) than a well-managed stage spectacle” (326). Yet, through the *Deus ex Machina* intervention of the Abbess-Emilia, farce and romance come together in the last scene to show that the errors in the play may have a positive outcome, becoming, as Coppélia Kahn argues, part of “a process whereby youth grows into and out of the family to find itself” (225). The notion that identity is not merely performative but growing through time, loss and confusion lies at the core of the romance, which through Acts 1 (the father’s story of shipwreck and loss) and 5 (the mother’s story and the resolution) frames the unstoppable plot of the farce, that turns in the middle acts people into objects, or clowns and marionettes.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Van Elk examines the relation between Shakespeare’s choice of mixing the two genres and subjectivity, arguing that “[t]he two genres, at least in Shakespeare’s versions of them, represent contrasting perspectives: farce shows subjectivity to be the random and unstable product of material exchange, while romance locates a spiritual and physical essence at the core of identity, a core that is testable but ultimately inalienable” (48).



Figure 2. Antipholus (Nikos Kouris) and Dromio (Orpheas Avgoustidis). Courtesy of Lykofos

The world of the circus is present in the Athenian *Comedy of Errors* not only through the reference to Chaplin's film but also through the actors' costumes and movements. Evangelatos' production creates an unreal world inhabited by circus clowns, dressed in the constructivist pastel-coloured costumes designed by Vassiliki Syrma [see figure 2]. Although Evangelatos has often used clowns in her performances, often in surprising contexts, such as in Euripides' *Alcestis*, directed for the National Theatre in 2017, she has emphasized that this is not done on purpose, but:

... it is something that is a part of the stage language I am trying to articulate. It is not something that is done just to do so. When it occurs, it is always because I think it suits the play" (Evangelatos, "The Theatre Does Not Have to Follow the News").

In *The Comedy of Errors*, her vision began with the costumes, inspired by Schlemmer's *Triadisches Ballett* (1919), with its beautiful Bauhaus costumes. In that sense, the idea of the Bauhaus costumes preceded the set, movement and sound:

It started reversely ... I had decided on the play, of course, but first I found the costumes, then we started thinking with Eva Manidaki about the set design, and then the movement came in, after investigating many different options (Evangelatos, Interview by Mia Kollia).

The costumes added to the circus and carnival effect deliberately hindering the actors' movement and turning them into strange automata. As some reviewers also pointed out, the combination of costume with movement recalled Meyerhold's biomechanics and his vision of the world as a dark puppet theatre (Kaltaki).

The clowns or marionettes appearing on stage were both comic and melancholic, suggesting the darkness which the director read in the farce. The sadness underlying the buffoonery was consistent with the "melancholic irony" that according to Giorgos Sampatakakis characterizes Evangelatos' personal style and approach to classical plays. Moreover, the white make-up turned the actors' faces into masks, recalling besides clowns, also cartoon characters, harlequins or even Kabuki performers. Evangelatos' emphasis on the visual conjured the most influential production of the *Comedy of Errors* in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Theodore Komisarjevsky's 1938 staging at Stratford for the Royal Shakespeare Company, which put the play back on the theatrical map after many years of neglect. Komisarjevsky emphasized "zaniness and an atmosphere of comic anarchy," setting the play in a stylized Mediterranean world (Whitworth 68). Ephesus was "a busy, brightly-coloured Toytown," while characters were colourfully dressed in different styles, including pink bowler hats for the officers ("Selection of Past Productions"). Komisarjevsky's stress on the playfulness of *The Comedy of Errors* and the surrealist style of his production influenced a number of twentieth-century productions, such as Adrian Noble's 1983 production at the RSC, which also created a circus world, with ladders, lifts, bicycles and funny sound effects. In this production, perhaps also informing Evangelatos' vision, the Antipholuses were confused, not only because they dressed alike as in many past performances but because they had blue faces, while the Dromios looked like clowns with check suits and red noses ("Selection of Past Productions").

Recalling Noble's production, where actors had to climb, swing and bicycle their way across the stage to produce a circus-like comedy, Evangelatos' aesthetics were very demanding for the actors. Patricia Apergi, who created the movement, made the actors perform ballet poses as well as repetitive motions resembling automata or robots, complementing the farcical dehumanization of the play's plot. The movement contributed to the circus and slapstick atmosphere through reverse walking, slaps and falls and all kinds of gags accompanied by an assortment of funny sounds, such as bells buzzing, thuds, whistles, trumpets, tubes, balloons and all kinds of percussions. The words and noise produced by the actors were framed by an

electronic score, composed by Giorgos Poullos and played by three on-stage musicians, who also generated all kinds of sounds and intensified the zany atmosphere of the play. In this way, the actors' movements had to correspond to the sounds produced by the musicians or the other actors, a particularly challenging task, especially considering the inflexibility of their constructivist costumes [see figure 3].



**Figure 3. Movement: Adriana (Dimitra Vlagopoulou) and Luciana (Amalia Ninou).**  
Courtesy of Lykofos

To achieve such a complex visual and auditory effect Evangelatos rehearsed for “three and a half months, seven hours a day,” exhaustively training her actors, first “in classical ballet – to be able to do all that they did,” and then adding the music and the live sounds. This synergy would not have been possible without “the faith, enthusiasm, dedication and generosity ... as well as the improvisations” of the actors (Evangelatos, Interview by Mia Kollia). The performance took the slapstick humour, madness and bawdiness of *The Comedy of Errors* to their utmost limits, while accentuating its themes, especially those associated with the instability of identity embodied in the sea imagery and the doubling. Returning to Egeon’s story and his tragic predicament which is magically transformed at the last moment into a happy ending, many among the Greek audience could not help but think of the Mediterranean today as a sea separating rather than bringing people together due to

all kinds of new political boundaries and disparities.<sup>12</sup> Evangelatos has explicitly rejected the idea that her choice of plays has been topical, arguing that “the theatre does not need to be timely or follow the news” (“The Theatre Does Not Have to Follow the News”) and indeed, it would be odd to turn *The Comedy of Errors* into a dark and laughterless play. Yet, the magical, funny, and a few times melancholic, spectacle that she created uncovered the layers of the text without at all diminishing its farcical humour.

In the final act of *The Comedy of Errors*, the motifs of drowning, loss, metamorphosis and magic culminate in the Duke’s words: “I think you all have drunk of Circe’s cup” (5.1.270). Shakespeare’s allusion to the *Odyssey* highlights the magical metamorphosis suggested by myth, by the sea – as “a transformative and liberating force” (Mentz, *At the Bottom of Shakespeare’s Ocean* 69) – and by the theatre itself.

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<sup>12</sup> In the summer of 2019, Shakespeare’s Globe’s Touring Ensemble made this association explicit by including *The Comedy of Errors* in a trio of plays – with *Pericles* and *Twelfth Night* – whose performance intended to explore “the themes of refuge and displacement” through “these timeless tales of those who have crossed seas and lost their families, are seeking new homes, and finding out what belonging truly means to them” (Shakespeare’s Globe).

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