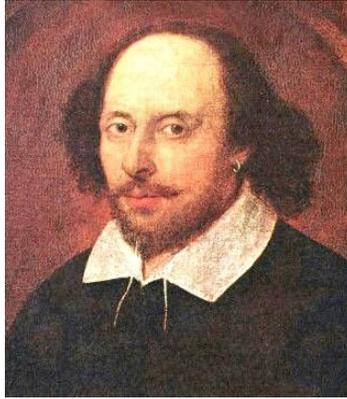


THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA

by William Shakespeare



THE AUTHOR

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was born into the family of a prosperous tradesman in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. While in his mid-teens, he was forced to leave school because his family fell into a period of poverty, so that he had only a rudimentary education. In 1582, he married Anne Hathaway, eight years his senior and already three months pregnant. The marriage produced three children in three years, but in 1585, Shakespeare left Stratford to go to London to seek his fortune in the big city.

In London, he embarked upon a career on the stage, becoming a popular actor by the early fifteen nineties. In 1591, he penned his first play, *Love's Labour's Lost*. His early plays were comedies, and show nothing of the depth that characterized his later works. His plots were borrowed from a variety of sources, both ancient and contemporary. During his career, he wrote 37 plays, three narrative poems, and 154 sonnets.

His writing brought him fame and popularity, but he continued to act as well as write (critics love to speculate about which of the characters in his plays would have been played by the author). He eventually became a shareholder in the Lord Chamberlain's Men (later the King's Men when James I ascended the throne). Most of his plays were performed at local theaters like the Rose, the Globe, and the indoor Blackfriars. When the Globe burned to the ground in 1613 (a cannon misfired during a performance of *Henry VIII*), Shakespeare retired, and died in Stratford three years later on his fifty-second birthday.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona was written around 1594, and was thus one of Shakespeare's earliest plays. His main sources appear to have been Jorge de Montemayor's *Diana*, a Spanish play about a maiden who seeks to win her lover after he leaves her for a noble lady, and the story of Titus and Gisippus, a tale about two friends, one of whom gives the other his intended bride to show that the bonds of friendship are stronger than those of love. From these Shakespeare derives the two triangles of love and friendship, Julia/Proteus/Silvia and Valentine/Proteus/Silvia,

that drive the plot complexities of the story. The play is light comedy, and contains none of the serious themes present in the later plays in which Shakespeare shows complete mastery of his craft.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Valentine - A gentleman of Verona, in love with Silvia. He is banished from Milan, becomes an outlaw, and finally regains the Duke's favor and marries his beloved.
- Proteus - His lovesick friend, who is in love with Julia. He goes to Milan, falls in love with Silvia, tries to steal her from his friend, ultimately threatens to rape her, but finally returns to Julia and marries her.
- Silvia - The daughter of the Duke of Milan, she is in love with Valentine and spurns the advances of all other suitors, including Proteus and Thurio.
- Julia - The beloved of Proteus, she disguises herself as Sebastian in order to follow her love to Milan, and finally regains his affections.
- Speed - Valentine's comic servant.
- Launce - The clownish servant of Proteus, he likes nothing better than his mangy dog Crab.
- Lucetta - Saucy maid of Julia, she makes male clothing for her mistress.
- Duke of Milan - Father of Silvia; he wants his daughter to marry Thurio because he is rich.
- Antonio - Father of Proteus.
- Thurio - A foolish but wealthy nobleman who wants to marry Silvia because of her rank.
- Eglamour - A nobleman who helps Silvia make her escape from Milan.

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

"Love is your master, for he masters you;
And he that is so yoked by a fool
Methinks should not be chronicled for wise." (Valentine, Ii, 39-41)

"O, how this spring of love resembleth
The uncertain glory of an April day,
Which now shows all the beauty of the sun,
And by and by a cloud takes all away!" (Proteus, Iiii, 84-87)

“O gentle Proteus, Love’s a mighty lord.” (Valentine, IIiv, 133)

“At first I did adore a twinkling star,
But now I worship a celestial sun.” (Proteus, IIvi, 9-10)

“Win her with gifts, if she respect not words.
Dumb jewels often in their silent kind
More than quick words do move a woman’s mind.” (Valentine, IIIi, 89-91)

“Had I been seized by a hungry lion,
I would have been a breakfast to the beast,
Rather than have false Proteus rescue me.” (Silvia, Viv, 33-35)

NOTES

Act I, scene 1 - The story opens with two friends from Verona, Valentine and Proteus, in conversation. Valentine is about to embark for Milan and encourages Proteus to accompany him. Proteus refuses, unwilling to leave the love of his life, Julia. After Valentine departs, his servant Speed comes looking for him. Proteus asks if he has delivered his letter to Julia, but can get no satisfactory response from the double-talking Speed.

Act I, scene 2 - Julia is talking to her maid Lucetta, asking her opinion of her various suitors. In the maid’s opinion, Proteus is the best of a sorry lot. Lucetta then gives her mistress Proteus’ letter, which Julia in anger refuses. After Lucetta leaves, she repents her rash, coquettish action and calls the maid back. After considerable banter she reclaims the letter, but tears it up in a fit of pique. After her maid leaves again, she pieces it together and determines to requite the lovesick poetry of Proteus with affection of her own.

Act I, scene 3 - The scene begins with a conversation between Antonio, the father of Proteus, and his servant Panthino. Both are concerned with Proteus’ lack of ambition and knowledge of the world, and Antonio decides to send him to Milan to join Valentine. Just then Proteus enters, carrying a letter he has received from Julia indicating that she returns his love. When Antonio asks him about the letter, Proteus tells him it is from Valentine and contains news about his success at court. Antonio then breaks the news that Proteus is to join him - the last thing the lovesick boy wants to hear at this particular time.

Act II, scene 1 - In Milan, Valentine has fallen in love with Silvia, the Duke’s daughter. He and Speed banter about the subject. When Silvia arrives, Valentine gives her a letter he has written for her, and she, playing the coquette, returns it and leaves.

Act II, scene 2 - Proteus and Julia, sadly preparing to part, exchange rings and promises of unfailing love.

Act II, scene 3 - Launce, the servant of Proteus, bemoans the separation from his family that is about to occur when he accompanies his master to Milan. Apparently the only member of his family who is not weeping is his dog Crab.

Act II, scene 4 - As the scene begins, Valentine and Thurio, rivals for Silvia's love, exchange insults in her company. The Duke of Milan, Silvia's father, arrives with news that Proteus has come to Milan. Valentine is pleased, and praises his friend highly before the Duke. After the Duke leaves, Proteus enters and Valentine introduces him to Silvia, who receives him kindly. The Duke favors Thurio in the contest for Silvia's hand because of his wealth and property, but Silvia loves Valentine, and the two have already pledged themselves to one another and agreed to elope. After Silvia and Thurio leave, Valentine praises Silvia highly and tells Proteus all this. The praise, however, has an unintended effect - Proteus falls in love with Silvia at his first sight of her and determines to have her in any way possible.

Act II, scene 5 - Speed and Launce discuss the status of the relationship between Proteus and Julia, but Speed cannot get a straight answer from Launce on the subject.

Act II, scene 6 - The entire short scene is a soliloquy by Proteus, who decides to cast off his vows to Julia and friendship for Valentine and seek the love of Silvia. His plot involves telling the Duke of the proposed elopement in order to get Valentine banished, then taking his place.

Act II, scene 7 - By this time Julia misses Proteus terribly, and schemes with Lucetta to go to Milan to see him. She asks Lucetta to prepare men's clothes for her so she can travel in safety. Lucetta warns her that her visit might not be welcome to Proteus, but Julia insists that Proteus is not like other men; he will surely be faithful to his vows of affection.

Act III, scene 1 - Proteus tells the Duke of the planned elopement of Valentine and Silvia that night, and asks the Duke not to reveal the source of his information. After Proteus leaves, Valentine arrives. The Duke stops him and tells him that, because Silvia refuses his command that she marry Thurio, he intends to take a second wife and disinherit her. He asks Valentine for advice on how to win the lady on whom he has fixed his eye. Valentine advises him to give her gifts, but he says she has already refused them. When Valentine tells him to press his suit despite her refusals, the Duke tells him that she is kept isolated behind a high window. Valentine then advises him to use a rope ladder. When the Duke asks him how to conceal it, Valentine says it will easily fit beneath a cloak. The Duke then tears open Valentine's cloak and finds his ladder, and along with it a letter of love to Silvia. He then banishes Valentine in a fury, telling him to leave his city immediately or face certain death. Proteus and Launce then arrive to commiserate with Valentine. They tell him that Silvia is overwhelmed with grief at the news of his banishment, but has been put in close confinement by her father. Proteus offers to take Valentine's letters to Silvia. After the two leave, Launce and Speed banter over a milkmaid with whom Launce has fallen in love.

Act III, scene 2 - The Duke is frustrated because Silvia continues to bewail the loss of Valentine and treats Thurio with contempt. He asks Proteus for advice, and he suggests that a close friend of Valentine slander him before Silvia and praise the merits of Thurio. The Duke asks Proteus to undertake the task, and he pretends reluctance but agrees, knowing that this will give him free access to Silvia's presence alone. He then advises Thurio to sing love songs underneath her window in order to win her affection.

Act IV, scene 1 - Valentine and Speed, on the way back to Verona, are waylaid by bumbling outlaws. Valentine tells them that he was banished from Milan for killing a man in a duel. They are impressed and ask him to be their captain, threatening to kill him if he refuses. He complies with their request.

Act IV, scene 2 - Proteus soon finds that Silvia spurns his advances; she remains true to Valentine while scorning him for betraying his friend and his own love, Julia. Proteus then meets Thurio and tells him that he will sing beneath Silvia's window and plead his cause (while intending to plead his own). As he sings, Julia arrives, disguised as a boy. She overhears him pleading with Silvia for her love. Silvia again spurns him, reminding him of Valentine and Julia; Proteus claims that both are dead, but Silvia sends him away, though she does promise to give him a picture of her so he can make love to that. Julia also leaves in great sorrow.

Act IV, scene 3 - Silvia arranges with her friend Sir Eglamour to meet at Friar Patrick's cell and flee to Valentine the following night.

Act IV, scene 4 - Launce enters with his dog. He had been ordered by Proteus to give the dog to Silvia as a present, but Crab had stolen food and made water under the banquet table, causing them both to be thrown out and beaten. Launce rebukes the dog, reminding him of all the beatings he has taken on his behalf. Proteus then enters with Julia, disguised as a boy named Sebastian. He calls Launce a fool, tells him to get a different dog for Silvia, then asks Sebastian, whose looks he likes for some reason, to take a ring to Silvia for him (the same ring that Julia gave him) and bring back the picture she promised him. Julia doesn't know what to do, but soon Silvia arrives. When Julia, in the guise of Sebastian, gives her a letter and the ring from Proteus, she refuses both, but gives the promised picture. She asks Sebastian about Julia, and he speaks well of her, though with becoming modesty. Julia then determines to make herself look like Silvia in order to win back her lost love.

Act V, scene 1 - Silvia meets Sir Eglamour at Friar Patrick's cell and they prepare to head off through the forest.

Act V, scene 2 - Thurio asks Proteus how his suit progresses, and Proteus deceives him about Silvia's responses. Sebastian, meanwhile, makes sarcastic asides during the conversation. The Duke then arrives and tells them that Silvia has fled with the help of Eglamour. All then pursue them into the forest, each with his own set of motives.

Act V, scene 3 - The outlaws have captured Silvia and intend to bring her to their captain. Eglamour, meanwhile, has escaped.

Act V, scene 4 - Proteus and Sebastian have rescued Silvia from the outlaws. They come near to where Valentine is hiding. Silvia still rejects Proteus' advances, and he finally threatens to take her by force. Valentine emerges and interrupts the proceedings. Proteus is startled by Valentine's intervention and promptly begs his forgiveness. Valentine accepts his apology and offers Silvia to him in token of their restored friendship. Sebastian (Julia) faints. When Proteus goes to attend to her, she revives and shows him the two rings that they had exchanged. He now realizes her

identity and apologizes for his unfaithfulness. He now swears to return to his original love, leaving Silvia to Valentine. The Duke and Thurio, having been captured by the outlaws, are now brought in. Thurio advances to claim Silvia, but Valentine threatens him with death if he so much as touches her. He quickly renounces all claim on her. The Duke, seeing Thurio's cowardice and Valentine's bravery, forgives the latter and agrees that Valentine and Silvia may wed. Valentine then asks the Duke to pardon the outlaws, which he willingly does. As all travel toward Milan, Valentine suggests that Proteus and Julia share a wedding day with himself and Silvia.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. Discuss the role played by letters in William Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. How does Shakespeare use letters, delivered and undelivered, to drive the action of the play? What do you think he might be saying about the power of writing to alter the course of events? Support your essay with specifics from the play.
2. Love and friendship are often at odds in William Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Which do you think the playwright considers most important? Why do you think so? Be sure to include in your essay discussions of incidents in the play where the two come into conflict in the relationships among the characters.
3. William Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is one of the great playwright's earliest efforts. Discuss the ways in which plot devices appear in this play that Shakespeare uses again in some of his later and greater works. Choose three such devices and compare their use in this play with the way Shakespeare uses them later.
4. In William Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, to what extent are Valentine and Proteus intended by the playwright to be foils? Discuss how their differences help to bring out the characters of both men. Be sure to use specifics.
5. In William Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, to what extent are Silvia and Julia intended by the playwright to be foils? Discuss how their differences help to bring out the characters of both women. Be sure to use specifics.
6. In William Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, to what extent may the three servants be considered foils to their respective masters or mistresses? What features of the servants help to illuminate their betters? Be specific.
7. Discuss the stylistic elements of William Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Consider the ways in which Shakespeare makes use of prose, blank verse, and rhyme in defining character and setting the tone for different scenes in the play.
8. Many critics have ridiculed the final scene of William Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* as lacking credibility. Do you agree? Why or why not? Consider in your answer the dual themes of love and friendship that dominate the play.

9. Discuss the role of parents in the lives of their children in William Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. To what extent do the attitudes of the parents and the success of the children in circumventing their wishes provide social criticism of the family values of the late sixteenth century? Support your answer with specifics from the script.
10. Compare and contrast the love stories found in William Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Give particular attention to the roles of secondary characters such as parents, friends, servants, and rivals to the lovers.
11. Discuss the role of deception in William Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. According to Shakespeare, does such sin pay off, or does deception eventually catch up with the deceiver? Support your answer with specifics from the play.
12. Discuss the role of servants in William Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. In particular, consider the extent to which those assumed to have little knowledge or power become sources of wisdom. Do the servants in the play speak greater wisdom than their masters? If so, what might Shakespeare be saying or doing through this convention?
13. In William Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, do you consider the faithfulness of the two leading women, Julia and Silvia, to their chosen men credible, especially given what Proteus did to Julia and what Valentine did to Silvia? What, if anything, would justify the stance of these two women? Do their responses portray them as strong in their fidelity or weak in their dependence? Support your conclusions with details from the play.
14. In many of William Shakespeare's comedies, the forest is symbolic of the breaking down of society's values. Compare and contrast the way this theme is handled in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and one other of Shakespeare's comedies, such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *As You Like It*.