



*Two Gentlemen  
of Verona*

Critical Essays

Edited by June Schlueter

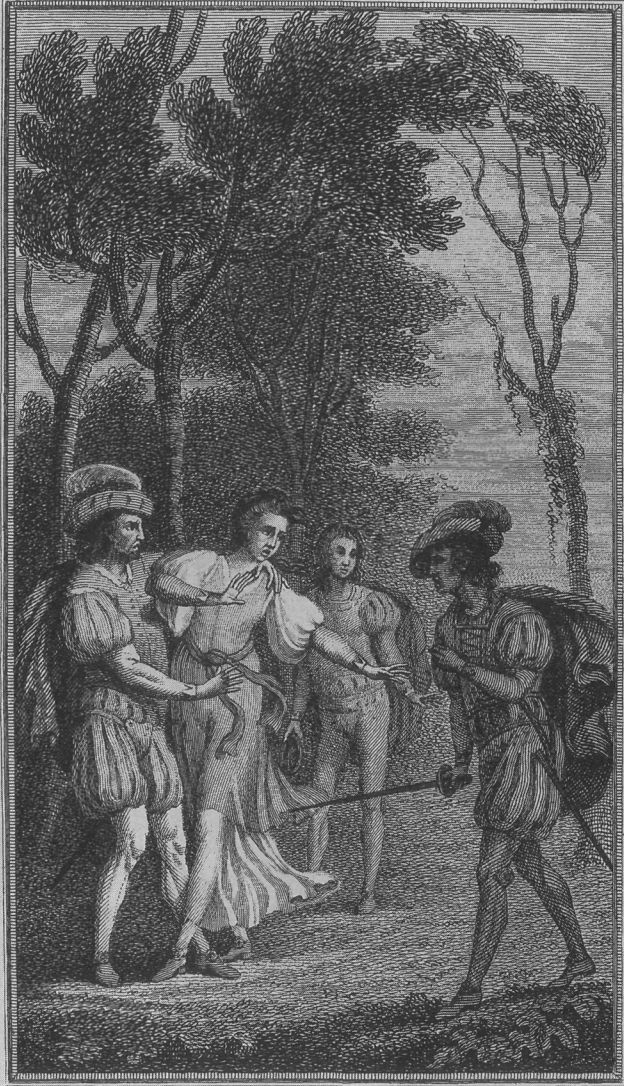
TWO GENTLEMEN  
OF VERONA

SHAKESPEARE CRITICISM  
VOLUME 15  
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TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA • OET TRBJJNA..

Act V

Scene IV



E. Edwards del.

M. Smith sculp.

*Ruffian let go that rude uncivil Touch.*

*Published according to Act of Parlt. May 1. 1774. by John Bell, Strand.*

The Two Gentlemen of Verona Act 5, Scene 4. By Edward Edwards.  
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TWO GENTLEMEN  
OF VERONA  
CRITICAL ESSAYS

EDITED BY  
JUNE SCHLUETER

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## GENERAL EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

The continuing goal of the Garland Shakespeare Criticism series is to provide the most influential historical criticism, the most significant contemporary interpretations, and reviews of the most influential productions. Each volume in the series, devoted to a Shakespearean play or poem (e.g., the sonnets, *Venus and Adonis*, the *Rape of Lucrece*), includes the most essential criticism and reviews of Shakespeare's work from the seventeenth century to the present. The series thus provides, through individual volumes, a representative gathering of critical opinion of how a play or poem has been interpreted over the centuries.

A major feature of each volume in the series is the editor's introduction. Each volume editor provides a substantial essay identifying the main critical issues and problems the play (or poem) has raised, charting the critical trends in looking at the work over the centuries, and assessing the critical discourses that have linked the play or poem to various ideological concerns. In addition to examining the critical commentary in light of important historical and theatrical events, each introduction functions as a discursive bibliographic essay that cites and evaluates significant critical works—essays, journal articles, dissertations, books, theatre documents—and gives readers a guide to the research on a particular play or poem.

After the introduction, each volume is organized chronologically, by date of publication of selections, into two sections: critical essays and theatre reviews/documents. The first section includes previously published journal articles and book chapters as well as original essays written for the collection. In selecting essays, editors have chosen works that are representative of a given age and critical approach. Striving for accurate historical representation, editors include earlier as well as contemporary criticism. Their goal is to include the widest possible range of critical approaches to the play or poem, demonstrating the multiplicity and complexity of critical response.

In most instances, essays have been reprinted in their entirety, not butchered into snippets. The editors have also commissioned original essays (sometimes as many as five to ten) by leading Shakespearean scholars, thus offering the most contemporary, theoretically attentive analyses. Reflecting some recent critical approaches in Shakespearean studies, these new essays approach the play or poem from many perspectives, including feminist, Marxist, new historical, semiotic, mythic, performance/staging, cultural, and/or a combination of these and other methodologies. Some volumes in the series even include bibliographic analyses that have significant implications for criticism.

The second section of each volume in the series is devoted to the play in performance and, again, is organized chronologically, beginning with some of the earliest and most significant productions and proceeding to the most recent. This section, which ultimately provides a theatre history of the play, should not be regarded as different from or rigidly isolated from the critical essays in the first section. Shakespearean criticism has often been informed by or has significantly influenced productions. Shakespearean criticism over the last twenty years or so has usefully been labeled the “Age of Performance.” Readers will find information in this section on major foreign productions of Shakespeare’s plays as well as landmark productions in English. Consisting of more than reviews of specific productions, this section also contains a variety of theatre documents, including interpretations written for the particular volume by notable directors whose comments might be titled “The Director’s Choice,” histories of seminal productions (e.g., Peter Brook’s *Titus Andronicus* in 1955), and even interviews with directors and/or actors. Editors have also included photographs from productions around the world to help readers see and further appreciate the way a Shakespearean play has taken shape in the theatre.

Each volume in the Garland Shakespeare Criticism series strives to give readers a balanced, representative collection of the best that has been thought and said about a Shakespearean text. In essence, each volume supplies a careful survey of essential materials in the history of criticism for a Shakespearean text. In offering readers complete, fulfilling, and in some instances very hard to locate materials, volume editors have made conveniently accessible the literary and theatrical criticism of Shakespeare’s greatest legacy, his work.

PHILIP C. KOLIN

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## INTRODUCTION

With the notable exceptions of brief commentaries by William Hazlitt (1817), Algernon Charles Swinburne (1880), and Edward Dowden (1890), the documentary record on *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* through 1900 is an editorial one, with compilers of Shakespeare's works offering occasional critical remarks on the play. In fact, it is only with Alexander Pope's 1723 edition—which followed Heminge and Condell (1623, 1632, 1663–64, 1685) and Nicholas Rowe (1707)—that critical commentary on *Two Gentlemen* appears. Tellingly, Pope identifies the crux that has most stubbornly resisted accommodation into a hospitable reading of the play, particularly in contemporary times: the ending. Of Valentine's offer of "all that was mine in Silvia" to his friend, Pope observes, it is "very odd to give up his mistress thus at once," an opinion endorsed and extended by Thomas Hanmer (1743–44), who thought it impossible "that Valentine would act so out of character and Silvia would remain silent."

Lewis Theobald, who edited the works in 1733, is generally without charity, judging the play "one of Shakespeare's worst." Pope, however, notes that "the style of this comedy is less figurative, and more natural and unaffected than the greater part of this author's," a comment which Samuel Johnson quotes and endorses in the preface to his own 1765 edition. In response to Upton's judgment that the play must "seek for its parent elsewhere," Johnson agrees that *Two Gentlemen* lacks "diversities of character" and "striking delineations of life" and is not among Shakespeare's "most powerful effusions," but he is not prepared to disown it: the play, he discovers, reflects the "language and sentiments of Shakespear." With a rhetorical restraint characteristic of criticism of the time, John Bell's 1774 edition concludes that *Two Gentlemen* "is very far from a bad piece, and much less distant from merit; tolerable judgment and genius would make it a living entertainment."

In addition to occasional commentary in editions—Charles Knight’s (1843) and W.J. Craig’s (1892), for example—the nineteenth century produced the first independent critical assessments of the play, each within a larger study of Shakespeare. Hazlitt’s *Characters of Shakespeare’s Plays* (1817) is in large part a reaction to Johnson’s preface, which remains the most influential of eighteenth-century commentaries on Shakespeare. Though Johnson had faulted the playwright for the individuality of his characters, preferring the general representation of human nature, Hazlitt celebrates the “life and variety of character” and devotes his study to individual analyses of the principal characters of the plays. Quoting extensively from Schlegel’s *Lectures on Drama* (1808), Hazlitt praises the German critic for his stimulating account of Shakespeare’s work. In his two-page commentary on *Two Gentlemen*, Hazlitt reacts to Pope’s expression of editorial despair over the play’s second scene: the eighteenth-century compiler had regretted that “This whole scene, like many others in these plays (some of which I believe were written by Shakespear, and others interpolated by the players) is composed of the lowest and most trifling conceits, to be accounted for only by the gross taste of the age he lived in.” In return, Hazlitt, though admitting that the play is “little more than the first outlines of a comedy loosely sketched in,” speaks of “passages of high poetical spirit” and “inimitable quaintness of humour” and of moments of “sweetness of sentiment and expression.” In particular, he praises the style of the play’s “familiar” parts, noting the drollery and invention of the fourth act scene with Launce and Crab.

In *A Study of Shakespeare* (1880), Swinburne similarly registers reservations, judging the play deficient in the “elegiac beauty” of the earlier plays and the “exalted eloquence” of the later, yet he sees in this “slight” play of “swift . . . execution” an “even sweetness.” And, with Hazlitt, he celebrates Launce, claiming the comic character and his dog were worth “all the bright fantastic interludes of Boyet and Adriano, Costard and Holofernes; worth even half the sallies of Mercutio, and half the dancing doggrel or broad-witted prose of either Dromio.” Dowden, too, is restrained in his praise of the play, but he credits *Two Gentlemen* with being an advance over the earlier comedies and a starting point for the romantic love story told in dramatic form, with Julia prefiguring Juliet, Viola, Portia, Rosalind, and Imogen.

The first four decades of the twentieth century saw a number of critical editions of the complete works, including George Lyman Kittredge’s in 1936. More important for criticism, individual editions of plays began to appear, inviting editors to offer extended introductions to

the play. Editions by R. Warwick Bond (Arden, 1906), John Dover Wilson and Arthur Quiller-Couch (New Cambridge, 1921), Karl Young (Yale Shakespeare, 1924), and M.R. Ridley (New Temple Shakespeare, 1935) provided valuable information and judgments on dating, sources, textual variations, performances, and authorship.

More important still, these years engendered book-length critical studies of Shakespeare's plays and individual critical essays, enabling more focused attention. Representative books included George Baker's *The Development of Shakespeare as a Dramatist* (1907), which, in a chapter on "Early Experimentation in Plotting and Adaptation," analyzes technique in *Two Gentlemen*, concluding that this early work is weak in exposition and plotting; Victor Oscar Freeburg's *Disguise Plots in Elizabethan Drama* (1915), which discusses the female page, including Julia; E.K. Chambers' *Shakespeare: A Survey* (1925), which devotes a chapter to *Two Gentlemen*, characterizing the play as an immature dramatic effort and connecting it thematically with the sonnets; G. Wilson Knight's *The Shakespearean Tempest* (1932), which devotes a chapter to the romantic comedies and speaks of sea images in *Two Gentlemen*; Caroline Spurgeon's *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us* (1935), which includes a short discussion of patterns of imagery in the play; and H.B. Charlton's *Shakespearian Comedy* (1938), which offers an extended analysis of romantic conventions in *Two Gentlemen*.

The first individual essay to concern itself primarily with *Two Gentlemen*, S. Asa Small's "The Ending of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*," appeared in *PMLA* in 1933. Taking his cue from Alwin Thaler's "Shakespeare and the Unhappy Happy Ending" (*PMLA*, 1927) (which attributes Silvia's silence to her breathlessness following the struggle), Small explores the ending of *Two Gentlemen* in the context of romantic conventions, particularly the competing claims of love and friendship. The ending, he concludes, fails artistically because it does not respect the convention: Valentine, who otherwise acts thoughtfully, as a friend/lover should, does not acknowledge his affront to Silvia.

It is clear from this sampling of early twentieth-century criticism that such assessments of the play reflected the same critical ambiguity registered in earlier centuries: critics were ready to acknowledge the poetic and dramatic effectiveness of the play's parts, but all fell short of admiration for this underdeveloped and flawed apprentice work.

The 1940s and 1950s brought translations of the complete works into Russian, Italian, Turkish, Romanian, Armenian, French, Spanish, German, Japanese, Portuguese, Frisian, Polish, and Dutch (all listed in D'Orsay W. Pearson's annotated bibliography). Some ten new editions of the complete

plays or the complete works were published, the most familiar of these being George B. Harrison's for Harcourt, Brace & World (1948) and Hardin Craig's Scott, Foresman edition (1951). Three individual editions of *Two Gentlemen* also appeared: George B. Harrison (Penguin, 1956), Charles J. Sisson (Laurel Shakespeare, 1958), and John Dover Wilson (Cambridge Pocket Shakespeare, 1958). Interesting commentary appeared in Oscar James Campbell's *Shakespeare's Satire* (1943), which suggests that Launce was the first clown role Shakespeare designed for Will Kempe; Sister Miriam Joseph's *Shakespeare's Use of the Arts of Language* (1947), which identifies rhetorical figures throughout the canon; T.W. Baldwin's structural analysis in *Shakespeare's Five-Act Structure* (1947), which analyzes Shakespeare's dramatic strategies in *Two Gentlemen* and three other early plays; Hardin Craig's chapter on *Two Gentlemen* in *An Interpretation of the Works of Shakespeare* (1948), which evaluates the play within the context of Shakespeare's later work, with special reference to his treatment of women; Harold C. Goddard's *The Meaning of Shakespeare* (1951), which proposes that *Two Gentlemen* be read ironically; Northrop Frye's still influential "The Argument of Comedy" (1948), which identifies the pattern of death and revival characteristic of "green world comedy," including *Two Gentlemen*; and Volume 1 of Geoffrey Bullough's *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (1957), which surveys and reprints sources and analogues.

Two important PMLA essays appearing in the 1950s were Ralph M. Sargent's "Sir Thomas Elyot and the Integrity of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*" (1950) and Karl F. Thompson's "Shakespeare's Romantic Comedies" (1952). Both writers attempt to reclaim the play, Sargent by comparing Shakespeare's treatment of romantic love and friendship with that of Elyot and others, Thompson by placing the play within the literary tradition of courtly love. A third essay, Thomas A. Perry's "Proteus, Wry-Transformed Traveller," which appeared in *Shakespeare Quarterly* (1954), examines the travel motif in *Two Gentlemen*, and Mario Praz's "Shakespeare's Italy," published in *Shakespeare Survey* (1954), treats the Italianate context of several of Shakespeare's plays.

Scholarship on *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and, even more so, on Shakespeare's more popular plays, burgeoned in the 1960s. Editions of the collected works included Charlton Hinman's Norton Facsimile of the First Folio (1968), as well as Alfred Harbage's Complete Pelican Shakespeare (1964); *Two Gentlemen* was edited individually by Bertrand Evans (Signet Classic, 1964), Berners A. W. Jackson (Pelican, 1964), Louis B. Wright and Virginia A. LaMar (Folger, 1964), Norman Sanders (New Penguin, 1968), George L. Kittredge (revised by Irving Ribner, 1969), and Clifford Leach

(Arden, 1969). The decade saw several new books on the comedies, among them Bertrand Evans' *Shakespeare's Comedies* (1960), Derek Traversi's *The Early Comedies* (1960), John Dover Wilson's *Shakespeare's Happy Comedies* (1962), Robert Grams Hunter's *Shakespeare and the Comedy of Forgiveness* (1965), E.M.W. Tillyard's *Shakespeare's Early Comedies* (1965), and Peter G. Phialias' *Shakespeare's Romantic Comedies: The Development of Their Form and Meaning* (1966). The freshest of these is Evans, who explores discrepant levels of awareness as a comic device, isolating moments of ignorance and their effect not simply on the progress of the play but on audience reception. Evans illustrates ways in which Shakespeare's plays exploit the audience's privileged position, or its ignorance, to achieve their effect, providing numerous examples in *Two Gentlemen*, including the circumstance of Julia's disguise.

Essays in the 1960s were legion, many reinforcing earlier observations and several focusing their analyses on the play's imagery, its neoplatonism, its rhetoric, structure, or theatrical conventions. John Vyvyan's analysis of *Two Gentlemen* in *Shakespeare and the Rose of Love* (1960) highmindedly attempts to restyle this troubling play as Platonic allegory. William Leigh Godshalk, in "The Structural Unity of *Two Gentlemen of Verona*" (1969), also tries to reclaim the play: structural recurrence, he suggests, as well as classical and mythical allusion, creates unity and a masterfully designed play. William E. Stephenson, in "The Adolescent Dream World of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*" (1966), proposes that the play might be better understood as youthful fantasy. The more practical Stanley Wells, in "The Failure of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*" (1963), willingly reconsiders critical objections to the play but concludes, without apology, that the play is flawed. Two important essays on the play's comic elements also appeared in the 1960s. Harold F. Brooks' "Two Clowns in a Comedy (to say nothing of the Dog): Speed, Launce (and Crab) in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*" (1963) identifies parodic parallels between the clown scenes and other parts of the play. And Robert Weimann's "Laughing with the Audience: *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and the Popular Tradition of Comedy" (1969) offers insights into the aside and the direct address, comic devices in *Two Gentlemen* that do not derive from the popular tradition.

The 1970s, though producing two major editions of the complete works, by Hardin Craig and David Bevington (1973, a revision of Craig's 1951 edition) and by G. Blakemore Evans (*The Riverside Shakespeare*, 1974) (as well as Denis Carey's Folio Society edition of *Two Gentlemen* [1974]), proved a lean period for *Two Gentlemen* criticism. Books on Shakespeare's comedies or the early plays—Larry S. Champion's *The Evolution of*

*Shakespeare's Comedy* (1970), Roland M. Frye's *Shakespeare: The Art of the Dramatist* (1970), John Arthos' *Shakespeare: The Early Writings* (1972), Patrick Swinden's *An Introduction to Shakespeare's Comedies* (1973), Robert Turner's *Shakespeare's Apprenticeship* (1974), and Kenneth Muir's *Shakespeare's Comic Sequence* (1979), for example—continued the motifs of earlier full-length studies and did little to rescue *Two Gentlemen* from the judgment of history. As Isaac Asimov put it in *Asimov's Guide to Shakespeare* (1970), of the early works, *Two Gentlemen* is “the most forgettable.” Alexander Leggatt offered characteristically perceptive insights on the play in *Shakespeare's Comedy of Love* (1974), arguing that *Two Gentlemen* had a comic and a rhetorical quality of modest value and noting that the various styles and points of view came together in the character of Julia; Ralph Berry, in *Shakespeare's Comedies: Explorations in Form* (1972), credited the work as an experiment in behavioral conventions; and Thomas F. Van Laan, in *Role-playing in Shakespeare* (1978), focused attention on that device in each of the plays, including *Two Gentlemen*.

The decade saw only a few essays dedicated to the play; the best of these were Inga-Stina Ewbank, ““Were man but constant, he were perfect’: Constancy and Consistency in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*” (1972), which explores the play’s inconsistencies and makes a case for connecting *Two Gentlemen* and Sonnet 40; Thomas E. Scheye, “Two Gentlemen of Milan” (1974), which examines the three worlds of the play (Verona, Milan, the forest) in terms of the characters’ search for identity; and Peter Lindenbaum, “Education in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*” (1975), which explores the motif of the perfect gentleman within the tradition of Christian fallibility.

A critical breakthrough in Shakespeare criticism came in the 1970s with a spate of publications that questioned assumptions about sexuality and gender and focused attention on Shakespeare’s women. Charles Brooks’ “Shakespeare’s Heroine-Actresses” (1960) and Anne Righter’s *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* (1962) had secured the emphasis on identity, role-playing, and theatricality that informs much contemporary criticism. In addition, the Brooks essay, in renewing interest in the disguised heroine, prefigured more theoretically sophisticated studies of gender relations, gender identity, and gender/genre ideology (see Philip C. Kolin’s *Shakespeare and Feminist Criticism: An Annotated Bibliography and Commentary* [1991]). Among the earliest of these were Juliet Dusinberre’s *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* (1975), Marianne Novy’s “Shakespeare’s Female Characters as Actors and as Audience” (1977), Robert Speaight’s “Shakespeare’s Heroines” (1977), and Kezia Sproat’s “Sisterhood in Shakespeare” (1978). These were followed, in the 1980s, by Angela Pitt’s *Shakespeare’s Women*

(1981), Marilyn French's *Shakespeare's Division of Experience* (1981), Linda Woodbridge's *Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womankind, 1540-1620* (1984), Marianne Novy's *Love's Argument: Gender Relations in Shakespeare* (1984), and an influential collection of essays that galvanized the political underpinnings of the inquiry: Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene, and Carol Thomas Neely's *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare* (1980). The collective impact of these publications on Shakespeare studies was to extend—and to revise—the field of critical play. Traditional essays on courtly conventions, thematic motifs, and structural features of the early comedies still appeared, but the moral and critical imperative of feminism became increasingly evident. For *Two Gentlemen*, this meant that Julia and Silvia began a critical upstage of their male counterparts.

The past fifteen years have brought their share of book-length studies of Shakespeare's plays and of new editions. The 1980s began with the publication of David Bevington's *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, third edition, to be followed in 1992 by the fourth. Other major editions of the complete works included Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor's Oxford Shakespeare (1986, compact edition 1988), as well as Michael J.B. Allen and Kenneth Muir's facsimile edition of *Shakespeare's Plays in Quarto* (1981). *The Illustrated Stratford Shakespeare* (1982) and *The Globe Illustrated Shakespeare*, which reprints Howard Staunton's 1857-60 texts (1983), also appeared. Among the several individual editions of *Two Gentlemen* to be published were the BBC TV performance text (1984), which contains an introduction by John Wilders and production notes by Henry Fenwick; Tony Bareham's Longman edition (1983), and A.L. Rowse's edition in the Contemporary Shakespeare Series (1986). The most helpful of the new editions is Kurt Schlueter's New Cambridge Shakespeare (1990), which provides a lengthy introduction that is especially strong on the stage history of the play.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the inventory of books on the comedies is considerable. These include Ruth Nevo, *Comic Transformations in Shakespeare* (1980); Jack A. Vaughn, *Shakespeare's Comedies* (1980); Edward Berry, *Shakespeare's Comic Rites* (1984); William C. Carrol, *The Metamorphoses of Shakespearean Comedy* (1985); Karen Newman, *Shakespeare's Rhetoric of Comic Character* (1985); Richard A. Levin, *Love and Society in Shakespearean Comedy* (1985); W. Thomas MacCary, *Friends and Lovers: The Phenomenology of Desire in Shakespearean Comedy* (1985); Robert Ornstein, *Shakespeare's Comedies: From Roman Farce to Romantic Mystery* (1986); Linda Anderson, *A Kind of Wild Justice: Revenge in Shakespeare's Comedies* (1987); David Richmond, *Laughter, Pain and Wonder:*

*Shakespeare's Comedies and the Audience in the Theater* (1990); Roger L. Cox, *Shakespeare's Comic Changes: The Time-Lapse Metaphor as Plot Device* (1991); Ejner J. Jensen, *Shakespeare and the Ends of Comedy* (1991); Anthony J. Lewis, *The Love Story in Shakespearean Comedy* (1992); and Gary Waller's edited collection, *Shakespeare's Comedies* (1991).

Recent books of special interest are David Bevington's *Action Is Eloquence: Shakespeare's Language of Gesture* (1984), which treats the stage properties and business of Shakespeare's plays, including letters, Julia's ring, and the grieving gesture in *Two Gentlemen*; Keir Elam's *Shakespeare's Universe of Discourse* (1984), a semiotic approach to the plays that provides special insight into Launce's lines; and John Drakakis' edited volume, *Alternative Shakespeares* (1985), which offers a range of rereadings, including Catherine Belsey's "Disrupting Sexual Difference: Meaning and Gender in the Comedies," which uses Julia as an example of the instability of gender categories.

Several essays particular to *Two Gentlemen* reflect a sustained interest in dramatic form, sources and analogues, and thematic motifs. These include William Rossky's "*The Two Gentlemen of Verona* as Burlesque" (1982), which suggests that the spirit of the play is that of a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta; Camille Wells Slight's "*The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and the Courtesy Book Tradition" (1983), which deepens the connection between Castiglione's *The Courtier* and the conduct of Shakespeare's gentlemen; Frederick Kiefer's "Love Letters in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*" (1986), which examines the many texts within the text; and René Girard's "Love Delights in Praises: A Reading of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*" (1989), which offers a stimulating interpretation of the play in terms of symmetry and mimetic desire. Individually and collectively, these essays suggest that new critical approaches may engender new readings.

Indeed, the section of this volume representing the 1990s, with several newly written essays included, offers evidence of renewed thinking about *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Charles A. Hallett's "'Metamorphising' Proteus: Reversal Strategies in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*" builds on his and Elaine S. Hallett's 1991 book, *Analyzing Shakespeare's Action: Scene Versus Sequence*, in its analysis of textual and performance units of action. Kathleen Campbell, in "Shakespeare's Actors as Collaborators: Will Kempe and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*," sees *Two Gentlemen* as a case study in staging, using Elizabethan stage conventions to speculate on the casting of Crab. John Timpane's "'I am but a foole, looke you': Launce and the Social Functions of Humor" deepens Campbell's perspective on the comic characters, noting how improvisational invitations are built into the text. Two

essays on performance complete this section, the first, Michael Friedman's "‘To be slow in words is a woman's only virtue’: Silence and Satire in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*" explores contemporary staging possibilities; the second, Patty S. Derrick's "Feminine ‘Depth’ on the Nineteenth-Century Stage," connects stage history and cultural perceptions of female character.

These recent essays reflect a growing interest in Shakespeare's plays as scripts for the stage. Though the stage history of *Two Gentlemen* is lean, the earliest record of its production being 139 years after its publication in the First Folio, contemporary directors, working within a postmodern critical context, have seen the play, and particularly the final scene, as a production challenge. Indeed, it was not until William Charles Macready's 1841 Drury Lane production that Shakespeare's textual ending, or at least Valentine's offer of Silvia to Proteus, was restored. The 1762 production at Garrick's Drury Lane theatre followed an adapted text by Benjamin Victor, which rearranged, conflated, and interpolated speeches and scenes and omitted the troubling gesture that continues to vex critics who would like to defend the play. Subsequent performances—Covent Garden in 1784 (with Mrs. Stephen Kemble as Silvia and Mr. Wroughton as Proteus); in Drury Lane in 1790 (by John Philip Kemble, with Mrs. Kemble and Mr. Wroughton in their 1784 roles and Mr. Barrymore as Valentine); in Covent Garden in 1808 (again by John Philip Kemble, with Kemble playing Valentine); and in Covent Garden in 1821 (apparently extravagant)—took textual liberties. In his New Cambridge edition of the play (1990), Kurt Schlueter offers commentary on each of these early productions, along with an analysis of how various textual changes affected interpretation. The casting of actors older than one would expect for this youthful play may well have influenced staging decisions: in 1762, the thirty-four-year-old Mrs. Yates played Julia; in 1784, the thirty-eight-year-old Mrs. Mattocks played Julia; and in 1808, the fifty-year-old John Philip Kemble played Valentine (with Julia played by the twenty-five-year-old Mrs. Goodall).

Macready's production, featuring Macready himself as Valentine, was taken to New York in 1846 and revived at the Haymarket, London, in 1848, by Charles Kean, with Mr. and Mrs. Kean as Valentine and Julia. The play was also produced in the nineteenth century at the Olympic Theatre (1849), by Samuel Phelps at Sadler's Wells (1857), by Osmond Tearle at Stratford (1890), and at Daly's Theatre (1895).

The first half of the twentieth century saw productions by Harley Granville Barker (1904) and William Poel (1910), the latter staged at Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree's invitation at His Majesty's Theatre, London. The Old Vic mounted productions in 1916 and 1923 (Robert Atkins) and again

in 1952 (the Bristol Old Vic in London, directed by Denis Carey), and 1956 (directed by Michael Langham). The Carey production, with John Neville as Valentine and Laurence Payne as Proteus, won the approval of the *Times* reviewer who felt it would “make audiences wonder why it is not done more often”; the Langham production, set in the nineteenth century, with Keith Mitchell as a Byronic Proteus, was hailed by Muriel St. Clare Byrne as “a producer’s and designer’s triumph with a much neglected play.”

Over the years, England’s Royal Shakespeare Company has regularly returned to *Two Gentlemen*, offering stagings in 1890, by Tearle; 1910, by Frank Benson; 1925, by William Bridges-Adams; 1938, by Iden Payne; 1960, by Peter Hall; 1970, by Robin Phillips; 1981, by John Barton (in a curious pairing with *Titus Andronicus*)—all described in Kurt Schlueter’s informative survey—and 1991, by David Thacker.

In the United States, Shakespeare festivals across the country have staged the play: the New York Shakespeare Festival, for example, in 1957 and 1994 and the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in 1957, 1974, and 1981; the Folger Theatre staged the play in 1977, The Acting Company, on tour, in 1990 (to name just a few). The Stratford Festival in Ontario, Canada, offered productions in 1975, directed by Robin Phillips; in 1984, directed by Leon Rubin; in 1988, directed by Robert Beard; and in 1992, directed by Marti Maraden. The Rubin mounting, highly controversial among Canadian critics, featured punk haircuts that developed bright pink streaks signalling when the character was smitten by love.

Even as contemporary Shakespearean directors sought new ways to mount familiar texts, BBC TV and Time Life Productions were preparing the plays for television. Under the direction of Don Taylor, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* entered the BBC Television Shakespeare series in the 1983-84 season. Though not among the more memorable of the play’s stagings, the production assumes a place within a series that has become virtually canonical for teachers of Shakespeare.

On its own, however, *Two Gentlemen* has yet to redeem itself from a largely scornful—even patronizing—critical history, which, from the start, characterized the play as the work of a crude, unpolished youth, who had thematic ideas and dramatic ideals he was as yet unable to realize. Yet productions of the play in recent years have been delightfully engaging: I think of the RSC revival of its palm court setting, a production that handled the ending more intelligently than any other I’ve seen; the punk version in Stratford, Ontario, which frankly admitted its youth; the Acting Company’s circus romp, in which Milan was dressed like the Wild West; the New York Shakespeare Festival’s production in Central Park, alongside a lake that fed

into an onstage river; and a Pennsylvania Stage Company production in which Crab, a forlorn-looking beagle, howled on cue. Those who know Shakespeare measure this early effort against his mature achievements, and the play necessarily comes up short. Still, over the centuries, grudging acknowledgments of its successes, including Launce and Crab, have punctuated the criticism, which, even in its most uncharitable form, never fully dismisses the play. As one who was prompted to compile this volume by a stubborn attraction to this early work, I retain an open eye. For despite implausibilities, inconsistencies, and a hurried and painfully sexist ending (at least to twentieth-century minds), the play in contemporary production is almost always spirited, resonant, and fun.

Those who shared in the fun of helping me prepare this volume include my husband, Paul Schlueter; Lafayette College's Skillman Library staff; and Nancy Williams, who ably—and patiently—typed what began as a manuscript twice this size. Offstage partners in this project were D'Orsay W. Pearson and Kurt Schlueter, whose annotated bibliography and New Cambridge Shakespeare introduction, respectively, gave helpful direction. To their unrivaled merit, I thus subscribe.

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PART I  
CRITICISM



EXCERPT FROM HIS EDITION OF *THE  
PLAYS OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE*  
(1765)

*Samuel Johnson*

*It is observable (I know not for what cause) that the stile of this comedy is less figurative, and more natural and unaffected than the greater part of this author's, tho' supposed to be one of the first he wrote.—Pope.*

To this observation of Mr. *Pope*, which is very just, Mr. *Theobald* has added, that this is one of *Shakespear's worst plays, and is less corrupted than any other*. Mr. *Upton* peremptorily determines, *that if any proof can be drawn from manner and style, this play must be sent packing and seek for its parent elsewhere*. How otherwise, says he, *do painters distinguish copies from originals, and have not authors their peculiar style and manner from which a true critick can form as unerring a judgment as a Painter?* I am afraid this illustration of a critick's science will not prove what is desired. A Painter knows a copy from an original by rules somewhat resembling these by which criticks know a translation, which if it be literal, and literal it must be to resemble the copy of a picture, will be easily distinguished. Copies are known from originals even when the painter copies his own picture; so if an authour should literally translate his work he would lose the manner of an original.

Mr. *Upton* confounds the copy of a picture with the imitation of a painter's manner. Copies are easily known, but good imitations are not detected with equal certainty, and are, by the best judges, often mistaken. Nor is it true that the writer has always peculiarities equally distinguishable with those of the painter. The peculiar manner of each arises from the desire, natural to every performer, of facilitating his subsequent works by recurrence to his former ideas; this recurrence produces that repetition which is called habit. The painter, whose work is partly intellectual and partly

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Reprinted from *Johnson on Shakespeare*. Ed. Walter Raleigh. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1908, pp. 72–75.

manual, has habits of the mind, the eye and the hand, the writer has only habits of the mind. Yet, some painters have differed as much from themselves as from any other; and I have been told, that there is little resemblance between the first works of *Raphael* and the last. The same variation may be expected in writers; and if it be true, as it seems, that they are less subject to habit, the difference between their works may be yet greater.

But by the internal marks of a composition we may discover the authour with probability, though seldom with certainty. When I read this play I cannot but think that I discover both in the serious and ludicrous scenes, the language and sentiments of Shakespear. It is not indeed one of his most powerful effusions, it has neither many diversities of character, nor striking delineations of life, but it abounds in γυφμαι beyond most of his plays, and few have more lines or passages which, singly considered, are eminently beautiful. I am yet inclined to believe that it was not very successful, and suspect that it has escaped corruption, only because being seldom played it was less exposed to the hazards of transcription.

ACT I. SCENE ii.

That this, like many other Scenes, is mean and vulgar, will be universally allowed; but that it was interpolated by the players seems advanced without any proof, only to give a greater licence to criticism.

ACT II. SCENE vii. (II.iv.1 37-9)

Love's a mighty lord:  
And hath so humbled me as, I confess,  
There is no woe to his correction.

No misery that *can be compared* to the punishment inflicted by love. *Herbert* called for the prayers of the *Liturgy* a little before his death, saying, *None to them, none to them.*

In this play there is a strange mixture of knowledge and ignorance, of care and negligence. The versification is often excellent, the allusions are learned and just; but the author conveys his heroes by sea from one inland town to another in the same country; he places the Emperour at *Milan* and sends his young men to attend him, but never mentions him more; he makes *Protheus*, after an interview with *Silvia*, say he has only seen her picture,

and, if we may credit the old copies, he has by mistaking places, left his scenery inextricable. The reason of all this confusion seems to be, that he took his story from a novel which he sometimes followed, and sometimes forsook, sometimes remembered, and sometimes forgot.