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The Themes in Shakespeare **QUEST**

Though Shakespeare worked in a period of Western cultural history, when the outer world was being discovered and explored, and New World quest was in that sense widespread, even the two quest plays of Shakespeare exemplify inner quest, the quest for fulfillment in romance or for the reuniting of family, rather than the quest of outer-world discoveries.

A COMEDY OF ERRORS Personal identity is constantly being mistaken in this play. The result of systematic error, which exists because the principal players are identical twins, is that we are reduced to thinking of identity as inherently questionable. As readers of Shakespeare we are used to the plays of disguise, and the horseplay depersonalizations which permeate this theatrical opus. In the present play, arguably Shakespeare's first performed play, we are reminded that one person can in many cases simply be a replacement for another, rather than exemplification of the noble concept of 'personality.'

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL Bertram and Isabella are asymmetrical lovers, She has loved him from day one, but he—think of Hippolytus in Euripides' *Hippolytus*—has had eyes for the military (and the fast) life, none for her. Even though he marries her, he tries to flee and scorn her, but by trickery she puts him in her pocket, meeting his conditions for true marriage, and turning him into an ardent (if surprisingly quicksilver) husband. His mother in law forgives him, he is a family man, and Isabella's quest for Bertram is satisfied, after a concluding fashion often—cf. the closing of *A Comedy of Errors*—attractive to Shakespeare who enjoys romantic surprise.