

ASF Study Materials for



The Two Gentlemen of Verona

by William Shakespeare

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The Two Gentlemen of Verona

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Characters in the Tour

in Verona:

Valentine, a young gentleman
Speed, Valentine's page
Proteus, a young gentleman,
Valentine's best friend
Launce, his servant
Crab, Launce's dog, a mutt
Julia, the girl Proteus loves
Lucetta, her maid
Antonio, Proteus's father

in Milan:

The Duke, Silvia's father
Silvia, Valentine's beloved
Sir Thurio, a wealthy nobleman
in love with Silvia

in the forest:

Outlaws

Place: Verona, Milan, and a
forest on the way to Mantua
Time: 1960s

Cover: Valentine introducing Silvia
to Proteus (Walter Crane)

Welcome to *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* — a Tale of Friendship and Love

Shakespeare knows young love—we immediately think of *Romeo and Juliet* and the host of romantic comedies he penned. The truism is that "the course of true love never did run smooth," for the Bard rarely gives any of his young lovers an easy time on their way to the altar. Challenges and hardships season the lovers—their affections are mangled, their friendships tested, their self-knowledge questioned, and their behavior turned unrecognizable even to themselves. Why? Because they are young and in love, so both inside and out things seem confusing, uncertain, and unsettling.

In this play, Shakespeare sets his scene in fair Verona, or at least starts it there. Verona is home to the two gents who now must leave and make their way in the larger outside world of the Milanese court, where ambition and love will entangle and complicate their lives—and the lives of the young women who love them.

After all, what's the worst thing that could happen when a guy introduces his best friend to his new fiancée? Yes, indeed. The friend behaves like a cur and tries to steal the girl. That is the crux of this play—friendship, young love, an elopement plot, betrayal by one, loyalty in others, and a high stakes ending that manages to test all the lovers and still get them to the altar. Shakespeare not only knows young love; he knows good theatre, too.



Proteus's servant Launce scolding Crab,
his dog (Sir John Gilbert)

... and Welcome to Our Tour!

Our love of Shakespeare runs deep at ASF, and we are happy to share it with schools across Alabama and our neighboring states, because there is just nothing like the powerful effect of seeing Shakespeare live.

This version of Shakespeare's play trims *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* to fit a one-hour class period while keeping the great characters, the verse, and the compelling comic action. Directed by ASF's Greta Lambert, herself a renowned Shakespeare actress, the touring show features eight actors chosen from New York auditions who join the ASF company for the 2016-17 season.

These eight will perform all the roles in the play, doubling or tripling roles just as Shakespeare's own company did. They bring you a complete theatre with set, costumes, props, and actors in a van and a trailer. In addition, we offer your students a series of workshops following the play, so they can work with the actors on theatre skills and Shakespeare's language. We're excited to be headed your way with the Bard!



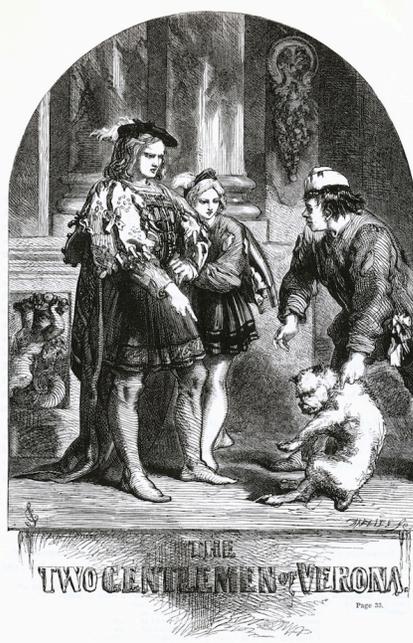
Your acting company: L to R seated, Ann Flanigan, Kate Owens, Joshua Sottile, and Andre Revels; standing, Tirosh Schneider, Joe O'Malley, Javon Q. Minter, and Justy Kosek

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Map of northern Italy—
Verona to Milan is 90 miles



"What, didst thou offer her this from me?" Proteus exclaims. Sweets from the sweet, in Shakespeare's terms? (Sir John Gilbert)

The Two Gentlemen of Verona Fact Sheet

Genre: Usually called a romantic comedy, though it may more nearly be a comic romance

Date of composition: The first mention of the play is in Francis Meres's 1598 list of Shakespeare's comedies. Many 20th-century critics dated the play as 1594-5, but more recent scholars studying the text with computers have argued for a date nearer to the closing of the theatres in 1592-3 due to plague, which would make *Two Gents* one of Shakespeare's earliest comedies.

Length: 2294 lines in 20 scenes. The text is 82% verse and 18% prose.

Setting: Verona, Milan, and a forest

Longest roles in the play: Proteus, Valentine, Julia

Sources: The play combines two common types of tales: those of inconstancy in love and those of friendship triumphant.

The play's inconstant lover theme likely comes from Jorge de Montemayor's Spanish pastoral *Diana Enamorada* (c. 1559), which parallels the Julia and Proteus plot.

The perfect friendship tradition appears in Damon and Pythias in the ancient world, and in Chaucer's "Knight's Tale," in which cousins fight over love of a woman, but many scholars point to Sir Thomas Elyot's tale of Titus and Gisippus (taken from Boccaccio), in which Titus so loves his friend's fiancée that Gisippus allows him to consummate the marriage and take his wife.

Thurio stems from the braggart soldier and the Duke from the blocking father of the ancient and commedia dell'arte traditions.

Words and Contexts That Have Changed:

- In our world, when a male refers to his "mistress," we assume he is having an illicit sexual relationship. In the courtly love rhetoric of the Renaissance, however, the term comes from chivalry via Petrarch—it is "mistress/servant." The lover admires and serves his lady (seen on a social/spiritual pedestal), who challenges and inspires him to become a worthier man.

Plot: Valentine heads to the court in Milan, while his best friend Proteus stays home in Verona, secretly wooing Julia. He just wins her love when his father sends him to Milan.

At court, Valentine has fallen in love with the Duke's daughter, Silvia, who returns his love although she has a rich suitor, Thurio, whom the Duke prefers. When Valentine introduces the newly-arrived Proteus to Silvia, he is instantly smitten. He debates his loyalties, but decides to betray his friend's elopement plans to the Duke in order to woo Silvia for himself. His betrayal works, and Valentine is banished, then captured by outlaws and made their chief.

Missing her beloved, Julia follows Proteus to Milan disguised as a page only to discover him wooing Silvia. Because his own servant Launce has lost the gift Proteus sent Silvia—a small dog, for which Launce substituted his own mangy mutt—Proteus hires the new page to take a letter to Silvia and get her picture. When the women meet, loyal Silvia tells the page she pities the woman Proteus is abandoning. Silvia then decides follow Valentine, leaving in the protection of Sir Eglamour.

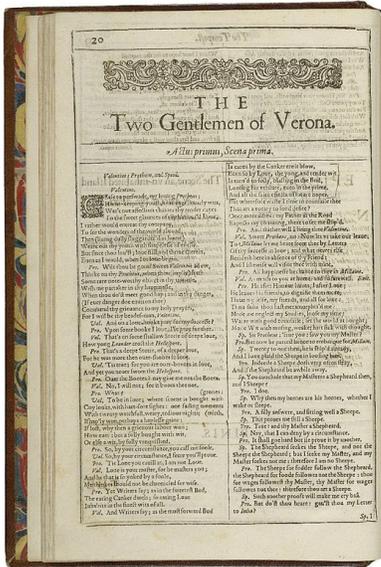
The outlaws capture Silvia, but she is rescued by Proteus, who is pursuing her along with his page (Julia), the Duke, and Thurio. When Proteus tries to assault Silvia, Valentine intervenes and rejects his friend, who realizes his many wrongs and asks pardon. Just as the young men begin to pledge new fidelity, the disguised Julia faints and her identity is revealed. Proteus recognizes his true love for her and begs her forgiveness, too, and the Duke finally allows both sets of lovers to marry.

Things to look for:

- Whether Proteus is forgiveable—is he a confused teen or a villain?
- How the women negotiate the last scene, which offers these characters large challenges with few lines in key places.
- How the dog is played (what kind of dog, how like Launce it looks, how like Proteus's behavior its behavior is)—and whether it's a biological dog at all, or, like Julia disguised as a page, someone in "canine clothing."

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The play in the First Folio (1623) under Comedies; the romances are also in Comedies in the Folio (except for Cymbeline, which is in Tragedies)..

Genre Issues: Comedy or Romance?

Comedy and romance share an essential pattern of separation and reunion, and that pattern accurately describes the action of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. The details of each genre, however, offer us quite different journeys to that reunion.

COMEDY

Unlike tragedy, which focuses on the individual, comedy emphasizes the group, often a family. *Two Gents* almost immediately separates its gentlemen from their families, however, so the "group" more nearly seems to be the duo of friends headed to Milan, along with their attendants. This small group also becomes attached to the women each loves, women who might join or alter the friendship group.

The classical tradition of comedy that flows into the Renaissance pits young lovers against the father—it is a battle over who picks the spouse. There are often several suitors for the daughter's hand, and she sees all but one as Mr. Wrongs. Daddy, however, uses different criteria and says "no" to the beloved, picking his own version of Mr. Right, so the melée is on to help love triumph. The major actors in that effort in classical and Italianate comedy are the servants—witty, perceptive schemers who can make things happen and steer events in the right direction.

Many commentators on *Two Gents* note that the attendants in the play do not function as classical servants do; Speed and Launce do not scheme so much as crack jokes at each other's and their masters' expense. They truly are a *comics* subplot.

Some feel the juxtaposition of their dialogue with their masters' may even satirize the love and loyalty proclaimed in the main plot, and that aspect should be assessed.

ROMANCE

The *Norton Anthology of English Literature* describes romances as "narratives of separation, errancy, and loss" that "satisfy our deepest imaginative desires" as they "therapeutically deliver endings of reintegration, recovery, and return. That which was lost is found." This description fits *Two Gents* well and highlights different aspects of the story than does the standard definition of comedy.

Comedy focuses on the lovers and marriage; romance focuses on identity, tests, and learning from expulsion so that one can be reintegrated. As well as Valentine, romance might privilege Proteus, for ultimately it is not the women who shatter the friendship bond but one of the friends. Proteus falls into the very rivalry and selfishness ("errancy") that friendship is supposed to transcend, and as a result he becomes a liar, a backstabber, a false advisor, a self-interested flatterer, and a total jerk, not to mention a potential rapist. Yet in romance someone who makes himself a Mr. Wrong can learn to be a Mr. Right, as rarely, if ever, happens in comedy.

Romances combine adventure and love; they move from civilization into the wild both geographically and psychologically, and the emphasis is on the young. In the wild the young hero or heroine is tested—a test that can often ultimately lead to marriage. Getting lost is essential to the process—and all four young protagonists of *Two Gents* qualify as lost at different times and in different ways during the play.

Shakespeare ends his formal playwriting career with four plays that are labelled romances—*Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest* (which is in ASF's repertory this season). These plays all adhere to the principles of romance, but Shakespeare also explores these elements early in his career as well, most notably in *Two Gents* and the frame story of *The Comedy of Errors*.



Silvia and the substitute dog (Augustus Egg, 1849)

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Note: These are juxtapositions in Shakespeare's text, and since the script for the touring production rearranges some scenes, not all of these juxtapositions may appear in the play as performed.

The Play's Structure: Upstairs/Downstairs Parallels

Shakespeare builds plays by thematically interweaving plot lines, usually a main plot with a subplot or higher status characters with lower status servants. In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Shakespeare often follows a piece of major action with attendants' banter. Does this juxtaposition highlight and contrast issues and values, or, as some scholars wonder, does it satirize the lovers' feelings? Analyze some of the juxtapositions and decide what do you think.

Places to Consider Scene Juxtapositions:

1.1/1.2 Proteus says farewell to Valentine, then banter with Speed about his love letter, a passage that links directly to the banter in 1.2 between Julia and Lucetta about receipt of that letter. Both attendants are way ahead of their master or mistress.

2.1 Finding Silvia's glove at the top of the scene leads to Speed's comic anatomizing of Valentine as a lover. Valentine is clueless in both halves of the scene, even when Silvia returns, and Speed must do all the explaining.

2.2/2.3/2.4 Proteus's leavetaking from Julia is followed by Launce's description of his family and their tearful farewell, with much focus on his seemingly unweeping dog. Launce apparently loves the dog more than the dog loves him.

Also watch how 2.3 sets up issues of affection and loyalty that will begin to arise in 2.4.

2.4/2.5 Proteus's arrival in Milan and meeting Valentine and Silvia is followed by Launce and Crab's arrival in Milan and meeting with Speed.

2.6/2.7 Proteus's decision to betray both love and friendship is followed by Julia's decision to visit him in Milan, travelling in disguise as a page, a point about which Lucetta teases her.

3.1 Proteus betrays Valentine's elopement plot to the Duke, so that the Duke then exposes Valentine's letter and rope ladder and banishes him. Launce jokes briefly about the banishment when he and Proteus enter, and after they leave, he produces his own letter or list of qualities about the milkmaid he loves, which Speed discovers and banter about—the crisis about Silvia is followed by banter about the attractions of a milkmaid.

4.4 This scene reverses the usual pattern, for here Launce begins the scene with his soliloquy about his dog's misbehavior and his willingness to take the blame. Following this, Proteus enters, charging his new "page" (Julia in disguise) to go get the portrait from Silvia, which Julia does, finding an ally rather than a rival in Silvia. Julia's soliloquy ends the scene, and it is worthwhile to compare Launce's and Julia's soliloquies here. Misbehavior by both Crab and Proteus is apparent and parallel.

Things to Consider or Compare

- Proteus's soliloquies—how good a fight does he put up to remain loyal in friendship and love? What proves stronger for him? Why?
- Loyal love (Silvia, Valentine, Julia) versus disloyal love (Proteus). But how loyal are the "loyal lovers" to their other obligations/loyalties—such as to parents, who at their social station in the Renaissance should arrange their marriages? Are they *entirely* different from Proteus?
- Launce's and Julia's soliloquies in 4.4
- Valentine betrayed by Proteus in Milan and then captured by outlaws in the forest
- Are the outlaws threatening or comic? What are the implications of each choice? Are Valentine and Proteus also "outlaws" in some sense?
- The urban setting vs. the forest setting with its outlaws—what kind of values rule each environment?



In 2.1, Valentine is not interested in the glove Speed hands him until he realizes it is Silvia's; then Speed catalogues Valentine as a lover—something Valentine thought was secret. (Sir John Gilbert)

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Gentleman—a man of good breeding and social standing, such as a noble; a well-bred, well-educated, well-mannered man; a man with an independent income who does not work for a living.

"He after honor hunts;
I after love...."

—Proteus, 1.1

For Discussion

- Given the quotation above, can one legitimately pursue love without also pursuing honor in the Renaissance or today? Does/should love preclude or supplant honor?



Walter Crane's 1857 version of the leavetaking between Proteus and Valentine. Note that Proteus is (suggestively?) the darker clad figure, wearing striped/bicolor tights—he shows more than one "color"—and he's bent. Good character drawing?

Verona's Two Young Gentlemen: An Overview

The title of the play invites us to compare the title characters and to assess their gentility.

The Basis for Judgment

- So what is the standard by which we judge?

In the Renaissance, to be a gentleman was to have high social status; one was "genteel," an untitled aristocrat.

Such a one was educated to be able to advise the monarch or serve the state, to be a magistrate, and also to master the military arts, chivalry, and the fine arts—to be a Renaissance man; that was the ideal.

- In point of fact, the "gentlemen" at Queen Elizabeth's court often behaved with a ruthlessness and self-interest equal to any political establishment now in existence.

The variable nature of the court's values was a frequent subject for the pens of Renaissance poets. Under Henry VIII, Sir Thomas Wyatt's "Mine Own John Pains" describes a court where flattery and role-playing too often cover vice and greed. So while the ideal of the court is to be educated and honorably fulfilled, the actuality can be corrupting, in real life and in drama, either because of the court or because of the nature of the courtiers who attend there.

The Play's Case Study

- Our play's gentlemen are young and are about to take the next step in their gentlemanly education, going to the court.

They avow their firm friendship as Valentine leaves for Milan to begin his career as a courtier, to earn a "place," gaining that first valuable opportunity to win friends and influence people. Later, Proteus's father also sends him to Milan to curry the gentlemanly arts.

- Both young men also get a second (and, ideally, complementary) education by falling in love, Proteus with Julia in Verona, whom he leaves with a vow of earnest fidelity, and Valentine with the Duke's daughter Silvia in Milan. Once in love, each young man also gets a scene with Speed, whose spry wit shows up their love-blindness. His comment, "You are metamorphosed with a mistress" describes both young men's state; love is changing each in unpredictable ways.

Honor versus Love?

- Silvia provokes a crisis of loyalty for each young man. Though not the Duke's favored suitor for his daughter, Valentine plans to elope with Silvia, despite his pledged loyalty to the Duke. He plans to rob the Duke of his daughter and his paternal right to choose.

Proteus meets Silvia and is a goner. She is aristocratic, sophisticated, and gorgeous; Julia suddenly seems a bit gauche, still pretty but not this cover girl.

So Proteus plunges into a double crisis of fidelity—to friend and beloved—and chooses to betray them both, becoming a self-interested manipulator, a machiavel in the making.

Valentine trusts Proteus with his elopement plan, then Proteus slyly reveals this plan to the Duke, his "advice" being selfish. Valentine is duly banished, and Proteus begins to woo Silvia.

- Silvia is our first in-play evaluator of the two gentlemen—she is faithful to her beloved and scorns Proteus's duplicity to both his friend and his hometown beloved.
- So each of the young gentlemen fails in his loyalty to the prince he ostensibly serves—because he is actually dedicated to serving a "princess," Silvia. Love overrides their other expected loyalties, princely or paternal, and we must decide if this is valid or if passion and self-interest guide them. Proteus also fails Julia, his first love; he is unfaithful on all counts.

Valentine grows and evolves during the play, gaining leadership and clarity of purpose as he begins to reform the outlaws who capture him, finally gaining ducal acclaim.

Proteus devolves, following his baser, more selfish and lustful impulses, and shows himself to be disloyal and undeserving—an "outlaw" in spirit. Being discovered and his assault on Silvia prevented by his friend reminds him of the ideal, for Silvia could not chide him into recognition or shame, nor Julia's efforts get him to think. Only Valentine's strong presence and sharp judgment finally clarify Proteus's emotions and allow a double forgiveness.

Gentlemen, courtiers, lovers, outlaws, husbands—the route to maturity becomes the route to happiness as the two suffer their way through to win faithful wives.

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"He cannot be a perfect man,
Not being tried and tutored in the world."
—Proteus's father, 1.3

Defining "Gentleman" in the Text

Watch how the play defines the idea and values of being called a gentleman:

- in 1.1, Valentine cites travel as education and experience:

"I rather would entreat thy company
To see the wonders of the world abroad"

- in 1.3 Proteus's father Antonio and his attendant Panthino discuss Proteus's future possibilities:

Panthino: [You] suffer him to spend his youth at home,

While other men, of slender reputation,
Put forth their sons to seek preferment out:
Some to the wars, to try their fortune there,
Some to discover islands far away,
Some to the studious universities....

Antonio: ... I have considered well his loss of time,

And how he cannot be a perfect man,
Not being tried and tutored in the world....

Panthino: ... [at the court] shall he practice tilts and tournaments,
Hear sweet discourse, converse with noble men,

And be the eye of every exercise
Worthy his youth and nobleness of birth.

These comments give us some sense of what adults perceive the proper experience for young nobles to have in gaining favor.

- When asked about Proteus in 2.4, Valentine praises him to the Duke:

Valentine: I know him as myself... [He hath] Made use and fair advantage of his days; His years but young, but his experience old; His head unmellowed, but his judgment ripe. And in a word...

He is complete in feature and in mind
With all good grace to grace a gentleman.

Duke: Beshrew me, sir, but if he make this good,

He is as worthy for an empress' love
As meet to be an emperor's counselor.

The qualities Valentine mentions which in Proteus seem to belie his youth are experience and judgment, and his completeness and grace seem commendable. The Duke sees such traits as worthy both of state service and of a noble marriage (the very kind of woman Valentine now loves and longs for).

- Compare the Duke's comment above with his view of Valentine at the play's end:
I do applaud thy spirit, Valentine,
And think thee worthy of an empress' love.
Know then I here forget all former griefs,
Cancel all grudge, repeal thee home again,
Plead a new state in thy unrivaled merit,
To which I thus subscribe: Sir Valentine,
Thou art a gentleman and well derived.
Take thou thy Silvia, for thou hast deserved her.

So Valentine's shortcomings of loyalty toward the Duke are forgiven and he is found worthy of place and marriage by being called a gentleman.

- The subplot shifts from the adventures of Crab the dog paralleling Proteus to a different comparison—to outlaws in the forest. When Valentine invents a wild deed to bluff the outlaws, they proclaim: "This fellow were a king for our wild faction!" and Speed advises Valentine: "be one of them. / It's an honorable kind of thievery."

The oxymoron of "honorable thievery" includes Valentine's proposed elopement and Proteus's upcoming seizure of Silvia. At the end, Valentine asks that the gentlemen/outlaws be forgiven because they (too?) are reformed. How?



"Gentlemanly" outlaws in the forest—ready for reformation?
(Sir John Gilbert)

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A good fellowship (or society) is one that fosters 'friendship' in all of its senses.

—Aristotle,
Nicomachean Ethics

"You cannot compare with friendship the passion men feel for women.... I must admit the flames of passion are more active, sharp and keen. But that fire is a rash one....

Friendship "is a matter of the mind, **with our souls being purified by practising it....** [our] souls are mingled and confounded in so universal a blending that they efface the seam which joins them together.... Not only did I know his mind as well as I knew my own **but I would have entrusted myself to him with greater assurance than to myself.**"

—Montaigne, *Essays*

The Ideal of Friendship in the Renaissance and in the Play

As in many cultures today, in Renaissance England the standard route to the altar for most middle-class and all aristocratic youth was an arranged marriage, that is, a business alliance between families agreed on by the fathers—not by the spouses to be. (Only Puritans and the lower class had companionate marriage.) A marriage, thus, was a business deal, and love, if it occurred—which was not expected—would be a bonus. Erotic love was considered unstable and fickle, no fit basis for so important a bond as marriage.

So where did one find a soul mate if not in marriage? In friendship—the only close personal relationship one could choose for oneself. In the Renaissance, friendship was considered a higher form of human affection than erotic love; it was disinterested, platonically pure, capable of teaching selflessness. As it was considered "a supreme achievement of the human spirit, it must transcend humanity's all-too-common penchant for rivalry and ingratitude."

"Friendship is ... seen as an institution that enables man to develop his mental and moral potential to the highest possible degree" and thus offers an example for ordering all human relationships. In the Renaissance the word *lover* was often used non-sexually as a synonym for *friend*, and Shakespeare so uses it in several of his plays.

Today's popular culture values friendship in a similar way—consider the mass of buddy films involving soldiers, cops, cowboys, or vagabonds and the tight bond that forms when men grow up or face crisis together. Two Gents is a buddy play, and the crisis is not war but love, though Proteus seems to turn it into a guerrilla conflict.

The forgiveness moment in 5.4 by William Holman Hunt (1851). Is this Valentine giving Silvia away?

Betrayal and Forgiveness

Where Valentine is inclusive with his relationships in Milan, Proteus is selfish. He re-casts his friend as a rival (despite Silvia's insistence that she loves only Valentine) and changes from friend to an adolescent version of Iago. How can a romantic comedy sustain such a character? He calls himself a lover, but that term does not describe the emotions he feels. He betrays his friend, putting himself first; the ideal crashes and burns in him—and so, ultimately, will he, for his protest is: "In love / Who respects friend?" (5.4)—a question he and Valentine will answer differently. Thus he fails others and he fails himself; he is lost.

His failure becomes the challenge for others. How does one respond to a friend's betrayal? Valentine tongue-lashes him:

Thou common friend, that's without faith or love,
For such is a friend now. Treacherous man,
Thou hast beguill'd my hopes; nought but mine
eye
Could have persuaded me: now I dare not
say
I have one friend alive; thou wouldst disprove
me.
Who should be trusted now, when one's right
hand
Is perjured to the bosom? Proteus,
I am sorry I must never trust thee more,
But count the world a stranger for thy sake.
The private wound is deepest: O time most
accurst,
'Mongst all foes that a friend should be the
worst!
(5.4)

Valentine shows him what he has become and rescinds his trust, the deepest bond they have. Now Proteus is truly alone, lost. To whom should he turn? Who will help him? Shamed and guilty, he repents and asks his friend to forgive him. In this reverse test, what should Valentine do? Can he or should he embrace the snake who betrayed him and his beloved? Living up to the ideal, Valentine finds he can credit repentance, follow the divine model, and accept a changed Proteus, a Proteus now, we hope, in his "true nature."

Valentine's last line in this sequence is the kicker for scholars and directors, though: "All that was mine in Silvia I give thee." What? After all this? But that is, in fact, the classical model of the friendship bond, to give one's life or beloved to one's friend. Silvia has no line, but Julia seizes the moment by swooning, thus instigating the final revelation and reintegration of Proteus. Good timing!



Quotations from David Bevington's introduction to the play in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, 4th ed.* (HarperCollins, 1992) and Kurt Schleuter's introduction to the *New Cambridge edition of the play* (1990).

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"In love
Who respects friend?"

—Proteus, 5.4

Shakespeare's Proteus

• Young Proteus certainly takes a number of emotional shapes in the course of the action. Does Julia, by her love and loyalty, "hold him until he takes his true shape," a man loyal to beloved and friend again? Or do we see him as an immature and irresponsible jerk, and is that his true shape?

Metamorphosis: The Power of Love—and Desire

Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, tales of the mythic transformations wrought by love (Daphne into a laurel tree; Pygmalion's statue brought to life) was one of Shakespeare's favorite sources, but he didn't need Ovid to tell him that love changes a man or woman or to acknowledge that love itself is changeable, for such insights are the basis of most of his romantic comedies.

In *Two Gents*, the idea of metamorphosis is introduced early in each gentleman's experience with love. In 1.1, after much teasing from Valentine, Proteus admits:

He leaves his friends, to dignify them more;
I leave myself, my friends, and all, for love:
Thou, Julia, thou hast metamorphos'd me...

and in so saying speaks more prophetically than he knows, though the changes that Julia has wrought are incidental to those that love—or desire—will wreak in him. He will, indeed, leave himself, his friend, and all for what he calls love.

Proteus's name itself suggests his metamorphic proclivity, for **Proteus is the name of a minor Greek sea god (Homer describes him as a servant of Poseidon) who is able to take many shapes**, but if held until he took his true shape, he would answer questions. We are meant to expect changeability from this character—his name immediately alerts us to his nature. If this "Proteus" is a lover, we might well expect the worst, and Shakespeare complies.



Proteus
reading Julia's
declaration of
love (Sir John
Gilbert). Is
Proteus always
secretive?

Likewise, in 2.1 Speed describes how Valentine has changed, concluding, "now you are metamorphosed with a mistress, that when I look on you, I can hardly think you my master." Through the play Valentine grows from the love-sick courtier of 2.1 to a thwarted eloper, then to the kind of man the outlaws immediately want to follow and the hero who saves his beloved from harm and confronts Sir Thurio's claim, impressing the Duke. Proteus's arc is less heroic, though he may learn as much the hard way: "O heaven, were man / But constant, he were perfect. That one error / Fills him with faults ... / What is in Silvia's face but I may spy / More fresh in Julia's, with a constant eye." Indeed.



(above) The outlaws ask newly captured Valentine to lead them; (right) Valentine saves Silvia from Proteus's advances (note the parallel sword angles Sir John Gilbert chooses; given the sword, notice how Valentine uses it—might for right)



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Analyzing Proteus

- Would Proteus behave the way he does if he had stayed at home? Is this like his "freshman freedom" at college? Is it "the real Proteus," or is it influences?
- Is love part of his gentlemanly honor, a noble pursuit in Proteus's eyes, or do his "eyes" lead his choice, changing with each new beauty he spies? Or does he want Silvia because Valentine has her? What percent of his love is desire/lust, what percent admiration of virtue, what percent rivalry?
- In courtly love the lady's spiritual perfection inspires the knight/lover to do great deeds. What great deeds does Proteus's "love" inspire him to? Do his deeds show the nature of his "love"?
- How carefully and virtuously does Proteus consider his conflicting emotions and loyalties? Does he put up a good fight? mount a reasoned debate? What values underpin his "reasoning"? Are those the values of nobility, friendship, and love?
- How emotionally mature is Proteus? Why do you think so?

Evaluation and Choice: Proteus's Soliloquies

• Soliloquy #1 / 1.1.64-70

Proteus compares his love pursuits to Valentine's apparently more honorable, courtly pursuits in Milan—love versus honor. He feels diminished by the contrast: "I leave myself, my friends, and all, for love." The loss of self in love can be enriching or depleting; Proteus at the moment feels the latter, for he says he has neglected his studies, lost his time, warred with counsel, set his future at naught, weakened his wit, and become heartsick, a series of negative diction choices. **What should we conclude from this wording?**

Yet he pursues Julia, and when Speed complains of not getting his anticipated payoff for delivering the letter, Proteus also feels he is not getting his anticipated payoff for his love (a feeling he sustains throughout the play).

• Soliloquy #2 / end of 1.3

This brief speech reacts to the thwarting of his new joy, for he reads Julia's love letter just as his father decides to send him to Milan. His fear of expressing his love and having it dismissed—and his consequent lie about the letter—has only destroyed his love another way, not by burning, he says, but by drowning.

His love will, indeed, drown, but is that a deluge of his own making?

• Soliloquy #3 / end of 2.4

Having met Silvia in Milan and learned of Valentine's requited love, his betrothal to her, and their planned elopement, Proteus expresses his conflicted reaction. The only hint we might pick up in the preceding dialogue is, after calling Silvia a "worthy mistress" (standard courtly love rhetoric), we get:

Silvia: Servant, you are welcome to a worthless mistress.

Proteus: I'll die on him that says so but yourself.

Silvia: That you are welcome?

Proteus: That you are worthless.

Still courtly love rhetoric, but modern video might underscore it with "uh oh, trouble brewing" music. **Would you?**

Launce lists his beloved's virtues and faults in practical terms, almost a spoof of Proteus's decision-making about love (Sir John Gilbert)

Once alone, Proteus confesses Silvia has made him forget Julia. He asks why—my eye, Valentine's praise, Silvia's perfection, "or my false transgression"? Look at the order; on some level he knows where this is going. He compares the women, but his former love is melted (note all the heat imagery here and love as waxen/meltable) and so is his loyalty to his friend. He also plays with the "love is blind" concept, ending, "If I can check my erring love, I will; / If not, to compass her I'll use my skill." **Given that couplet, how hard is he going to try to check his new feelings?**

• Soliloquy #4 / top of 2.6

One short scene later, Proteus is back realizing he will be forsworn and considering his various oaths to Valentine and Julia. He explains or excuses his feeling with "Love bade me swear, and Love bids me forswear." For 26 lines he weighs and debates, but by line 27 he has decided and chooses a course of action, betrayal of his friend. In facing a "threefold perjury," he "reasons" that Julia was a star but Silvia the sun (a stronger Petrarchan love image), though he cannot quite sanction his urge to call Julia "bad" in calling Silvia "better."

Knowing "I leave [cease] to love where I should love," he weighs the cost: "Julia I lose, and Valentine I lose," but "If I keep them, I needs must lose myself." This is the crux for Proteus—he will not sacrifice himself nor his desires for another; he betrays the core value of friendship and loyal love, instead proclaiming, "I to myself am dearer than a friend." Thus he chooses to think Julia dead and Valentine an enemy as he proceeds to "treachery."

He knows the result of betraying his friend will be Valentine's banishment, but Valentine is his major rival for Silvia; he is confident he can thwart Thurio. So he invokes Love in an unholy prayer: "Love, lend me wings to make my purpose swift, / As thou hast lent me wit to plot this drift." **Is it really Love's fault, not his?**

• Soliloquy #5 / top of 4.2

The plan isn't working out as he intended. He has access to Silvia, but she, "too fair, too true, too holy," rejects his false vows. Yet, he says, engaging the dog parallel in the plot, "spaniel-like, the more she spurns my love, / The more it grows and fawneth on her still." His plot has succeeded in betraying love but not in winning love—**what's a dog to do?**



The Two Gentlemen of Verona

by William Shakespeare



Valentine vs. Romeo when Banished

- Compare 3.1 of *Two Gents* from the Duke's banishment speech through Valentine's exit after talking with Proteus to 3.3 of *Romeo and Juliet* between Friar Laurence, Romeo, and the Nurse. How is the sentence described, how does the young man respond, what counsel is he given?

Identity and Love: Valentine's Soliloquies

The Courtly Love Ideal

In the Renaissance courtly love tradition, which based its values on the image of chivalry, the beloved lady is a spiritual ideal, virtuous and pure, and by faithfully serving her without the corrupting force of sexual desire, the man himself can grow toward the ideal, become a better man.

The beloved is the "guiding star" to the lover's "wand'ring bark [ship]," the deer/dear that he hunts or pursues, her eyes the sun that illuminates his life. Much of the love imagery in the play is related to or plays off of the courtly love tradition, just as Launce's list describing his beloved milkmaid's traits is also a comic commentary on the courtly love attributes given women (he would appreciate "Sonnet 130").

Valentine is the primary voice of courtly love values and imagery in the play, though Proteus tries to match him when he woos Silvia in his desperate rhetoric as the unrequited lover, the usual plight of the courtly love speaker in poetry.

• The Banishment Soliloquy, 3.1

While Proteus's secret betrayal emerges in his soliloquies, Valentine's secret—or not-so-secret—love for Silvia comes out in dialogue with both Silvia and Speed. Requited love is not a spiritual crisis but a fulfillment for Valentine; his crisis doesn't occur until he is banished, until he is separated from Silvia and his love seemingly denied forever. Now he registers how his sense of himself and his soul have been changed by love and how much of his very being Silvia is.

Valentine being given back the love letter he wrote for Silvia—the moment just before he learns his love is requited (Louis Rhead).

The Duke's parting word upon banishing Valentine is "as thou lov'st thy life, make speed from hence" (3.1). Stunned Valentine begins to process this cataclysmic change:

And why not death rather than living torment?

To die is to be banished from myself,
And Silvia is myself. Banished from her
Is self from self—a deadly banishment!

He will die physically, be put to death, if he stays, but he realizes he will die emotionally if he leaves. He tries to fathom life without Silvia:

What light is light, if Silvia be not seen?
What joy is joy, if Silvia be not by?
Unless it be to think that she is by
And feed upon the shadow of perfection.

Except I be by Silvia in the night,
There is no music in the nightingale;
Unless I look on Silvia in the day,
There is no day for me to look upon.

She is my essence, and I leave to be
If I be not by her fair influence

Fostered, illumined, cherished, kept alive.

He recognizes that his life is joined and wedded to Silvia's now, whether or not they are officially married, a union he sought in the now thwarted elopement. While we may uncharitably hear the echo of adolescent hormones and reactive extremity in his words, he is speaking the ideal language of courtly love, the spiritual bond—"she is my essence." She is the influence that makes him the man he wants to be, a man he does not believe he can be without her. At this moment he sees the situation completely opposite to the Duke's parting view, for Valentine knows that "fly I hence, I fly away from life."

• Valentine's Forest Soliloquy, top of 5.4

Courtly love rhetoric is more than words for Valentine, for he actually considers Silvia to be his inspiration and guide. As an "outlaw" in the forest without her, he calls himself a tenantless mansion, "growing ruinous" (a shell and not a being), and beseeches her unseen, "Repair me with thy presence, Silvia."

Her virtue and purity continue to call forth his better self, values which now he uses to curb his "mates [the gentleman/outlaws], that make their wills their law" so as to "keep them from uncivil outrages"—which is the perfect cue for Proteus's entry with rescued Silvia, for Proteus now wants to make his will his law with an uncivil outrage center stage, an impulse Valentine will thwart and "curb" on the spot.



Silvia. Yes, yes; the lines are very quaintly writ,
But since unwillingly, take them again;
Nay, take them.

Act II. Scene I.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona

by William
Shakespeare



- Notice the theme of "Sonnet 116," that love does not change—the opposite of Proteus and his protean "love," which is more likely desire—part lust and part competitiveness. On the other hand, "Sonnet 110" could be Proteus's Act 5 *apologia* sonnet to Julia.

Renaissance Definitions:

Shakespeare 116:

- l. 5—*mark* = lighthouse or beacon
- l. 8—*height taken* = sextant image
- l. 9—*Fool* = plaything
- l. 12—*doom* = Judgment Day

Shakespeare 110:

- l. 2.—*motley* = jester
- l. 4—*affections* = passions
- l. 5—*truth* = fidelity
- l. 6—*strangely* = coldly
- l. 7—*blenches* = turnings
- l. 8—*worst essays* = trying lesser loves
- l. 10—*grind* = whet
- l. 11—*try* = test

Spenser: (spelling modernized)

- l. 3—*sly* = clever
- l. 13—*fondness* = foolishness

Sidney:

- l. 1—*mark* = target
- l. 3—*band* = swaddling band (links to *cradle*)
- l. 13—*hire* = reward

Shakespeare:

- l. 1—*disgrace* = *disfavor*
- l. 3—*bootless* = futile
- l. 7—*art/ scope* = skill/ ability
- l. 10—*state* = state of mind
(l. 14 includes political sense)

Also see Shakespeare's sonnets 29, 30, 34-36, 42, 62, 87, 96, 108, 109, 111

Renaissance Sonnets on Love, Desire, and Friendship

LOVE

Sonnet 116 by William Shakespeare

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments; love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O, no, it is an ever-fixèd mark,
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wand'ring bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height
be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and
cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

DESIRE

Sonnet 37 by Edmund Spenser

What guile is this, that those her golden
tresses,
She doth attire under a net of gold:
And with sly skills so cunningly them dresses,
That which is gold or hair, may scarce be told?
Is it that men's frail eyes, which gaze too bold,
She may entangle in that golden snare:
And being caught may craftily enfold
Their weaker hearts, which are not well
aware?
Take heed therefore, mine eyes, how ye do
stare
Henceforth too rashly on that guileful net,
In which if ever ye entrappèd are,
Out of her bands ye by no means shall get.
Fondness it were for any being free,
To covet fetters, though they golden be.

FRIENDSHIP

Sonnet 29 by William Shakespeare

When, in disgrace with Fortune and men's
eyes,
I all alone beweepe my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless
cries,
And look upon myself and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends
possessed,
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;

Sonnet 110 by William Shakespeare

Alas, 'tis true I have gone here and there
And made myself a motley to the view,
Gored mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is
most dear,
Made old offenses of affections new.
Most true it is that I have looked on truth
Askance and strangely; but, by all above,
These blenches gave my heart another youth,
And worse essays proved thee my best of love.
Now all is done, have what shall have no end:
Mine appetite I never more will grind
On newer proof, to try an older friend,
A god in love, to whom I am confined.
Then give me welcome, next my heaven the
best,
Even to thy pure and most most loving breast.

Thou Blind Man's Mark by Sir Philip Sidney

Thou blind man's mark, thou fool's self-chosen
snare,
Fond fancy's scum, and dregs of scattered
thought,
Band of all evils, cradle of causeless care,
Thou web of will, whose end is never wrought—

Desire, desire! I have too dearly bought,
With price of mangled mind, thy worthless ware;
Too long, too long asleep thou hast me brought,
Who should my mind to higher things prepare.

But yet in vain thou hadst my ruin sought;
In vain thou madest me to vain things aspire;
In vain thou kindest all thy smoky fire;
For virtue hath this better lesson taught—
Within myself to seek my only hire,
Desiring nought but how to kill desire.

Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state
(Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth) sings hymns at heaven's
gate;
For thy sweet love remembered such wealth
brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

Sonnet 30, parallel to 29, states the addressee in the couplet:

But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,
All losses are restored and sorrows end.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona

by William
Shakespeare



Song (4.2)

Who is Silvia? What is she
That all our swains commend
her?

Holy, fair, and wise is she,
The heaven such grace did
lend her,
That she might admired be.

Is she kind as she is fair?
For beauty lives with kindness.
Love doth to her eyes repair,
To help him of his blindness;
And, being help'd, inhabits
there.

Then to Silvia let us sing,
That Silvia is excelling;
She excels each mortal thing
Upon the dull earth dwelling.
To her let us garlands bring.

The song matches Valentine's earlier praise that Silvia is "divine." Here Silvia is praised for beauty and for virtue (which some sonneteers call "true beauty").



"Silvia" by Edwin Austin Abbey
(1899)

Julia and Silvia: The Loyal Ladies Who Love

In Shakespeare's romantic comedies, women often drive the action—Portia, the French princess and her ladies, the merry wives, Rosalind, and Olivia and Viola. Others who find themselves driven—Katherina, Adriana, Titania, Beatrice—are the spice of the action. It's hard to have a romantic comedy without some smart and witty girls with hearts!

In *Two Gents*, Julia considers her options, asking Lucetta, "Wouldst thou then counsel me to fall in love?" (One wonders how she might answer that question near the end of the play.) The lady and her maid then engage in one of Shakespeare's favorite comic games for women—evaluating the list of suitors—which shows that the women are aware of the mating game and its consequences. Julia asks Lucetta to assess the suitors, "In thy opinion which is worthiest love?" Given the criterion of worthiness, one suitor she calls "fair," one "rich," Lucetta yet finding both unworthy. Proteus is called "gentle," which can mean *tender* or *genteel*, *well-born*, and Lucetta favors him. But he has not yet declared himself as the others have, so Julia wonders if few words mean little love: "I would I knew his mind" (and she's still wondering near the end of the play), just as Lucetta delivers his love letter.

In fact, both Julia and Silvia are introduced by means of a love letter in this play—Julia is teased until she shreds Proteus's letter and then has to read the gratifying scraps, while Silvia, trying to get Valentine to declare himself, requires him to write a letter proclaiming her love. Confused, he complies, becoming more confused when she delivers the letter back to him, to Speed's vast amusement. Both women have other wooers, but they want one of the gentlemen from Verona.

While Proteus fears parental problems about a match with Julia for reasons that are never explained, Silvia knows all too well what she faces. Her father, the Duke, has already said he favors, the dull, rich Sir Thurio—a classic Mr. Wrong among comic wooers. Valentine is not as rich, but also not as conceited or foolish. She chooses the one she considers to be the better man and stays true to him, first braving elopement, and when that falls through, fleeing the court,



Lucetta delivers Proteus's love letter to Julia
(Walter Crane, 1857)

her father, outlaws, and Proteus, in that order, in an effort to find and marry banished Valentine.

These two loyal, loving women are tormented by their situations: Silvia by a lover denied and banished while she is beset by unwanted wooers; Julia eagerly seeking her love via a disguise and then trapped as a page serving Proteus's love for Silvia. When challenged, both women put on a cloak and hit the road to pursue their loves.

Yet in Silvia Julia finds a true friend because a faithful lover; Silvia rejects Proteus, leaving Julia to look at Silvia's picture and wonder what Proteus sees in her. Like a faithful dog (the image appears everywhere in the play, thanks to Crab), she follows Proteus even into the forest.

Love can cost us our dignity as well as our emotional stability and self-respect at times, but Silvia and Julia remain true, loyal, and committed, and at the end are rewarded with the men they love and, we hope, a happy ever after.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona

by William Shakespeare



Walter Crane's illustration of the page (Julia) meeting Silvia

"It is the lesser blot modesty finds,
Women to change their shapes, than men their minds."
—Julia, 5.4

Seen but not Regarded

- Proteus looks right at Julia wearing page's garb and does not recognize her. Is that possible?
Well, how often do we need attention at a restaurant and ask, "what does our waitress look like?" How often is the person at the checkout terminal a function rather than a face? Do we always "see" other people? Who do we see and who don't we "see" during a day? Why?

Girls Disguised as Boys—Then and Now

In Shakespeare's time, English acting companies were all-male—boys and men played all the roles. A young boy in the 1590s who was an apprentice with the Lord Chamberlain's Men not only got to study the art and craft of acting by living and working with a professional actor, but also got to perform some of the greatest female roles ever written. The irony that these roles were written for and played by pre-pubescent boys is not lost on modern actresses or scholars.

In several comedies, Shakespeare used the male-actor identity of his female characters as an "in" joke with his audience, shifting the "girls" into male disguise and out again as necessity demanded. To have a boy actor disguised as a "boy" was perfect; no one on stage or off could tell he wasn't a boy. The actual "disguise" was his role as a young woman. Julia in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Jessica, Portia, and Nerissa in *The Merchant of Venice*, Rosalind in *As You Like It*, and Viola in *Twelfth Night* all adopt a male disguise.

Julia is the first in this line, just as *Two Gents* may be the first in Shakespeare's long line of romantic comedies. After these plays, Shakespeare's comedy moves to tragicomedy and eventually to the adventure-and-reunion plays known as romances, where again in *Cymbeline* Imogen disguises herself as a boy.

In the modern theatre, these roles are played by women, so the page disguise is often transparent (we can see it's a girl) as it would not have been in the Renaissance, undermining Shakespeare's metatheatrical joke.

Julia's Experience

Julia's disguise protects her as she travels alone to another city. Travel, as Valentine and Silvia also both learn in the play, is fraught with dangers. Julia no sooner puts on the disguise, however, than it traps her, as it does all of Shakespeare's cross-dressing heroines, for she finds her beloved desperately in love with another woman. He doesn't even look at his new page closely enough to realize who it is. Her love is challenged by betrayal—**should she just tell him off and go home, or should she trust her commitment and stay true to it?**

Renaissance Identity and Clothes

Far more even than in our world of conspicuous display, Renaissance society considered one's clothing as the key to one's identity. Only a lord might wear silk, only royalty could wear purple or ermine, only the privileged might wear spurs or jewels, servants wore blue—England's sumptuary [clothing] laws were specific and clear. One need look only at the garment, the surface, to learn the essential truth of birth, status, and degree.

Whereas in our world someone can choose to dress up or dress down, to dress goth or preppy or grunge or jock whatever one's social status, in the Renaissance one was supposed to dress "properly," according to social station—so of course everyone tried to dress better than his or her actual status. As a result, Philip Stubbes protested in 1583 that when "every one is permitted to flaunt it out, in what apparel he lust [chooses] himselfe ... it is verie hard to knowe, who is noble, who is worshipfull, who is a gentleman, who is not."

Regarding gender, the Renaissance viewed human biology as more or less unisex, all having the same analogously shaped sexual equipment, but men's superior "heat" even in

utero made theirs external and visible, while women's inferior, "less hot" nature kept theirs internal and invisible. Women were considered to be "imperfectly formed" men (male being the ideal for the Renaissance—have things changed?). So if the sexes were structured analogously, the clothes make a huge difference in stating one's gender. Male dress equals a male; female dress equals a female. To transgress this code off stage caused ructions and prompted sermons from the pulpit or pillorying and imprisonment—especially if the person transgressed by dressing in the more privileged status of the male and took on that authority.

However, many of Shakespeare's disguised heroines, such as Julia and Viola (as Jean Howard argues of Viola), are not transgressive; they wear masculine apparel not to act out (or "up") but for temporary safety. They know they are female, which is what they want to be; we meet them first in female apparel. They want Proteus's or Orsino's love, but each disguised page confronts a beloved female, Silvia or Olivia, and must negotiate the fact that her beloved loves this other woman.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona

by William
Shakespeare



Analyzing Julia

- Julia starts off giddy and girly, but she toughens up as the play proceeds. When she decides to set out for Milan, she calls herself a "pilgrim." What does that image suggest about her love?
- When Julia arrives in Milan she sees Proteus wooing Silvia with a song. We watch her heart break as she realizes he doesn't love her any more, and we watch Proteus hurt when Silvia rejects him. How should Julia respond when Proteus tells Silvia his former love is dead?
- Valentine and Proteus call themselves Silvia's "servants"; Julia calls herself Sebastian and actually serves Proteus. What does this "service" mean?
- She confuses letters when with Silvia and then confuses rings at the end of the play with Proteus. Is she just ditzy or is more going on in these exchanges?



Julia in disguise, newly arrived in Milan, watches Proteus woo Silvia at her window (Louis Rhead)

Julia's Soliloquies

Soliloquies 1 and 2 / 1.2

Having just heard Speed's witplay about delivering Proteus's love letter to Julia, we now get the flip side of the relationship and Julia's receipt of the letter. Because Lucetta took the letter in Julia's name, Julia momentarily feels misused and conspired against and so refuses Proteus's letter.

Left alone, truth and honesty emerge—she wants to read the letter. Caught between trying to maintain modesty while feeling "inward joy," she talk herself into calling Lucetta back. The sprightly monologue is a more innocent, comic version of Proteus's later, more sinister inner negotiations to convince himself to pursue his desires.

Having gotten the letter, Lucetta teases her and she shreds it. Then she must try to piece it together from the fragments (an interesting parallel to Proteus's actions in the play—Shakespeare is quite skilled at giving us early, simple cognates for later, more weighty issues and actions). Here she punishes her own name when she finds it written and embraces any instance of Proteus's name, kissing it and holding it to her heart. These may seem giddy responses, but in fact she does hold the idea of Proteus near her heart throughout the play.

Soliloquies 3 and 4 / 4.4

By 4.4 Julia is in Milan disguised as Sebastian, having arrived just in time to observe Proteus wooing Silvia at her window. Now Proteus has hired this new page to serve him, his first task being to take a ring (the very ring Julia gave him when they parted) and a love letter to Silvia and return with her picture. Proteus does have enough memory as he parts with the ring to say, "She loved me well delivered it to me."

Julia first asks the key question, "How many women would do such a message?" Yes, and how many would just claw out his eyes on the spot? She first calls herself "a fox" in addressing the task, but cannot maintain the role, because she pities him—and "Because I love him, I must pity him."

We may want to spell "co-dependent" at this point, but the values of friendship and love in the play make self-sacrifice a virtue, and throughout this soliloquy Julia debates self and love, sense and Proteus:

I am my master's true-confirmed love,
But cannot be true servant to my master
Unless I prove false traitor to myself.
Yet will I woo for him...

so every time she debates, love and Proteus win—as vows and Julia never do in Proteus's soliloquies. The contrast is telling.

As she approaches her task, she acknowledges its contradictory nature:

To plead for that which I would not obtain,
To carry that which I would have refused,
To praise his faith which I would have
dispraised....

unaware that she will get her wish (even though she apparently heard Silvia tell off this "subtle, perjured, false, disloyal man" at her window).

Silvia tears the love letter (women are hard on Proteus's love letters in this play) and refuses the ring. Then, when Sebastian confesses to knowing Julia, Silvia questions him about Julia's beauty, and Julia bravely answers, "She, in my judgment, was as fair as you," though disdainful love has left her now "as black as I."

In her final soliloquy, Julia affirms that Silvia is "a virtuous gentlewoman, mild and beautiful," then compares her own looks with Silvia's picture, trying to discover why Proteus loves this other woman. Silvia wears a fancy headdress in the painting, and has auburn rather than blonde hair, but there's no major difference—"What should it be that he respects in her / But I can make respective in myself, / If this fond Love were not a blinded god?" She wants to be jealous, but cannot because Silvia was kind to her. Julia emerges as human but just and loving, trapped but true.

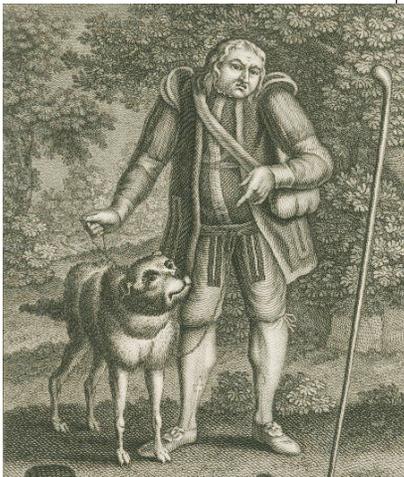
The Two Gentlemen of Verona

by William
Shakespeare



Let's Not Forget Lucetta...

In a play called *Two Gents*, it's easy to overlook the females, but even among the help there's a witty woman. Lucetta is the female complement of Speed (although her role can be played young or older). She is knowing, wise, witty, and perceptive—she's on to Julia's games and teasing her for playing hard to get. Julia's sudden tearing up of that love letter may seem harsh, but it is the quickest route to fun for the scene and the most clarifying for Julia's true feelings.



Richard Yates as Launce with Crab, as played at Drury Lane in 1762 (by Henry Roberts)

The Play's "Help": Speed, Launce, Lucetta, "Sebastian"

Attendants such as pages and servants have an important role in the history of romantic comedy. Traditionally, they are often the schemers who get things done, and while that scarcely seems likely with a servant such as Launce, only by acknowledging the classical pattern can we fully appreciate the new pattern Shakespeare is creating here.

Verona's Male Attendants

To be a servant in a comedy is to find opportunities for banter and byplay. In *Two Gents*, each leading man has an attendant, but these are very different comic types. Valentine has a page, Speed, whose name alone describes his mental and verbal abilities. Being a page was part of the upbringing of an aristocratic child, so Speed is genteel and played by a boy actor. He's a quick thinker, a quick talker, and a quick jokester. This kind of saucy page was made popular by John Lyly, who wrote for the boys' companies in the 1580s and whose comedies immediately preceded Shakespeare's. Shakespeare clearly adopts the witty page character in this and other plays.

On the other hand, Shakespeare also uses the skills of one of the Elizabethan stage's great comic actors, Will Kempe, to write another kind of comic role, the slower-witted rustic known as the clown (and in many of the original printings of the plays, the speech headings for Kempe's roles simply read "Clown"). Kempe also apparently played such self-satisfied types as Bottom, Launcelot Gobbo, and Dogberry.

Launce is an adult, not a boy. Wit and intelligence are not beyond such a character, but they come at a different rate and from a different angle than Speed's do. The word play between Speed and Launce shows what an effective comic team they are, the slower one often scoring at the expense of the quicker—here again the tortoise can best the hare. Compare Proteus's opening exchange with Speed to any dialogue between Speed and Launce to see this contrast.

Proteus's Page in Milan

In meeting Speed, the audience sees the Renaissance witty page in action. It is impossible for them to consider Launce a page; he is a servant, and the contrast between these attendants tells us much about the difference between the masters. Valentine has a "proper" attendant, a gentleman's page. Proteus has a rustic, one who is loyal enough to offer his own misbehaving dog when Proteus's canine present for Silvia is stolen, but nonetheless a yokel compared to Speed, who is himself well-born.

Yet Proteus does gain a proper page during the action, one "Sebastian," who is actually Shakespeare's first use of the girl-disguised-as-a-boy gambit, and the disguise is naturally that of a page—the disguise easiest for a girl and much the easiest for the Renaissance boy actor playing that girl, for now he's playing a boy again. Julia as Sebastian proves to be a remarkably loyal servant, though a bit preoccupied at times—she gives Silvia the wrong love letter (accidentally or on purpose?), she gives Proteus the wrong ring (accidentally or on purpose?), and yet she also proves able to banter and observe her master with a perception comparable to Speed's.

Julia's loyalty is tested to the limit in the forest when Proteus re-captures Silvia; the faint and the confusion are not impossible for a boy but more appropriate for the girl who has found her love again betrayed. Just how good is that disguise, and how close are the roles of page and girl in love?



Henry James Haley's early 20th century illustration of Speed watching Valentine's confusion about the letter he wrote for Silvia

The Two Gentlemen of Verona

by William Shakespeare



Panthino: Launce, away, away, aboard.... you'll lose the tide, if you tarry any longer.

Launce: It is no matter if the tied were lost, for it is the unkindest tied that ever any man tied.

Panthino: What's the unkindest tide?

Launce: Why, he that's tied here, Crab my dog.

(2.3)

In 2.2, Proteus has just "tied" himself with oaths to Julia, but proves "unkind" himself in that regard once he arrives in Milan—he quickly "unties" himself and gets "lost."

Launce's homonymic punning is standard clown technique in Shakespeare; Launce is also given a number of malapropisms—he likes words, if he only knew what they all meant.

ASF Productions' Dog Tales

- After extensive dog auditions, which are a trip in themselves, Kent Thompson had not found a Crab for the 1991 production of *Two Gents*. A staff member happened to tie her new pound-mutt briefly in the hall, and after a cold reading, a head scratch and bark check, Huckleberry was cast. He proved to be a natural on stage, playing to the audience and stealing every scene from his Launce, once even dragging the bench he was tied to across stage—ensuring all eyes were on him.
- If the owner of Pebbles Ann, the 2003 Crab, was in the house, the dog could smell her owner's perfume and paid no attention at all to her Launce; she just tried to get to "mama."

The Comedy with the Cur

W. C. Fields himself decreed that an actor should never perform with children or dogs. Any actor playing Launce in *Two Gents* can tell us why, because he appears with Crab, the only dog Shakespeare scripted into a play. Perhaps Will Kempe owned a dog which he trained for stage; perhaps there was another trained dog available—we do not know. But we do know that every director must decide what breed of dog will best serve her production of *Two Gents*. Some breeds are more tractable on stage than others, but most often shows seem to look for a dog that in some way or another looks like Launce—a particularly long-faced Launce may have a wolfhound; a short, squat Launce a bull terrier. (Or, as in the ASF tour, breed is incidental because the role is played by an actor.)

The relationship between Launce and Crab is intimate; in Launce's first scene Crab's lack of response to their leavetaking is the subject of his narrative—everyone at home is sobbing, but not "cruel-hearted" Crab.



Crab's real usefulness to the play, in addition to stealing every scene in which he appears, is manifest later in the action when Launce tells us that Crab has misbehaved. Here is the essential parallel, for the only other misbehaving character is Proteus, who is apparently behaving like a dog—in modern slang, like a "hound." Crab has grabbed a piece of meat off someone's plate and then urinated under the table; he is also said to have urinated on Silvia's dress. All of those actions are suggestive in terms of how Proteus behaves. Proteus tries to grab Valentine's girlfriend and then tries to molest her in the forest. The parallels are unmistakable.



Rodney Clark (Launce) with Pebbles Ann (Crab) in ASF's 2003 *Two Gentlemen of Verona*

Behavior we can excuse in a dog we may have more trouble excusing in a human. Launce will offer to be beaten in Crab's place, has stood in the stocks for his dog's misdoings, and still loves the cur. So we should not be surprised in the last scene if Valentine and Julia also find a way to forgive Proteus for his misdeeds. He's a cur, but they love him. Thus Launce and Crab provide a powerful and perhaps essential emotional cognate for the more difficult negotiation of audience response to Proteus and the responses of Julia and Valentine—as Shakespeare knew, we need another "dog" in this play.

A Question for the Ladies:

Does it matter how cute the dog is if it pees on your dress?



The Two Gentlemen of Verona

by William Shakespeare



...Were man
But constant, he were perfect.
—Proteus, 5.4

The Challenges of the Play's Last Scene

Shakespeare often makes his endings worth the wait, with a pile of newly dead bodies in tragedy and a rush of recognition and matrimony in comedy. But *Two Gents* torments readers and producers alike because of silence. In the end, we expect a response from Silvia, and Shakespeare scripts nothing, not a word. How does Silvia respond? With gesture, we suppose, but what gesture is not specified in the script.

In *Two Gents*, the last scene is away from the civilities of the court and in the wilds of the forest, where outlaws prey on passersby and baser instincts emerge. Valentine has agreed, under threat, to become the outlaws' leader and is in the process of reforming them. Proteus, once he enters the forest, also seems to behave like an outlaw or to let the idea of "outlawry" define his actions. The outlaws use threat of violence and weaponry to gain their "prizes"; Proteus, it seems,

in pursuing Silvia is also now willing to use violence to get what he wants. Exactly what happens Shakespeare leaves vague, after a telling exchange:

Two versions of Valentine's rescue of Silvia: top—by Angelina Kaufmann (1789); below—by Gordon Browne in a much more dynamic rendition.



Proteus: O 'tis the curse in love, and still
 approv'd,
When women cannot love where they're
 belov'd.

Silvia: When Proteus cannot love where he's
 belov'd....

Thou counterfeit to thy true friend!

Proteus: In love,
 Who respects friend?

Silvia: All men but Proteus.

Proteus: Nay, if the gentle spirit of moving
 words

Can no way change you to a milder form,
I'll woo you like a soldier, at arm's end,
And love you 'gainst the nature of love:
 force ye.

Silvia: O Heaven!

Proteus: I'll force thee yield to my desire.

Valentine: Ruffian! Let go that rude uncivil
 touch.... (5.4)

Scholars often refer to this sequence as a "rape," and that is accurate if one remembers that *rape* originally meant "forcible seizure" rather than "sexual violation," although Proteus's ultimate goal is clearly sexual, as his allusion to soldiers shows. He has become, as Valentine calls him, a "ruffian." What does he do to Silvia and for how long? Why does Julia not intervene? These are the challenges a production must explain in the acting.

Another, perhaps even larger challenge awaits Silvia, if being forcibly seized by Proteus were not challenge enough. In accepting Proteus's apology, presumably heartfelt, Valentine ends with "All that was mine in Silvia I give thee," which cues Julia's swoon. But Silvia says nothing; she has no more lines for the rest of the play. Any woman might be struck dumb by such a line—is Valentine really giving her away, as it sounds, or is he simply avowing the depth of his friendship for Proteus, as an honorable man might? Is she, like Julia, betrayed at the end? If so, there must be a double reconciliation; if she is not betrayed, only the stage action can make that clear, so look sharp!

In all his romances, Shakespeare promotes the redemptive power of forgiveness—mortal forgiveness—as the unlooked-for second chance, the gift that grants a new future. All of the young lovers in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* carry lessons and a few scars but look for a better future thanks to their ability to negotiate the final moments in the forest with forgiveness.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona

by William Shakespeare



Both young women have balconies/windows, so both plays have **balcony scenes**. In *Two Gents*, Valentine, like Romeo, has a cord ladder, but never gets to use it. Proteus stands below Silvia's balcony, wooing in song while being observed by Julia. (Above: Zeffirelli's 1968 film; below, Walter Crane, 1857)



Comparing Shakespeare's Two Verona Plays: *R&J/Two Gents*

Two Gents and *Romeo and Juliet* share a source, a city, and also many of the same patterns in building their action. The parallels to the more familiar play can illuminate the relationships and issues in *Two Gents*.

Those parallels are more noticeable since the first half of *Romeo and Juliet* is essentially a comic, bawdy commentary on love. Only with the outbreak of deadly violence does the action turn toward tragedy. *Two Gents*, while comic, has its serious turns, for whatever Proteus intends for Silvia in the forest seems neither tender nor consensual but an act of desperation.

Young Lovers

- Both plays center on young love. At first Romeo proclaims his deep, futile love for Rosaline, yet later that night he sees Juliet and forgets Rosaline. We usually see this as his discovery of true love, for Juliet requites his love as Rosaline did not.

In *Two Gents*, we meet Proteus, a young man in an agony of love for Julia, who at first also seems unresponsive. Soon, however, Julia answers his letter and pledges her love. Attendant confidants help both women.

Just then, of course, the play separates them, as *Romeo and Juliet* quickly does its young lovers. When he gets to the court, Proteus, like Romeo at the party, sees another young woman and falls instantly in love with her. In his case, though, we do not respond as positively as we do to Romeo. We see Proteus as betraying his first love and his closest friend to follow his hormones. Same action; different contexts and audience response.

- In *Two Gents* we have another young couple, Valentine and Silvia, who meet and fall instantly in love, just as Romeo and Juliet do. It is first love for them both, a deep and abiding affection. While the father of each wealthy young woman has already chosen her prospective husband, neither woman agrees. Instead, she prefers another young man, one less wealthy, but more emotionally honest.

Parents and Banishment

- Parents in both plays are blocking figures. Proteus fears their fathers' response to his love for Julia and so does not tell his father, much as Juliet, fearing her father's response, never tells him of her marriage to Romeo. Likewise, Valentine dares not tell the Duke of his love for Silvia.

Secrets complicate the young lovers' lives and worsen their plights. We see Lord Capulet rage at Juliet when he thinks himself disobeyed, and we see the Duke's comparable temper revealed in *Two Gents* when he banishes Valentine after learning of his elopement plot. Thus both plays share a banishment; Romeo goes to Mantua, where banished Valentine also intends to sojourn, although he is waylaid in the forest by outlaws.

- Yet at the end, the fathers accept their daughters' choice, Capulet grieving Juliet's death anew and the Duke of Milan off to celebrate the promised wedding.

Male Friendships

- A strong male friendship bond grounds both plays and anchors the young men's relationship to themselves as individuals and to their world. Proteus and Valentine are good friends, just as Romeo, Benvolio, and Mercutio are. In each group, one has fallen in love, leaving the other(s) to tease him. Valentine is not as cynical or sexually bawdy as Mercutio, and it doesn't take long for us to see this gentleman of Verona join Proteus in being a lover.
- Both plays also depend on male rivalries. In *Romeo and Juliet* the feud feeds such rivalries and sparks outbreaks of violence. Tybalt confronts Romeo and Mercutio, and Romeo, without knowing it, has a rival in Paris. In much the same way, Valentine, too, has an unknown rival in Proteus as well as a known rival, Sir Thurio.
- In the tragedy, the only breakdown or accusation of disloyalty in the male friendships is when Romeo steps between the fighting Tybalt and Mercutio, allowing Tybalt to wound Mercutio. This is a good deed gone wrong. In *Two Gents*, however, Proteus chooses to betray his friendship with Valentine so secretly that Valentine does not realize it until the end. He is wounded emotionally but recovers.

Young Women's Loyalty

- The young women in these two plays have great passion, great strength of mind, and great loyalty to their beloveds. Juliet dares to "die" by potion if it will reunite her with her love and later dares death itself to accomplish that desire. Julia follows her love to Milan, and Silvia dares to follow her love into banishment only to find herself prey to outlaws and finally to the ultimate social "outlaw," the betraying Proteus.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona

by William Shakespeare



R&J and Two Gents—

Points to Compare/Consider:

- role of power figure (Prince/Duke)
- role of families
- who loves whom when, and what is real love (and why)
- scheming to get what the lovers want and its result
- cause and effect of banishment
- male friendship
- women's response to various suitors/loyalty to beloved



Proteus betraying Valentine's elopement plan to the Duke (Walter Crane, 1857; is Proteus's holding his hat "behind his back" significant?)

Activities for *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*

For Discussion While Reading the Play or Post-Performance:

- 1) How does the title establish both our focus for the play and a set of values to consider?
- 2) What are the settings for the action? What is the import of each (especially in terms of the values being considered)? Does setting affect character or actions?
- 3) What are the conflicts? External? Internal?
- 4) What is the arc of development for the play's major characters, the four young lovers? What do they want and why do they want it? Who changes; how and why? Is anyone unchanged? Why?
- 5) How is the play built or structured? How do the main plot and subplot scenes interweave? How does the subplot comment on or help us interpret aspects of the main plot? How does the attendants' friendship compare to the two gentlemen's?
- 6) What is the implication of juxtaposing Julia's decision to go to Milan with Proteus's decision to pursue Silvia?
- 7) How does the play use courtly love rhetoric or Petrarchan imagery in its love talk? Do Valentine and Proteus woo the same way with the same words? If there is a difference, what does it suggest?
- 8) How and why does Shakespeare use soliloquies in this play? What do these moments of private truth reveal? How many characters soliloquize?
- 9) The last setting is the forest, filled with the last subplot characters—the former gentlemen who are now outlaws. Should they be threatening or comic? What are the implications of each choice for the action and play? What is the value and idea of outlawry in the play?
- 10) At what point in the action does Proteus himself become an "outlaw"?
- 11) If romantic comedies usually have scheming servants who serve the lovers' cause, how is it comic when a major character is a manipulative schemer about love, friendship, and loyalty?

Comparison/Contrast within *Two Gents*

- compare the two gentlemen—values, attitudes, awareness, actions
- compare the two young women they love—values, attitudes, awareness, actions
- compare their attendants—values, attitudes, awareness, actions
- compare behavior at court to behavior in the forest and what we learn from that shift (in Shakespeare's comedies, clarification often occurs in nature; is that true here?)
- compare what love is to each young lover and what effect it has on each
- compare the use of love letters, their delivery, and comments on them
- compare the use of evaluative lists in the play

Advice to Friends

- If you were Proteus's good friend and heard his soliloquies, what feedback would you give him? Is he thinking clearly? What would you say as he persists in wooing Silvia despite her rejections of him? What would you say when he pursues her to the forest?
- If you were Silvia's good friend (since she has no confidant in the play), what would you say to her about her wooers, her father, and her elopement plans? What would you say about her decision to run away? Is she being impulsive or prudent?
- If you were Julia's good friend and ended up in Milan with her, hearing her soliloquies, what would you say to her? When Proteus asks her to take him back, what would you advise? What are the issues? What would you say to Proteus if you were Julia?
- If you were another good friend (perhaps a better friend...) of Valentine, how would you respond to his elopement plan? To Proteus's support (does Valentine miss something or is Proteus's facade that good?)? When he's banished? Is it a good idea to lead outlaws?

The Two Gentlemen of Verona

by William
Shakespeare



Activities for *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* / 2

Post-Production Discussion

Thinking about Shakespeare and Genre

As with any literary label, the way we evaluate and describe a work can help us appreciate its workings and values but also can privilege some elements to the exclusion of others. We need to assess labels—to peel them back and ask questions about them—in literature as in life to see how well they actually fit.

So is the play more accurately described as a romantic comedy or as a comic romance? Which term better describes your sense of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*? Which better describes your experience of the play in performance? Is the play all about outsmarting Daddy and getting what you want? Or is it a learning curve, a maturational story about the challenges of life and love? How and why? What are the implications of your choice?



Quick List for Genre

Comedy—

- group focus
- divides and then reunites
- often family focused
- romantic comedy focuses on young lovers and their efforts to marry as they choose
- blocking fathers make that difficult
- scheming servants help the lovers achieve their goal
- usually ends with a wedding, a feast, or a dance

Romance—

- often focuses on young protagonists learning their place in the world
- a tripartite structure: integration, disintegration, reintegration, a process that involves being expelled from civilization and entering the wild (an external and an internal state)
- the protagonists are tested; they must face their fears and meet their challenges; learning is essential before they re-enter civilization, often through marriage
- they must get lost before they find themselves
- conventional elements of romance:
 - inconstancy in love or friendship
 - disguise of heroine
 - banishment, elopement, capture



Left: *Thurio* tries to assert his superiority as *Valentine* puts him down verbally (J. C. Selous); above: *The "page" Julia* and *Proteus* embrace as *Valentine*, *Silvia*, and the cast look on in a non-forest setting on J. C. Selous's title page for *Two Gents*. Even *Crab* seems to have a lady friend.

Refer to the more detailed discussion of comedy and romance on page 3 for additional information.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona

by William Shakespeare



Images for Love in *Two Gents*

- "Fie, fie; how wayward is this foolish love,
That like a testy babe will scratch the nurse,
And presently all humbled kiss the rod!
—Julia on her responses to the love letter, 1.2
- "for Love is like a child,
That longs for every thing that he can come by"
—the Duke, in setting up Valentine's exposure, 3.1
- "Love's a mighty lord,
And hath so humbled me, as I confess
There is no woe to his correction,
Nor, to his service, no such joy on earth."
—Valentine, 2.4

Activities for *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* / 3

What Is Love?

1) Renaissance poets—poets of all eras—write poems defining love. Here are some passages from Shakespeare's plays that describe love. How apt are they? Write your own paragraph or poem describing love.

- O mistress mine, where are you roaming?
O stay and hear, your true love's coming,
That can sing both high and low.
Trip no further, pretty sweeting;
Journeys end in lovers' meeting,
Every wise man's son doth know.

What is love? 'Tis not hereafter;
Present mirth hath present laughter;
What's to come is still unsure.
In delay there lies no plenty.
Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty;
Youth's a stuff will not endure.
(Feste's song, 2.3, Twelfth Night,
using the *carpe diem* theme)

- Love is merely a madness, and, I tell you, deserves as well a dark house and a whip as madmen do; and the reason why they are not so punished and cured is that the lunacy is so ordinary that the whippers are in love too.
(Rosalind, disguised as Ganymede, 3.2, As You Like It)

- How all the other passions fleet to air,
As doubtful thoughts, and rash-embraced despair,
And shuddering fear, and green-eyed jealousy!
O love, be moderate, allay thy ecstasy,
In measure rain thy joy, scant this excess!
I feel too much thy blessing. Make it less,
For fear I surfeit.
(Portia—whose wooers must pass a test her dead father devised—as the man she loves passes the test, 3.2, The Merchant of Venice)

- *Lysander:*
Ay me! For aught that I could ever read,
Could ever hear by tale or history,
The course of true love never did run smooth;
But either it was different in blood—
Hermia:
O cross! Too high to be enthralled to low.
Lysander:
Or else misgrafted in respect of years—
Hermia:
O spite! Too old to be engaged to young.
Lysander:
Or else it stood upon the choice of friends—
Hermia:
O hell, to choose love by another's eyes!
Lysander:
Or if there were a sympathy in choice,
War, death, or sickness did lay siege to it,
Making it momentary as a sound,
Swift as a shadow, short as any dream,
Brief as the lightning in the collied night
That in a spleen unfolds both heaven and earth,
And ere a man hath power to say "Behold!"
The jaws of darkness do devour it up.
So quick bright things come to confusion.
(1.1, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*)

- 2) Write the paragraph or poem in today's language that one of the main characters in *Two Gents* would write to define love. How accurately does the song "Who is Siliva?" express the feeling?
- 3) What is the best expression of love today? The best song, the best film, the best example? Why? What are the essential truths of love?
- 4) How many different things and relationships do we use the word *love* for? Family? Girl- or boyfriend? Friends? Pets? A sport? A tv show? A song or singer/group? A vehicle? A food? An activity? "I love my dog," "I love football," "I love Adele," "I love my truck," "I love ice cream," "I love shopping"?
What common thread or aspect makes all of these *love*?
- 5) The Renaissance thought love (erotic love) was impermanent and fickle. Were they right or wrong?



True love, a man and his dog—here, Launce with Crab (Walter Crane, 1857)

The Two Gentlemen of Verona

by William
Shakespeare



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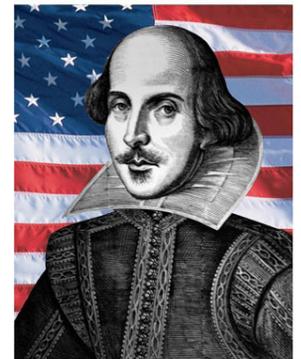
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