

2014 Study Guide for *The Two Gentleman of Verona* by William Shakespeare

Before seeing/reading the play

1. *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is thought to have been written between 1593 and 1595, making it one of Shakespeare's earliest plays. Research Shakespeare's early career. These and other websites provide information:
<http://www.britannica.com/shakespeare/article-232303>
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/537853/William-Shakespeare/232318/The-early-romantic-comedies>
2. In Shakespeare's time, the female roles were played by boys. Why was this the case? When did it change? In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Shakespeare uses for the first time a device he will use many more times: a female character disguising herself as a male. Therefore, a boy actor would have been playing a girl who was disguised as a boy. What was the effect of this layering of illusions?
<http://ise.uvic.ca/Library/SLT/stage/childactors.html>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boy_player
<http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/old-WILLA/fall96/gerlach>
3. Research courtly love. What is the function of the lady in this model of love? The function of the lover? What influence did the ideas of courtly love have on Elizabethan society? These and other websites provide information:
<http://cla.calpoly.edu/~dschwart/engl513/courtly/courtly.htm>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Courtly_love
4. In the world of the play, friendship between men has a higher value than love between a woman and a man. Why was male friendship so highly valued in Elizabethan society? What was the on-going debate regarding the value of male friendship vs. the value of love between a man and a woman? This and other websites provide information:
<http://ise.uvic.ca/Library/SLT/literature/euphuism.html>

5. A text much admired by the Elizabethans was Castiglione's *The Courtier*, translated by Sir Thomas Hoby. Find passages in *The Courtier* that describe suitable behavior for ladies, gentlemen, friends and lovers and the appropriate relationship between a courtier and his/her master or mistress. As you watch the play, notice which characters follow these guidelines and which violate them. What is the motive in each case? This and other websites provide information:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Book_of_the_Courtier

6. What is the meaning of these names from *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*: Proteus, Valentine, Silvia, Julia, Speed, Launce, Eglamour, Crab? Given your research on the meaning of the names, what do you expect these characters to be like? These and other websites provide information:
<http://www.behindthename.com/name/proteus>
<http://www.behindthename.com/name/valentine-1>
<http://www.sheknows.com/baby-names/name/sylvia>
<http://www.sheknows.com/baby-names/name/julia>
<http://www.ancestry.com/name-origin?surname=speed>
<http://www.sheknows.com/baby-names/name/launce>
<http://www.ourbabynames.co.uk/gaelicboy.php?pg=10>
<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=crab>

7. What is a rite of passage? What is "coming of age?" What are some of the characteristics associated with adolescence?
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rites_of_passage
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coming_of_age
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adolescent>

8. What is love at first sight? At first description? What qualities about another person might cause someone to fall in love at first sight or at first description?
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/3643822.stm>

9. Shakespeare often takes his characters out of the city and into the forest. What are the significant differences between these two settings? How might people behave differently in the city and in the forest? This and other websites provide information:
<http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-the-green-world.htm>

10. Research the history of women playing male roles. When did the first woman play a male role? How were these performances received? How did a female performances inform the male roles? These and other websites provide information:

<http://howlround.com/playing-shakespeare%E2%80%99s-men>

<http://hollyderr.com/tag/charlotte-cushman/>

Learn more about Shakespeare's life and times at the following websites:

<http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/SLT/index.html>

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/tudors/shakespeare_early_01.shtml

<http://www.folger.edu/template.cfm?cid=865&CFID=6230886&CFTOKEN=25420173>

<http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare.html>

<http://www.bardweb.net/man.html>

After seeing/reading the play

1. Director, Sarah Rasmussen, has cast the 2014 OSF production of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* with an entirely female ensemble. How does this decision illuminate the themes in the play? What is gained by casting the play in this way?
2. Describe the good and bad qualities of each character. Based on your research regarding the meaning of the names, how does each character live up to her or his name?
3. The principal characters are quite young. What actions do they perform that are typical of people in their late teens? How does their behavior change by the end of the play? These young characters must also learn empathy through the course of the play? How are they taught this lesson? What does it cost them to learn it?
4. What differences are there in the behavior of the young people and the members of the older generation in the play? What motivates the behavior of each?
5. Refer to your research on love at first sight. Identify the moment when Proteus falls in love with Silvia. How quickly does he fall in love? What qualities does he fall in love with? Find examples in the text to support your position. What does this say about his love for Julia?

6. Using your research on courtly love, what does it mean for Valentine and Proteus to be Silvia's "servants?" Why do they desire this relationship with her? In what ways do they take on the servant role? What do they learn by serving her? While in disguise as Sebastian, Julia becomes a servant to Proteus. Why does she take on this role? What does she learn while serving him?
7. In Shakespeare's time, men were thought to be more constant in love and women more fickle. In the play, which characters are constant in love? Which change their affections? What does Shakespeare seem to be saying about the traditional image?
8. Leaving the security of unsophisticated Verona for the unfamiliarity and polish of Milan can be considered a rite of passage, a formalized "coming of age." What do the two gentlemen hope to achieve by going to Milan? What are they expected to accomplish in Milan that they could not accomplish if they stayed home? What are the rites of passage for the young women in the play?
9. What are the values of Verona? What are the values of Milan? What makes Milan attractive to boys from Verona?
10. What distinguishes Launce's comedy? What distinguishes Speed's comedy? In what way does each use language to comic effect? In what ways does the appearance of Crab the dog add to the comedy of Launce?
11. What cultural norms is Julia violating by disguising herself as a boy? Why does she choose to do this? What does she gain by pretending to be a boy? What does she lose? Who else uses a disguise in the play?
12. What does Sylvia see in Valentine? Why does she follow him into exile? What does Julia love in Proteus? Why does she want him at the end of the play?
13. In the world of the play, friendship between men has a higher value than love between a woman and a man. How does this justify or condemn Proteus' behavior? Valentine's? How does their friendship change in the course of the play? As the play ends, what are the most important relationships? What argument does Shakespeare make for the value of friendship between men? Between women?

14. Valentine forgives Proteus' grievous behavior because Proteus repents. What does Proteus learn by having to apologize? What does Valentine learn in forgiving his friend? Julia must also forgive Proteus. What does her act of pardoning teach him about his behavior? What does she learn from pardoning him? What does Sylvia gain or lose in this situation?
15. Some of Shakespeare's most interesting heroines disguise themselves as men: Viola in *Twelfth Night*, Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*, Rosalind in *As You Like it* and Imogen in *Cymbeline*. Compare Julia to these women. What reasons does each have for assuming the disguise? How are the perceptions of each changed when she begins to see the world as a man? How eager/reluctant is each to be seen as a woman again? In each case, how successful is the disguise?
16. Refer to your research on the symbolism of the forest in Shakespeare's plays. In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Valentine and Speed go first, followed by Silvia, Eglamour, Proteus, Julia, Thurio and the Duke. Why does each character in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* flee? How do the rules change away from the city? What does each hope to accomplish in the woods? What does each in fact accomplish? What other characters are in the woods? Why are they there? If you also saw *Into the Woods*, in what ways do the characters of that play have similar journeys? How are the courts in each play similar? In what ways are they different? Compare and contrast the journey of Jack in *Into the Woods* to that of Valentine and Proteus.
17. If you are also seeing *The Tempest* and/or *The Comedy of Errors* compare the servant/master relationships in the plays. What are the similarities and differences between the relationships of Julia and Lucetta, Proteus and Launce, Valentine and Speed, the Antipholii and the Dromios, and Prospero and Ariel and Prospero and Caliban?
18. Both *The Tempest* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* involve forgiveness. If you are also seeing *The Tempest*, compare the gravity of the offenses in the two plays: the degree of suffering by the one who offends, the degree of suffering by the one who is hurt, the degree of repentance, and the ease of the forgiveness.

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