



## A Study of Love and Friendship; With Special Reference to the Shakespeare

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Date of Submission: 13-09-2025

Date of Acceptance: 27-10-2025

### Abstract -

*The impression of the play brought home to the audience and the closet lover of the play, that between life-long friends, from infancy, forgiveness is easier sought than found, in a grievous case of this nature though it would be easier found than sought amongst bare strangers or mere acquaintances. Between friendship and love, the drama closes in favour of the former. Endorsing this fact, Shakespeare apparently followed the literary conventions of the mediaeval and Renaissance period by placing friendship above love.*

**Key Words.** Love, Friendship, Valentine, Relationship -

William Shakespeare's creative career may be divided into three phases- first phase is from about 1588 to 1599, a period of early plays: second phase from 1599 to 1607 in which he wrote more tragedies than comedies. Hamlet, Othello, King Lear and Macbeth all belong to this phase. The last phase, 1608 to 1611, contains the plays we usually call 'The Romances'. The play The Two Gentlemen of Verona obviously belongs to the first phase of his dramatic career. Much of his work, in this period, comprises comedies and histories. This is a period marked by elaborate, highly ornate language, sometimes extremely stiff and formal. The plots of the comedies, which spring from this period, depend much upon conventions such as the disguise of girls of boys, mistaken identity, and sudden revelation in the last Act. The girls in these plays often demonstrate more wit and ingenuity than the men do.

"The essential of Shakespearian comedy at its best are after all", as Dowden remarks, "simple and obvious enough - a delightful story, conducted, in some romantic region by gracious and gallant persons, thwarted or aided by the mirthful god,

circumstances, and arriving at a fortunate issues." The Two Gentlemen of Verona is predominantly a romantic comedy. Shakespeare had no theory of comedy. But his genius created the 'comic' world. As they are pre-eminently the comedies of love, in the present play, disguise or mistaken identity plays an important role in the final solution of lovers' trouble.

Shakespeare seldom invented his own plots. He took well known stories from all over Europe, often combining more than one of these in the same play. The Two Gentlemen of Verona makes use of Diana of Jorge de

Montemayor, a Portuguese writer. Diana relates the love affairs of Syrenus and Diana. Many of the elements of the play are present in Diana. One notable absence is the betrayal of friendship between two young men, a theme, which Shakespeare sets in this play alongside the betrayal of love.

A tradition of 'Friendship' literature was strong in renaissance Europe and Shakespeare might have developed his Valentine - Proteus relationship from any one of a number of sources. Titus and Gisippus from Sir Thomas Elyot's Book Named The Governour (1531) would have furnished hints of a plot about the demands of friendship and of love, and some minor elements of the plot in Shakespeare's play may be found in an Elizabethan work entitled The Excellent Comedy of... Damon and Pithias (1571), by Richard Edwards. One further source may be mentioned - Arthur Brooke's poem Romeus and Juliet (1562). Hence the plot of the play is drawn from at least three different sources.

Valentine and Proteus, the two gentlemen of Verona, have long been fast friends of great understanding, disagreed heartily on one point. Valentine is about to start on his travels to see something of the world. He thought the most important thing in life was to travel and learn the



wonders of the world. But Proteus, on the other hand, thought love the only thing worthwhile. He is tied to Verona by his love for a beautiful and sweet-natured girl, Julia. Valentine travelled to Milan to seek advancement and honour in the place of the duke.

On the advice of a friend, Panthino, Antonio, the father of Proteus, orders his son to follow the example of Valentine

for being tried and tutored in the world'. Proteus obeys his father and proceeds to Milan. Valentine, in Milan, meets the Duke's daughter, Silvia, and falls instantly in love with her. Silvia too reciprocates. On arrival, Proteus finds that his friend has fallen in love with Silvia. No sooner does Proteus behold Silvia than Julia is forgotten. He gets captivated to the fascinations of the maiden. Proteus turns faithless to his friend and plots to win her away from Valentine. He learns that the Duke wishes Silvia to marry a moneyed fool, named Thurio. He sees his chance and reveals to the Duke that Valentine and Silvia are engaged in contract of marriage and intend to elope. He hopes that in the absence of Valentine, he will be able to press his suit with Silvia with success. The Duke is riled and orders immediate banishment of Valentine. Valentine takes to hurried flight and becomes the leader of outlaws in neighbouring forest. At the time of leaving Milan, Proteus gives his friend false assurance that he will be the medium of communication between Valentine and Silvia. The Duke takes Proteus for an honest man and enlists him in the endeavour to overcome Silvia's objections to Thurio. In the meantime Julia is stung to desperation at Proteus's silence and continued absence. She determines to follow him in disguise to Milan. On arrival she meets Proteus and is taken into service as a pageboy. In this capacity she is employed to carry letters and messages to Silvia. Pestered by the importunities of foolish Thurio and perfidious Proteus, Silvia, attended by Sir Eglamour, starts out to meet Valentine in Mantua. They are made prisoners by the brigands whose captain is quickly discovered as Valentine. Silvia's flight is quickly discovered. The Duke and Proteus, accompanied by Thurio and the pageboy, Julia, set off in pursuit. They fall in Valentine's hands. Duke and Thurio are captured. Proteus and the pageboy escape and in flight come upon Silvia. Proteus protests that he has come to rescue her and hopes that she will relent and accept his love. But Silvia rejects him scornfully. Maddened by this, he is on the point of using violence to her. Valentine appears on the scene and serves the situation. Julia in disguise suddenly declares herself and further

shames Proteus, Repentant Proteus returns to his first love. The Duke indignant over Thurio's cowardly renunciation of Silvia, gives his consent to her marriage with the brave and manly Valentine. And the whole party made its way back to Milan. There the two happy couples would share one wedding day and mutual joy.

"Love and Friendship", the two-dimensional theme, is the most dominating theme of the play. There is some critical dispute about which is the more important of the two. In fact, the play is never wholly concerned with friendship. But it centres on the interpretation of the final scene that is to say Valentine's renunciation of Silvia. At the beginning Proteus was already in love, and there seems little question at this stage that love is regarded as a more powerful

emotion than friendship'. "Love is your master, for he masters you" (I, i, L.39), asserts Valentine to Proteus. It is the change of direction in Proteus' love not the falling in love that strikes at the heart of their friendship. "Built on the commonplace Renaissance theme of friendship verses love, says Larry. S. Champion, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is a veritable repository of stock romantic motifs and characters.<sup>2</sup>

Some critics maintain that love is the main theme of the play. Love between man and man is opposed to love between man and woman. It is a love tangle in a triangular sexual relationship - two men loving one another, so that either is neither, as both are one, do come to love with the same girl, the girl, however loving only one of them... the play shows that love of woman for man and the love of man for woman touches the trio with the magic wand and so conquers all in the end after many tribulations. Shakespeare brings in the play that true love between man and woman overrides all love relations, including the sacred friendly love between man and man, and invariably leads the lovers to the alter. Shakespeare illustrates this love between two men and between two women in contradiction with love between man and woman and thus leads to the conflict between love and friendship in the play.

The keynote of the theme of love is struck by the story of Hero and Leander, "How young Leander cross'd the Hellespont." (I, i, 22) This exemplifies Valentine and Proteus. In the beginning, Proteus is seen in the grip of love. Julia has metamorphosed him - made him neglect his studies and lose his time. He wars with good counsel and sets the world at naught. The omnipotence of love has made him irresponsible. Valentine, on the other hand, is heart-free and in the beginning, he scoffs at love. He considers love as 'shapeless idleness' and



waste of time. He goes to the Milanese Court and becomes enamoured of Silvia's charm. Here he admits the omnipotence of love-"O gentle Proteus, Love's a mighty Lord' (II, iv, 131), Valentine confesses to his friend. He is now ready to give up all the pleasures of the world for the sake of love (Silvia). He can now fast upon 'the naked name of love'.

The two fathers - Antonio and the Duke interrupt the smooth courses of love. Antonio sends away his son to Milan at short notice. In the new surrounding of the Milanese Court, Proteus loses his head. The instant he sees Silvia, he falls under the spell of her charm. He woos Valentine's mistress and betrays his trustful friend. The Duke becomes very angry upon Valentine and ranks him a traitor. He desires to trust Silvia into the arms of rich, though foolish, Thurio. Consequently, the Duke discovered Valentine's plot of elopement and he is sent to exile.

The order of banishment stuns Valentine. 'Banished from her is self from self', he asserts with agonised heart. ! Subsequently, he goes to the forest and becomes the captain of outlaws. Even there he tunes his distresses to "the nightingale's complaining notes."

Julia, the mistress of Proteus cannot endure the pain and misery of separation from her lover. She puts on a masculine disguise and undertakes an un-staid' journey to Milan to seek out her lover. In Milan, she finds that Proteus has turned false and faithless. She becomes a page to her perjured lover and makes herself the instrument of his perfidy to win back a lost affection. The omnipotence of love makes her daring and reckless.

Silvia escapes to the forest to meet her lover, Valentine. She endures all the sufferings of the way for the sake of love. There she gets captured by the outlaws but does not lose her nerves. Proteus comes in hot pursuit of her in the forest. Crazy in love, Proteus goes to the extent of using violence on her to make her yield to his desire. Valentine intervenes, and blames Proteus' betrayal. Proteus then realises his mad folly and returns to his old love. Valentine and Silvia are again united with the blessing of the Duke.

Even the foolish servant, Launce, does not escape the infection of love. He is in love with a milkmaid and decides to marry her. The empty-headed Thurio cannot resist the influence of love. Knowing that Silvia hates him, he follows her to the forest and does not hesitate to claim her as his own.

Thus, turning the play onto the theme of love, as Herald remarks, "The theme of Verona is love's omnipotence and irresponsibility". G. S.

Sassoon comments, "Shakespeare is fitting a play into the pattern of the ancient debate of chivalry and the court of Love, of Friendship against Love,"

Though the theme of the play is love, romance and marriage, yet the fact is that the theme of friendship does get better emphasis. It is quite evident in the last scene where Valentine resigns Silvia to Proteus just for the sake of friendship. About the last scene, Masefield has this gloss to offer: "Shakespeare emphasises the highest virtue of penitence leading to forgiveness."

And that my love may appear plain and free,  
All that was mine in Silvia, I give thee. (V, iv, 77)  
This resignation of Silvia to Proteus is unnatural being not in keeping with the nature of true love.

According to Tony Bereham, "a tradition of 'friendship' literature was strong in Renaissance Europe and Shakespeare might have developed his Valentine - Proteus relationship by putting friendship above love."

This is quite apparent from the closing action of the play, which veers around Valentine sacrificing Silvia to Proteus. It looks odd and quite unnatural and is indeed an extreme cruelty to commonsense. Valentine, who is an ardent lover of Silvia, should never have resigned his love to his false friend who has tried to ravish her just a moment ago. Francis Bacon retrospectively supports this psychological principle in his essay "Of Friendship" and says, "we are commanded to forgive our enemies; but not our friends who have betrayed our trust." It also looks extraordinary that Proteus should quickly change his mind and 'spy more fresh in Julia's face' and returns to his old love. It is also difficult to explain the silence of Silvia when she is being bandied about between two friends. Richard Garnet remarks that Valentine's momentary resignation of his mistress to Proteus is an instance, unique in Shakespeare, of untruth of Nature. But to Masefield, Valentine's resignation of Silvia to Proteus is "as wise with delicate tact"<sup>5</sup>

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Competent critics have offered different explanations for the typical conduct of the two gentle men and their mistresses. "Frailty thy name is woman" (Hamlet) is Shakespeare's view on woman. While considering Valentine's renunciation of Silvia, it has been suggested that Valentine suspected some frailty in Silvia and acted subsequently as he did. But this suggestion seems untenable in view of her protest of love for him (V, iv, 36-37), when Proteus attempted to make her yield to his desire. Also, this is inconsistent with Valentine's manly intervention at precisely the right



moment to rescue her from the hands of Proteus. It is also inconsistent with Valentine's emphatic interest in her later on, when Thurio catches her hand and claims that she is his own, he says, "Thurio, give back, or else embrace thy death (V, iv, 125).

Zupitza, a famous Shakespearean critic, thought that such a sacrifice made to Proteus was only a way of showing that Proteus was good enough to inspire unselfishness in Valentine, and could not be unworthy of Julia. But this argument is also not convincing.

Dowden suggests that Shakespeare might sacrifice truth and nature to a literary convention of the mediaeval and Renaissance period. The writers that period followed a literary convention of placing friendship above love. None I can doubt that this convention influenced Shakespeare strongly. The study of Shakespeare's sonnets, particularly Nos. 40 and 42, and the claims of friendship and love in *The Merchant of Venice* reveal the influence of this convention. In the end, Shakespeare comes out with a conventional 'denouement' and closes the account with a tag of doggerel.

The Cambridge editors hold that the last scene is a piece of theatre botch work patched upon the original, as the first performance was found to be ineffective. To invent a solution the final scene was rewritten, partly by Shakespeare. They also suggest that the couplet and Julia's swoon are 'other man's work'. But this argument does not solve this difficulty. It only shows that this scene is a bad one.

R. W. Bond, the Arden Editor, accepts the renunciation of Silvia to Proteus as a handsome concession to the repentant friend. It is also a piece of rhetoric at an impassioned moment, well understood by all except Julia. The words used by the writer are intentionally ambiguous:

And that my love may appear plain and free  
All that was mine in Silvia I give thee. (V, iv, 77) In her overwrought imagination Julia misinterprets the words, and faints: Shakespeare secures Julia's swoon by putting these ambiguous words into Valentine's mouth. This argument is interesting but seems rather far-fetched.

Charles Lamb thought that Valentine's renunciation was "a sudden fight of heroism". Valentine was deeply touched by the repentance of Proteus and made a gesture of heroic sacrifice. S. C. Sen Gupta is in favour of this explanation. He points out that the romantic Valentine introduced Proteus to Silvia as a 'fellow servant' (II, iv, 106) and it is quite in character that, in a fit of generosity, he should renounce his lady-love in favour of his 'fellow servant'. Lamb adds that Julia hears this

strange offer and fears that Proteus would not be able with his now found virtue to refuse Silvia. Julia faints and all are employed in recovering her. In this confused situation Silvia has no time and opportunity to offend at being thus made over to Proteus.

Shakespeare was a playwright and knew what would be effective on the stage. He was much more concerned about the effect of his play upon spectators than the judgement of readers in the last scene. So the most reasonable interpretation is that when Shakespeare wrote these lines his principal anxiety was to finish the play as quickly as possible. To the problem of Valentine's resignation of Silvia to Proteus, the various eminent critics have variably reacted, but none kindly enough. This is because the critics have not allowed themselves to be wholly led by Shakespeare, who alone is the best commentary on himself, for, "others abide your question thou art free."

Shakespeare has given to his audience all that possibly he could offer as dramatic data: that the resignation of Silvia to Proteus is unnatural being not in keeping with the nature of true love. Proteus says to Silvia:

I'll woo you like a soldier, at arms' end,

And love you, 'gainst the nature of love-force ye. (V, iv, 55-56)

And-"I'll force thee to my desire" (V, iv, 59). Valentine, on hearing Proteus making aggressive love to Silvia, murmurs in a state of desperation, as the ground seems sinking beneath his feet:

How like a dream is this I see and hear

Love lend me patience to forbear a while. (V, iv, 26-27) Here lies a little confusion. Which love? Love for Proteus of course. But when he sees Proteus gripping Silvia's arm to force her to cater to the urge of lust, his "bear awhile" outruns love-lent patience. Valentine emerges from hiding and lets out a stream of self-pitying tirade which, however, has an unmistakable undercurrent of the theatrical.' However that be, the impression of the play brought home to the audience and the closet lover of the play, that between life-long friends, from infancy, forgiveness is easier sought than found, in a grievous case of this nature though it would be easier found than sought amongst bare strangers or mere acquaintances.

Between friendship and love, the drama closes in favour of the former. Endorsing this fact, Shakespeare apparently followed the literary conventions of the mediaeval and Renaissance period by placing friendship above love. "Shakespeare, keenly sensitive to the absurdities and



vices of Elizabethan literature, was in this play gunning for the literary convention which sets friendship between men above the love of man for woman.

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