The articles in this study guide are not meant to mirror or interpret any productions at the Utah Shakespeare Festival. They are meant, instead, to be an educational jumping-off point to understanding and enjoying the plays (in any production at any theatre) a bit more thoroughly. Therefore the stories of the plays and the interpretative articles (and even characters, at times) may differ dramatically from what is ultimately produced on the Festival’s stages.

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Shakespeare: Words, Words, Words
By S. S. Moorty

“No household in the English-speaking world is properly furnished unless it contains copies of the Holy Bible and of The Works of William Shakespeare. It is not always thought that these books should be read in maturer years, but they must be present as symbols of Religion and Culture” (G.B. Harrison, Introducing Shakespeare. Rev. & Exp. [New York: Penguin Books, 1991], 11).

We, the Shakespeare-theater goers and lovers, devotedly and ritualistically watch and read the Bard’s plays not for exciting stories and complex plots. Rather, Shakespeare’s language is a vital source of our supreme pleasure in his plays. Contrary to ill-conceived notions, Shakespeare’s language is not an obstacle to appreciation, though it may prove to be difficult to understand. Instead, it is the communicative and evocative power of Shakespeare’s language that is astonishingly rich in vocabulary—about 29,000 words—strikingly presented through unforgettable characters such as Hamlet, Macbeth, Lear, Othello, Rosalind, Viola, Iago, Shylock, etc.

In the high school classroom, students perceive Shakespeare’s language as “Old English.” Actually Shakespeare’s linguistic environment, experience, and exposure was, believe it or not, closer to our own times than to Chaucer’s, two hundred years earlier. Indeed, the history and development of the English language unfolds as follows: Old English, 449-1100; Middle English 1100-1500; and Modern English 1500-present. Shakespeare was firmly in the Modern English period.

At the time Shakespeare wrote, most of the grammatical changes from Old and Middle English had taken place; yet rigid notions about “correctness” had not yet been standardized in grammars. The past five centuries have advanced the cause of standardized positions for words; yet the flexible idiom of Elizabethan English offered abundant opportunities for Shakespeare’s linguistic inventiveness. Ideally it is rewarding to study several facets of Shakespeare’s English: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, wordplay, and imagery. The present overview will, however, be restricted to “vocabulary.”

To Polonius’s inquisitive question “What do you read, my lord?” (Hamlet, 2.2.191) Hamlet nonchalantly and intriguingly aptly replies: “Words, words, words” (2.2.192). This many-splendored creation of Shakespeare’s epitomizes the playwright’s own fascination with the dynamic aspect of English language, however troubling it may be to modern audiences and readers. Shakespeare added several thousand words to the language, apart from imparting new meanings to known words. At times Shakespeare could teasingly employ the same word for different shades of thought. Barowne’s single line, “Light, seeking light, doth light of light beguile” (Love’s Labour’s Lost, 1.1.77), as Harry Levin in his General Introduction to The Riverside Shakespeare (9) explains, “uses ‘light’ in four significations: intellect, seeking wisdom, cheats eyesight out of daylight.”

Another instance: Othello as he enters his bedroom with a light before he smothers his dear, innocent Desdemona soliloquizes: “Put out the light, and then put out the light” (Othello, 5.2.7) Here ‘light’ compares the light of Othello’s lamp or torch to Desdemona’s ‘light’ of life.

In both instances, the repeated simple ordinary word carries extraordinary shades of meaning. “Usually such a tendency in a Shakespeare play indicates a more or less conscious thematic intent.” (Paul A. Jorgensen, Redeeming Shakespeare’s Words [Berkeley and Los Angeles; University of California Press, 1962], 100).
Living in an age of the “grandiose humanistic confidence in the power of the word” (Levin 9), Shakespeare evidently felt exuberant that he had the license to experiment with the language, further blessed by the fact that “there were no English grammars to lay down rules or dictionaries to restrict word-formation. This was an immeasurable boon for writers” (Levin 10). Surely Shakespeare took full advantage of the unparalleled linguistic freedom to invent, to experiment with, and to indulge in lavishly.

However intriguing, captivating, mind-teasing, beguiling, and euphonious, Shakespeare’s vocabulary can be a stumbling block, especially for readers. “In the theater the speaking actor frequently relies on tone, semantic drive, narrative context, and body language to communicate the sense of utterly unfamiliar terms and phrases, but on the page such words become more noticeable and confusing” (Russ McDonald, The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare: An Introduction with Documents [Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin’s Press, 1996], 184).

Unlocking the meaning of Shakespeare’s vocabulary can prove to be an interesting challenge. Such words include those which “have dropped from common use like ‘bisson’ (blind) or those that the playwright seems to have created from Latin roots . . . but that did not catch on, such as conspectuities’ (eyesight or vision) or ‘unplasive’ (doubtful or disapproving). Especially confusing are those words that have shifted meaning over the intervening centuries, such as ‘proper’ (handsome), ‘nice’ (squeamish or delicate), ‘silly’ (innocent), or ‘cousin’ (kinsman, that is, not necessarily the child of an aunt or uncle” (McDonald 184). Because of semantic change, when Shakespeare uses ‘conceit,’ he does not mean ‘vanity,’ as we might understand it to be. Strictly following etymology, Shakespeare means a ‘conception’ or ‘notion,’ or possibly the ‘imagination’ itself.

Perhaps several Shakespeare words “would have been strange to Shakespeare’s audience because they were the products of his invention or unique usage. Some words that probably originated with him include: ‘auspicious,’ ‘assassination,’ ‘disgraceful,’ ‘dwindle,’ ‘savagery.’” Certainly a brave soul, he was “a most audacious inventor of words.” To appreciate and understand Shakespeare’s English in contrast to ours, we ought to suspend our judgment and disbelief and allow respect for the “process of semantic change, which has been continually eroding or encrusting his original meaning” (Levin 8).

Shakespeare’s vocabulary has received greater attention that any other aspect of his language. Perhaps this is because it is the most accessible with no burdensome complications. Whatever the cause, Shakespeare’s language will forever be challenging and captivating.
Not of an Age, but for All Mankind

By Douglas A. Burger

After an enormous expenditure of money and effort, Shakespeare’s Globe Theater has risen again, four centuries later, on London’s south bank of the Thames. Designed as a faithful reconstruction of the original, it uses the building methods of the time and traditional materials (oak timbers, plaster walls, wooden pegs, water-reeds for thatching the roof). From above, the shape seems circular (actually, it is twenty-six sided) with three covered tiers of seats surrounding a central area which is open to the sky. There the “groundlings” may stand to see the action taking place on the stage, which occupies almost half of the inner space. There are no artificial lights, no conventional sets, no fancy rigging. Seeing a Shakespeare play in the afternoon sunlight at the new Globe must come very close to the experience of those early-day Londoners, except, of course, that we in the twentieth-century behave better. We don’t yell insults at the actors, spit, or toss orange peels on the ground. We also smell better: the seventeenth-century playwright, Thomas Dekker, calls the original audience “Stinkards . . . glued together in crowds with the Streams of strong breath” (Shakespeare’s Globe: The Guide Book [London: International Globe Center, 1996], 42). And we are safer. The first Globe burned to the ground. The new theater has more exits, fire-retardant insulation concealed in the walls, and water-sprinklers that poke through the thatch of the roof.

That hard-headed capitalists and officials would be willing, even eager, to invest in the project shows that Shakespeare is good business. The new Globe is just one example. Cedar City’s own Utah Shakespeare Festival makes a significant contribution to the economy of southern Utah. A sizable percentage of all the tourist dollars spent in England goes to Shakespeare’s birthplace, Stratford-on-Avon, which would be a sleepy little agricultural town without its favorite son. The situation seems incredible. In our whole history, what other playwright could be called a major economic force? Who else—what single individual—could be listed along with agriculture, mining, and the like as an industry of a region? Why Shakespeare?

The explanation, of course, goes further than an attempt to preserve our cultural traditions. In an almost uncanny way, Shakespeare’s perceptions remain valuable for our own understandings of life, and probably no other writer remains so insightful, despite the constantly changing preoccupations of audiences over time.

The people of past centuries, for example, looked to the plays for nuggets of wisdom and quotable quotes, and many of Shakespeare’s lines have passed into common parlance. There is an old anecdote about the woman, who on first seeing Hamlet, was asked how she liked the play. She replied, “Oh, very nice, my dear, but so full of quotations.” She has it backwards of course. Only the King James Bible has lent more “quotations” to English than Shakespeare.

Citizens of the late nineteenth century sought in the plays for an understanding of human nature, valuing Shakespeare’s character for traits that they recognized in themselves and in others. The fascination continues to the present day as some of our best-known movie stars attempt to find new dimensions in the great characters: Mel Gibson and Kenneth Branagh in Hamlet, Lawrence Fishburn in Othello, Leonardo de Caprio in Romeo + Juliet, to name just a few.

Matters of gender, class, and race have preoccupied more recent audiences. Beatrice sounds a rather feminist note in Much Ado about Nothing in her advice to her cousin about
choosing a husband: Curtsy to your father, but say “Father, as it please me.” Coriolanus presents a recurring dilemma about class relations in its explorations of the rights and wrongs involved in a great man’s attempt to control the masses. Racial attitudes are illuminated in Othello, where the European characters always mark the hero by his race, always identify him first as the “Moor,” are always aware of his difference. London’s new/old Globe is thus a potent symbol of the plays’ continuing worth to us. The very building demonstrates the utter accuracy of the lines written so long ago that Shakespeare is not “of an age” but “for all time.”
Elizabeth's England

In his entire career, William Shakespeare never once set a play in Elizabethan England. His characters lived in medieval England (Richard II), France (As You Like It), Vienna (Measure for Measure), fifteenth-century Italy (Romeo and Juliet), the England ruled by Elizabeth's father (Henry VIII) and elsewhere—anywhere and everywhere, in fact, except Shakespeare’s own time and place. But all Shakespeare’s plays—even when they were set in ancient Rome—reflected the life of Elizabeth's England (and, after her death in 1603, that of her successor, James I). Thus, certain things about these extraordinary plays will be easier to understand if we know a little more about Elizabethan England.

Elizabeth's reign was an age of exploration—exploration of the world, exploration of man’s nature, and exploration of the far reaches of the English language. This renaissance of the arts and sudden flowering of the spoken and written word gave us two great monuments—the King James Bible and the plays of Shakespeare—and many other treasures as well.

Shakespeare made full use of the adventurous Elizabethan attitude toward language. He employed more words than any other writer in history—more than 21,000 different words appear in the plays—and he never hesitated to try a new word, revive an old one, or make one up. Among the words which first appeared in print in his works are such everyday terms as “critic,” “assassinate,” “bump,” “gloomy,” “suspicious,” “and hurry;” and he invented literally dozens of phrases which we use today: such un-Shakespeare expressions as “catching a cold,” “the mind’s eye,” “elbow room,” and even “pomp and circumstance.”

Elizabethan England was a time for heroes. The ideal man was a courtier, an adventurer, a fencer with the skill of Tybalt, a poet no doubt better than Orlando, a conversationalist with the wit of Rosalind and the eloquence of Richard II, and a gentleman. In addition to all this, he was expected to take the time, like Brutus, to examine his own nature and the cause of his actions and (perhaps unlike Brutus) to make the right choices. The real heroes of the age did all these things and more.

Despite the greatness of some Elizabethan ideals, others seem small and undignified, to us; marriage, for example, was often arranged to bring wealth or prestige to the family, with little regard for the feelings of the bride. In fact, women were still relatively powerless under the law.

The idea that women were “lower” than men was one small part of a vast concern with order which was extremely important to many Elizabethans. Most people believed that everything, from the lowest grain of sand to the highest angel, had its proper position in the scheme of things. This concept was called “the great chain of being.” When things were in their proper place, harmony was the result; when order was violated, the entire structure was shaken.

This idea turns up again and again in Shakespeare. The rebellion against Richard II brings bloodshed to England for generations; Romeo and Juliet’s rebellion against their parents contributes to their tragedy; and the assassination in Julius Caesar throws Rome into civil war.

Many Elizabethans also perceived duplications in the chain of order. They believed, for example, that what the sun is to the heavens, the king is to the state. When something went wrong in the heavens, rulers worried: before Julius Caesar and Richard II were overthrown, comets and meteors appeared, the moon turned the color of blood, and other bizarre astronomical phenomena were reported. Richard himself compares his fall to a premature setting of the sun; when he descends from the top of Flint Castle to meet the conquering
Bolingbroke, he likens himself to the driver of the sun’s chariot in Greek mythology: “Down, down I come, like glist’ring Phaeton” (3.3.178).

All these ideas find expression in Shakespeare’s plays, along with hundreds of others—most of them not as strange to our way of thinking. As dramatized by the greatest playwright in the history of the world, the plays offer us a fascinating glimpse of the thoughts and passions of a brilliant age. Elizabethan England was a brief skyrocket of art, adventure, and ideas which quickly burned out; but Shakespeare’s plays keep the best parts of that time alight forever.

(Adapted from “The Shakespeare Plays,” educational materials made possible by Exxon, Metropolitan Life, Morgan Guaranty, and CPB.)
History Is Written by the Victors
From Insights, 1994

William Shakespeare wrote ten history plays chronicling English kings from the time of the Magna Carta (King John) to the beginning of England's first great civil war, the Wars of the Roses (Richard II) to the conclusion of the war and the reuniting of the two factions (Richard III), to the reign of Queen Elizabeth's father (Henry VIII). Between these plays, even though they were not written in chronological order, is much of the intervening history of England, in the six Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VI plays.

In writing these plays, Shakespeare had nothing to help him except the standard history books of his day. The art of the historian was not very advanced in this period, and no serious attempt was made to get at the exact truth about a king and his reign. Instead, the general idea was that any nation that opposed England was wrong, and that any Englishman who opposed the winning side in a civil war was wrong also.

Since Shakespeare had no other sources, the slant that appears in the history books of his time also appears in his plays. Joan of Arc opposed the English and was not admired in Shakespeare's day, so she is portrayed as a comic character who wins her victories through witchcraft. Richard III fought against the first Tudor monarchs and was therefore labeled in the Tudor histories as a vicious usurper, and he duly appears in Shakespeare's plays as a murdering monster.

Shakespeare wrote nine of his history plays under Queen Elizabeth. She did not encourage historical truthfulness, but rather a patriotism, an exultant, intense conviction that England was the best of all possible countries and the home of the most favored of mortals. And this patriotism breathes through all the history plays and binds them together. England's enemy is not so much any individual king as the threat of civil war, and the history plays come to a triumphant conclusion when the threat of civil war is finally averted, and the great queen, Elizabeth, is born.

Shakespeare was a playwright, not a historian, and, even when his sources were correct, he would sometimes juggle his information for the sake of effective stagecraft. He was not interested in historical accuracy; he was interested in swiftly moving action and in people. Shakespeare's bloody and superb king seems more convincing than the real Richard III, merely because Shakespeare wrote so effectively about him. Shakespeare moved in a different world from that of the historical, a world of creation rather than of recorded fact, and it is in this world that he is so supreme a master.
Mr. Shakespeare, I Presume
by Diana Major Spencer From Insights, 1994

Could the plays known as Shakespeare’s have been written by a rural, semi-literate, uneducated, wife-deserting, two-bit actor who spelled him name differently each of the six times he wrote it down? Could such a man know enough about Roman history, Italian geography, French grammar, and English court habits to create *Antony and Cleopatra*, *The Comedy of Errors*, and *Henry V*? Could he know enough about nobility and its tenuous relationship to royalty to create *King Lear* and *Macbeth*?

Are these questions even worth asking? Some very intelligent people think so. On the other hand, some very intelligent people think not. Never mind quibbles about how a line should be interpreted, or how many plays Shakespeare wrote and which ones, or which of the great tragedies reflected personal tragedies. The question of authorship is “The Shakespeare Controversy.”

Since Mr. Cowell, quoting the deceased Dr. Wilmot, cast the first doubt about William of Stratford in an 1805 speech before the Ipswich Philological Society, nominees for the “real author” have included philosopher Sir Francis Bacon, playwright Christopher Marlowe, Queen Elizabeth I, Sir Walter Raleigh, and the earls of Derby, Rutland, Essex, and Oxford—among others.

The arguments evoke two premises: first, that the proven facts about the William Shakespeare who was christened at Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon on April 26, 1564 do not configure a man of sufficient nobility of thought and language to have written the plays; and, second, that the man from Stratford is nowhere concretely identified as the author of the plays. The name “Shakespeare”—in one of its spellings—appears on early quartos, but the man represented by the name may not be the one from Stratford.

One group of objections to the Stratford man follows from the absence of any record that he ever attended school—in Stratford or anywhere else. If he were uneducated, the arguments go, how could his vocabulary be twice as large as the learned Milton’s? How could he know so much history, law, or philosophy? If he were a country bumpkin, how could he know so much of hawking, hounding, courtly manners, and daily habits of the nobility? How could he have traveled so much, learning about other nations of Europe in enough detail to make them the settings for his plays?

The assumptions of these arguments are that such rich and noble works as those attributed to a playwright using the name “Shakespeare” could have been written only by someone with certain characteristics, and that those characteristics could be distilled from the “facts” of his life. He would have to be noble; he would have to be well-educated; and so forth. On these grounds the strongest candidate to date is Edward de Vere, seventeenth earl of Oxford.

A debate that has endured its peaks and valleys, the controversy catapulted to center stage in 1984 with the publication of Charlton Ogburn’s *The Mysterious William Shakespeare*. Ogburn, a former army intelligence officer, builds a strong case for Oxford—if one can hurdle the notions that the author wasn’t Will Shakespeare, that literary works should be read autobiographically, and that literary creation is nothing more than reporting the facts of one’s own life. “The Controversy” was laid to rest—temporarily, at least—by justices Blackmun, Brennan, and Stevens of the United States Supreme Court who, after hearing evidence from both sides in a mock trial conducted September 25, 1987 at American University in Washington, D.C., found in favor of the Bard of Avon.

Hooray for our side!
Musical development was part of the intellectual and social movement that influenced all England during the Tudor Age. The same forces that produced writers like Sir Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, John Donne, and Francis Bacon also produced musicians of corresponding caliber. So numerous and prolific were these talented and imaginative men—men whose reputations were even in their own day firmly established and well founded—that they have been frequently and aptly referred to as a nest of singing birds.

One such figure was Thomas Tallis, whose music has officially accompanied the Anglican service since the days of Elizabeth I; another was his student, William Boyd, whose variety of religious and secular compositions won him international reputation.

Queen Elizabeth I, of course, provided an inspiration for the best efforts of Englishmen, whatever their aims and activities. For music, she was the ideal patroness. She was an accomplished performer on the virginal (forerunner to the piano), and she aided her favorite art immensely in every way possible, bestowing her favors on the singers in chapel and court and on the musicians in public and private theatrical performances. To the great composers of her time, she was particularly gracious and helpful.

Singing has been an integral part of English life for as long as we have any knowledge. Long before the music was written down, the timeless folk songs were a part of our Anglo-Saxon heritage. The madrigals and airs that are enjoyed each summer at the Utah Shakespeare Festival evolved from these traditions.

It was noted by Bishop Jewel in 1560 that sometimes at Paul's Cross there would be 6,000 people singing together, and before the sermon, the whole congregation always sang a psalm, together with the choir and organ. When that thundering unity of congregational chorus came in, "I was so transported there was no room left in my whole body, mind, or spirit for anything below divine and heavenly raptures."

Religious expression was likely the dominant musical motif of the Elizabethan period; however, the period also saw development of English stage music, with Morley, John Wilson, and Robert Johnson setting much of their music to the plays of Shakespeare. The masque, a semi-musical entertainment, reached a high degree of perfection at the court of James I, where the courtiers themselves were sometimes participants. An educated person of the time was expected to perform music more than just fairly well, and an inability in this area might elicit whispered comments regarding lack of genteel upbringing, not only in the ability to take one's part in a madrigal, but also in knowing the niceties of musical theory. Henry Peacham wrote in The Compleat Gentleman in 1662 that one of the fundamental qualities of a gentleman was to be able to "sing your part sure, and...to play the same upon your viol."

Outside the walls of court could be heard street songs, lighthearted catches, and ballads, all of which indicates that music was not confined to the cathedrals or court. We still have extant literally hundreds of ballads, street songs, and vendors’ cries that were sung or hummed on the street and played with all their complicated variations on all levels of Elizabethan society.

Instruments of the period were as varied as the music and peoples, and the instrument and songbooks which remain in existence today are indicative of the high level of excellence enjoyed by the Elizabethans. Songbooks, mainly of part-songs for three, four, five, and six
voices exist today, as do books of dance music: corrantos, pavans, and galliards. Records from one wealthy family indicate the family owned forty musical instruments, including twelve viols, seven recorders, four lutes, five virginals, various brasses and woodwinds, and two “great organs.” To have use for such a great number of instruments implies a fairly large group of players resident with the family or staying with them as invited guests, and the players of the most popular instruments (lutes, virginals, and viols) would be playing from long tradition, at least back to King Henry VIII. In short, music was as necessary to the public and private existence of a Renaissance Englishman as any of the basic elements of life.

The Utah Shakespeare Festival musicians perform each summer on authentic replicas of many of these Renaissance instruments. The music they perform is authentic from the Elizabethan period, and the instruments are made available for audience inspection and learning.
Actors in Shakespeare’s Day
By Stephanie Chidester From Insights, 1994

The status of the actor in society has never been entirely stable but has fluctuated from the beginnings of the theatre to the present day. The ancient Greeks often considered actors as servants of Dionysus, and their performances were a sort of religious rite. Roman actors, often slaves, were seen as the scraps of society, only one step above gladiators. In medieval Europe, both the theatre and the actor, suppressed by the Catholic Church, were almost non-existent but gradually re-emerged in the form of the liturgy and, later, the Mystery plays. The actors of Shakespeare’s age also saw fluctuations in reputation; actors were alternately classified as “vagabonds and sturdy beggars,” as an act of Parliament in 1572 defined them, and as servants of noblemen.

As early as 1482, noblemen such as Richard, duke of Gloucester (later Richard III), the earl of Essex, and Lord Arundel kept acting companies among their retainers. But other than these select groups protected by nobles, actors lived lives of danger and instability because when they abandoned their respectable trades, they also left behind the comfort and protection of the trade guilds.

However, life soon became much more difficult for both of these classes of actors. In 1572, Parliament passed two acts which damaged thespians’ social status. In the first one, the Queen forbade “the unlawful retaining of multitudes of unordinary servants by liveries, badges, and other signs and tokens (contrary to the good and ancient statutes and laws of this realm)” in order to “curb the power of local grandees” (Dennis Kay, Shakespeare: His Life, Work, and Era [New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1992], 88). One result of this was that some of the actors, now considered superfluous, were turned away.

To make matters even worse, these actors faced yet another impediment: the “Acte for the punishment of Vacabondes” (Kay, 88), in which actors were declared “vagabonds and masterless men and hence were subject to arrest and imprisonment” (Thomas Marc Parrott and Robert Hamilton Ball, A Short View of Elizabethan Drama [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1943], 46).

However, there were still nobles, such as the earl of Leicester and the earl of Sussex, who endorsed players; the protector would usually seek royal permission for these actors to perform in London or, less frequently, some other less prestigious town. Thus the actors were able to venture forth without fear of arrest. It is through these circumstances that Shakespeare ends up an actor in London.

There are many theories—guesses really—of how Shakespeare got into the theatre. He may have joined a group of strolling players, performed around the countryside, and eventually made it to London, the theatrical hub of Britain. Another theory suggests that he began as a schoolmaster, wrote a play (possibly The Comedy of Errors) and then decided to take it to London; or, alternately, he could have simply gone directly to that great city, with or without a play in hand, to try his luck.

An interesting speculation is that while he was young, Shakespeare might have participated in one of the cycles of Mystery plays in Stratford: “On one occasion the Stratford corporation laid out money for an entertainment at Pentecost. In 1583 they paid 13s 4d ‘to Davi Jones and his company for his pastime at Whitsuntide.’ Davi Jones had been married to Elizabeth, the daughter of Adrian Quiney, and after her death in 1579 he took as his wife a Hathaway, Frances. Was Shakespeare one of the youths who trimmed themselves for the Whitsun pastime?” (S. Schoenbaum, William Shakespeare: A Compact Documentary Life [New York: New American Library, 1977], 111).
But however he got into the theatre and to London, he had made a very definite impression on his competitors by 1592, when playwright Robert Greene attacked Shakespeare as both actor and author: “There is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his Tiger’s heart wrapt in a Player’s hide, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you: and . . . is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country” (G. B. Harrison, *Introducing Shakespeare* [New York: Penguin Books, Inc., 1947], 1).

We don’t often think of Shakespeare as primarily an actor, perhaps because most of what we know of him comes from the plays he wrote rather than the parts he played. Nevertheless, he made much of his money as an actor and sharer in his company: “At least to start with, his status, his security derived more from his acting skill and his eye for business than from his pen” (Kay, 95). Had he been only a playwright, he would likely have died a poor man, as did Robert Greene: “In the autumn of 1592, Robert Greene, the most popular author of his generation, lay penniless and dying. . . . The players had grown rich on the products of his brain, and now he was deserted and alone” (Harrison, 1).

While Shakespeare made a career of acting, there are critics who might dispute his acting talent. For instance, almost a century after Shakespeare’s death, “an anonymous enthusiast of the stage . . . remarked . . . that ‘Shakespear . . . was a much better poet, than player’” (Schoenbaum, 201). However, Shakespeare could have been quite a good actor, and this statement would still be true. One sign of his skill as an actor is that he is mentioned in the same breath with Burbage and Kemp: “The accounts of the royal household for Mar 15 [1595] record payments to ‘William Kempe William Shakespeare & Richarde Burbage servantes to the Lord Chamberlain’” (Kay, 174).

Another significant indication of his talent is the very fact that he played in London rather than touring other less lucrative towns. If players were to be legally retained by noblemen, they had to prove they could act, and one means of demonstrating their legitimacy was playing at court for Queen Elizabeth. The more skilled companies obtained the queen’s favor and were granted permission to remain in London.

Not all companies, however, were so fortunate: “Sussex’s men may not have been quite up to the transition from rural inn-yards to the more demanding circumstances of court performance. Just before the Christmas season of 1574, for example, they were inspected (‘perused’) by officials of the Revels Office, with a view to being permitted to perform before the queen; but they did not perform” (Kay, 90). Shakespeare and his company, on the other hand, performed successfully in London from the early 1590s until 1611. It would be a mistake to classify William Shakespeare as only a playwright, even the greatest playwright of the English-speaking world; he was also “an actor, a sharer, a member of a company” (Kay, 95), obligations that were extremely relevant to his plays. As a man of the theatre writing for a company, he knew what would work on stage and what would not and was able to make his plays practical as well as brilliant. And perhaps more importantly, his theatrical experience must have taught him much about the human experience, about everyday lives and roles, just as his plays show us that “All the world’s a stage, / And all the men and women merely players” (*As You Like It*, 2.7.149-50).
When Shakespeare peeped through the curtain at the audience gathered to hear his first play, he looked upon a very motley crowd. The pit was filled with men and boys. The galleries contained a fair proportion of women, some not too respectable. In the boxes were a few gentlemen from the royal courts, and in the lords’ box or perhaps sitting on the stage was a group of extravagantly dressed gentlemen of fashion. Vendors of nuts and fruits moved about through the crowd. The gallants were smoking; the apprentices in the pit were exchanging rude witticisms with the painted ladies.

When Shakespeare addressed his audience directly, he did so in terms of gentle courtesy or pleasant raillery. In *Hamlet*, however, he does let fall the opinion that the groundlings (those on the ground, the cheapest seats) were “for the most part capable of nothing but dumb shows and noise.” His recollections of the pit of the Globe may have added vigor to his ridicule of the Roman mob in *Julius Caesar*.

On the other hand, the theatre was a popular institution, and the audience was representative of all classes of London life. Admission to standing room in the pit was a penny, and an additional penny or two secured a seat in the galleries. For seats in the boxes or for stools on the stage, still more was charged, up to sixpence or half a crown.

Attendance at the theatres was astonishingly large. There were often five or six theatres giving daily performances, which would mean that out of a city of one hundred thousand inhabitants, thirty thousand or more spectators each week attended the theatre. When we remember that a large class of the population disapproved of the theatre, and that women of respectability were not frequent patrons of the public playhouses, this attendance is remarkable.

Arrangements for the comfort of the spectators were meager, and spectators were often disorderly. Playbills seem to have been posted all about town and in the theatre, and the title of the piece was announced on the stage. These bills contained no lists of actors, and there were no programs, ushers, or tickets. There was usually one door for the audience, where the admission fee was deposited in a box carefully watched by the money taker, and additional sums were required at entrance to the galleries or boxes. When the three o’clock trumpets announced the beginning of a performance, the assembled audience had been amusing itself by eating, drinking, smoking, and playing cards, and they sometimes continued these occupations during a performance. Pickpockets were frequent, and, if caught, were tied to a post on the stage. Disturbances were not infrequent, sometimes resulting in general rioting.

The Elizabethan audience was fond of unusual spectacle and brutal physical suffering. They liked battles and murders, processions and fireworks, ghosts and insanity. They expected comedy to abound in beatings, and tragedy in deaths. While the audience at the Globe expected some of these sensations and physical horrors, they did not come primarily for these. (Real blood and torture were available nearby at the bear baitings, and public executions were not uncommon.) Actually, there were very few public entertainments offering as little brutality as did the theatre.

Elizabethans attended the public playhouses for learning. They attended for romance, imagination, idealism, and art; the audience was not without refinement, and those looking for food for the imagination had nowhere to go but to the playhouse. There were no newspapers, no
magazines, almost no novels, and only a few cheap books; theatre filled the desire for story discussion among people lacking other educational and cultural opportunities.

The most remarkable case of Shakespeare’s theatre filling an educational need is probably that of English history. The growth of national patriotism culminating in the English victory over the Spanish Armada gave dramatists a chance to use the historical material, and for the fifteen years from the Armada to the death of Elizabeth, the stage was deluged with plays based on the events of English chronicles, and familiarity with English history became a cultural asset of the London crowd.

Law was a second area where the Elizabethan public seems to have been fairly well informed, and successful dramatists realized the influence that the great development of civil law in the sixteenth century exercised upon the daily life of the London citizen. In this area, as in others, the dramatists did not hesitate to cultivate the cultural background of their audience whenever opportunity offered, and the ignorance of the multitude did not prevent it from taking an interest in new information and from offering a receptive hearing to the accumulated lore of lawyers, historians, humanists, and playwrights.

The audience was used to the spoken word, and soon became trained in blank verse, delighting in monologues, debates, puns, metaphors, stump speakers, and sonorous declamation. The public was accustomed to the acting of the old religious dramas, and the new acting in which the spoken words were listened to caught on rapidly. The new poetry and the great actors who recited it found a sensitive audience. There were many moments during a play when spectacle, brutality, and action were all forgotten, and the audience fed only on the words. Shakespeare and his contemporaries may be deemed fortunate in having an audience essentially attentive, eager for the newly unlocked storehouse of secular story, and possessing the sophistication and interest to be fed richly by the excitements and levities on the stage.
Shakespeare Snapshots

From Insights, 2002

By Ace G. Pilkington

It is hard to get from the facts of Shakespeare's life to any sense of what it must have been like to have lived it. He was born in 1564 in Stratford-on-Avon and died there in 1616. The day of his birth is not certain, but it may have been the same as the day of his death—April 23—if he was baptized, as was usual at the time, three days after he was born. He married Anne Hathaway in the winter of 1582-83, when he was eighteen and she was twenty-six. He became the father of three children. The first was Susannah, who was born around May 23, close enough to the date of the wedding to suggest that the marriage was not entirely voluntary. Shakespeare's twins, Hamnet and Judith, were baptized on February 2, 1585. Hamnet died of unknown causes (at least unknown by us at this distance in time) in 1596. Shakespeare's career as actor, theatre owner, manager, and, of course, playwright began in the vicinity of 1590 and continued for the rest of his life, though there are clear indications that he spent more and more time in Stratford and less and less in London from 1611 on. His work in the theatre made him wealthy, and his extraordinary plays brought him a measure of fame, though nothing like what he deserved or would posthumously receive.

It's hard to get even the briefest sense of what Shakespeare's life was like from such information. It is probably impossible ever to know what Shakespeare thought or felt, but maybe we can get closer to what he saw and heard and even smelled. Perhaps some snapshots—little close-ups—might help to bring us nearer to the world in which Shakespeare lived if not quite to the life he lived in that world. In Shakespeare's youth, chimneys were a new thing. Before that, smoke was left to find its way out through a hole in the roof, often a thatched roof, and there were even some who maintained that this smoky atmosphere was better than the newfangled fresh air that chimneys made possible—along with a greater division of rooms and more privacy.

In the year of Shakespeare's birth, Stratford had more trees than houses—"upwards of 400 houses as well as 1,000 elms and forty ashes" (Peter Thomson, Shakespeare's Professional Career [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 1). Peter Levi says, "The town was so full of elm trees that it must have looked and sounded like a woodland settlement. For example, Mr. Gibbs's house on Rothermarket had twelve elms in the garden and six in front of the door. Thomas Attford on Ely Street had another twelve. The town boundaries were marked by elms or groups of elms (The Life and Times of William Shakespeare [New York: Wings Books, 1988], 7). Shakespeare's "Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang" becomes a far more majestic image with the picture of Stratford's elms in mind. And the birds themselves had a sound which modern ears no longer have a chance to enjoy. "We must realize that it was ordinary for . . . Shakespeare to hear a dawn chorus of many hundreds of birds at once. . . . as a young man thirty years ago I have heard a deafening dawn chorus in the wooded Chilterns, on Shakespeare's road to London" (Levi 10).

Exactly what Shakespeare's road to London may have been or at least how he first made his way there and became an actor is much debated. He might have been a schoolmaster or fifty other things, but he may well have started out as he ended up—as a player. We can then, in John Southworth's words, "Picture a sixteen-year-old lad on a cart, growing year by year into manhood, journeying out of the Arden of his childhood into ever more unfamiliar, distant regions, travelling ill-made roads in all weathers, sleeping in inns, hearing and memorising strange new dialects and forms of speech, meeting with every possible type and character of person; learning, most of all perhaps, from the audiences to which he played in guildhalls and inns" (Shakespeare the Player: A Life in the Theatre [Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing Limited, 2000], 30). At some time in his life—in fact, many times—Shakespeare must have known theatrical tours very like that.
In London itself, the new Globe, the best theatre in (or rather just outside of) the city, was in an area with a large number of prisons and an unpleasant smell. “Garbage had preceded actors on the marshy land where the new playhouse was erected: ‘flanked with a ditch and forced out of a marsh’, according to Ben Jonson. Its cost . . . included the provision of heavy piles for the foundation, and a whole network of ditches in which the water rose and fell with the tidal Thames” (Garry O’Connor, William Shakespeare: A Popular Life [New York: Applause Books, 2000], 161). The playgoers came by water, and the Globe, the Rose, and the Swan “drew 3,000 or 4,000 people in boats across the Thames every day” (161). Peter Levi says of Shakespeare’s London, “The noise, the crowds, the animals and their droppings, the glimpses of grandeur and the amazing squalor of the poor, were beyond modern imagination” (49).

England was a place of fear and glory. Public executions were public entertainments. Severed heads decayed on city walls. Francis Bacon, whom Will Durant calls “the most powerful and influential intellect of his time” (Heroes of History: A Brief History of Civilization from Ancient Times to the Dawn of the Modern Age [New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001], 327), had been “one of the persons commissioned to question prisoners under torture” in the 1580s (Levi 4). The opportune moment when Shakespeare became the most successful of playwrights was the destruction of Thomas Kyd, “who broke under torture and was never the same again,” and the death of Christopher Marlowe in a tavern brawl which was the result of plot and counterplot—a struggle, very probably, between Lord Burghley and Walter Ralegh (Levi 48).

Shakespeare, who must have known the rumors and may have known the truth, cannot have helped shuddering at such monstrous good fortune. Still, all of the sights, smells, and terrors, from the birdsongs to the screams of torture, from the muddy tides to the ties of blood, became not only the textures and tonalities of Shakespeare’s life, but also the information and inspiration behind his plays.
Some time in the mid 1580s, young Will Shakespeare, for reasons not entirely clear to us, left his home, his wife, and his family in Stratford and set off for London. It was a time when Elizabeth, “la plus fine femme du monde,” as Henry III of France called her, had occupied the throne of England for over twenty-five years. The tragedy of Mary Stuart was past; the ordeal of Essex was in the future. Sir Francis Drake’s neutralization of the Spanish Armada was pending and rumors of war or invasion blew in from all the great ports.

What could have been more exciting for a young man from the country, one who was already more than half in love with words, than to be headed for London!

It was an exciting and frightening time, when the seven gates of London led to a maze of streets, narrow and dirty, crowded with tradesmen, carts, coaches, and all manner of humanity. Young Will would have seen the moated Tower of London, looking almost like an island apart. There was London Bridge crowded with tenements and at the southern end a cluster of traitors’ heads impaled on poles. At Tyburn thieves and murderers dangled, at Limehouse pirates were trussed up at low tide and left to wait for the water to rise over them. At Tower Hill the headsman’s axe flashed regularly, while for the vagabonds there were the whipping posts, and for the beggars there were the stocks. Such was the London of the workaday world, and young Will was undoubtedly mentally filing away details of what he saw, heard, and smelled.

Elizabethan people in general were an emotional lot and the ferocity of their entertainment reflected that fact. Bear-baiting, for example, was a highly popular spectator sport, and the structure where they were generally held was not unlike the theatres of the day. A bear was chained to a stake in the center of the pit, and a pack of large dogs was turned loose to bait, or fight, him. The bear eventually tired (fortunately for the remaining dogs!), and, well, you can figure the rest out for yourself. Then there were the public hangings, whippings, or drawing and quarterings for an afternoon’s entertainment. So, the violence in some of Shakespeare’s plays was clearly directed at an audience that reveled in it. Imagine the effect of having an actor pretend to bite off his own tongue and spit a chunk of raw liver that he had carefully packed in his jaw into the faces of the groundlings!

Despite the progressing enlightenment of the Renaissance, superstition was still rampant among Elizabethan Londoners, and a belief in such things as astrology was common (Ralph P. Boas and Barbara M. Hahna, “The Age of Shakespeare,” Social Backgrounds of English Literature, [Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1931] 93). Through the position of stars many Elizabethans believed that coming events could be foretold even to the extent of mapping out a person’s entire life.

Where witches and ghosts were concerned, it was commonly accepted that they existed and the person who scoffed at them was considered foolish, or even likely to be cursed. Consider the fact that Shakespeare’s Macbeth was supposedly cursed due to the playwright’s having given away a few more of the secrets of witchcraft than the weird sisters may have approved of. For a time, productions experienced an uncanny assortment of mishaps and injuries. Even today, it is often considered bad luck for members of the cast and crew to mention the name of the production, simply referred to as the Scottish Play. In preaching a sermon, Bishop Jewel warned the Queen: “It may please your Grace to understand that witches and sorcerers within these last few years are marvelously increased. Your Grace’s
subjects pine away, even unto death; their color fade; their flesh rotteth; their speech is benummed; their senses bereft” (Walter Bromberg, “Witchcraft and Psychotherapy”, *The Mind of Man* [New York: Harper Torchbooks 1954], 54).

Ghosts were recognized by the Elizabethans in three basic varieties: the vision or purely subjective ghost, the authentic ghost who has died without opportunity of repentance, and the false ghost which is capable of many types of manifestations (Boas and Hahn). When a ghost was confronted, either in reality or in a Shakespeare play, some obvious discrimination was called for (and still is). Critics still do not always agree on which of these three types haunts the pages of *Julius Caesar, Macbeth, Richard III,* or *Hamlet,* or, in some cases, why they are necessary to the plot at all. After all, Shakespeare’s ghosts are a capricious lot, making themselves visible or invisible as they please. In *Richard III* there are no fewer than eleven ghosts on the stage who are visible only to Richard and Richmond. In *Macbeth* the ghost of Banquo repeatedly appears to Macbeth in crowded rooms but is visible only to him. In *Hamlet,* the ghost appears to several people on the castle battlements but only to Hamlet in his mother’s bedchamber. In the words of E.H. Seymour: “If we judge by sheer reason, no doubt we must banish ghosts from the stage altogether, but if we regulate our fancy by the laws of superstition, we shall find that spectres are privileged to be visible to whom they will” (E.H. Seymour “Remarks, Critical, Conjectural, and Explanatory on Shakespeare” in *Macbeth A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare* [New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1963] 211).

Shakespeare’s audiences, and his plays, were the products of their culture. Since the validity of any literary work can best be judged by its public acceptance, not to mention its lasting power, it seems that Shakespeare’s ghosts and witches were, and are, enormously popular. If modern audiences and critics find themselves a bit skeptical, then they might consider bringing along a supply of Coleridge’s “willing suspension of disbelief.” Elizabethans simply had no need of it.
Shakespeare’s Day: What They Wore

The clothing which actors wear to perform a play is called a costume, to distinguish it from everyday clothing. In Shakespeare’s time, acting companies spent almost as much on costumes as television series do today.

The costumes for shows in England were so expensive that visitors from France were a little envious. Kings and queens on the stage were almost as well dressed as kings and queens in real life.

Where did the acting companies get their clothes? Literally, “off the rack” and from used clothing sellers. Wealthy middle class people would often give their servants old clothes that they didn’t want to wear any more, or would leave their clothes to the servants when they died. Since clothing was very expensive, people wore it as long as possible and passed it on from one person to another without being ashamed of wearing hand-me-downs. However, since servants were of a lower class than their employers, they weren’t allowed to wear rich fabrics, and would sell these clothes to acting companies, who were allowed to wear what they wanted in performance.

A rich nobleman like Count Paris or a wealthy young man like Romeo would wear a doublet, possibly of velvet, and it might have gold embroidery. Juliet and Lady Capulet would have worn taffeta, silk, gold, or satin gowns, and everybody would have had hats, gloves, ruffs (an elaborate collar), gloves, stockings, and shoes equally elaborate.

For a play like Romeo and Juliet, which was set in a European country at about the same time Shakespeare wrote it, Elizabethan everyday clothes would have been fine—the audience would have been happy, and they would have been authentic for the play. However, since there were no costume shops who could make clothing suitable for, say, medieval Denmark for Hamlet, or ancient Rome for Julius Caesar, or Oberon and Titania’s forest for A Midsummer Night’s Dream, these productions often looked slightly strange—can you imagine fairies in full Elizabethan collars and skirts? How would they move?

Today’s audiences want costumes to be authentic, so that they can believe in the world of the play. However, Romeo and Juliet was recently set on Verona Beach, with very up-to-date clothes indeed; and about thirty years ago, West Side Story, an updated musical version of the Romeo and Juliet tale, was set in the Puerto Rican section of New York City.

Activity: Discuss what the affect of wearing “special” clothes is—to church, or to a party. Do you feel different? Do you act different? How many kinds of wardrobes do you have? School, play, best? Juliet and Romeo would have had only one type of clothing each, no matter how nice it was.

Activity: Perform a scene from the play in your everyday clothes, and then in more formal clothes. Ask the participants and the spectators to describe the differences between the two performances.
Don’t Take This Play Too Seriously

*The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is perhaps Shakespeare’s earliest comedy, written before shadows penetrated his comic world to lend it depth and perspective. The play contains many of the themes Shakespeare would later develop in more detail: courtly lovers overcoming obstacles as they race for the altar, lightning changes in affection, a maiden in disguise who must woo another woman on behalf of the man she herself loves, fools who are often wiser than their masters, a forest in which all seem to live more freely and honestly than at court, and a festive ending marked by the promise of marriage at last for two couples in love. The very word “love” in fact, appears more frequently in this comedy than in any other.

Like *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, this play is not to be taken seriously. If we do not ask too much of the story, it will provide its own pleasure. It is a comedy of forgiveness; according to the code of love that infuses the story, love cannot choose its object, and forgiveness is possible because sin is only threatened.

*The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is a play about the young; no specifically old people appear in it; there is no bitterness, no cynicism, no talk about the past. Rather it is a play about love and friendship. Love between friends is corrupted by love between man and woman. Love between man and woman evaporates utterly and instantly at the sight of a new face. Love between father and daughter is tested, and even unconditional love enters with the uncritical adoration of the dull-witted servant, Launce, for his flea-bitten dog Crab.

Likely the play, written by about 1594, represents the combining of two plots. The “love” plot came from Diana, a fifteenth-century romance, and the “friendship” plot possibly came from the story of Titus and Gisippus, which was available to Shakespeare in a number of forms.

One of the most enduring Renaissance debates was the discussion of whether the love of woman was a sentiment more noble than the platonic friendship that might exist between men. This exalted friendship led one friend to make any sacrifice required, even that of his life, for another. Within this context, Shakespeare was merely employing a literary convention in having Valentine offer Silvia to Proteus, and readers of Elizabethan literature would have understood and accepted the convention . . . at least on the stage.

And the play does work on stage. Although the most neglected of Shakespeare’s romantic comedies (there is no record of performance until 1762 and even then it was staged in a considerably altered form), a number of surefire bits of comic business including disguise and comically stereotyped characters ensure stage success. Letters are delivered and torn up, and rings change hands with the vicissitudes of the love plot. An operatic version in 1857 added the Franz Schubert setting of “Who is Sylvia?”, immortalized as one of the world’s great love lyrics. Most of all, the play gives us Launce and Speed and Crab. Launce’s stand-up comic routine with his shoe and his dog Crab can be delightfully funny stage business. Launce was originally played by Will Kemp, the most famous clown of the Elizabethan theatre, and Kemp’s dog was a trained beast capable of all sorts of vaudeville tricks.

Critics of the play have argued that it shows immaturity, hasty workmanship, and an unsuresness of touch, because of its unrealistic ending and the utter improbabilities of the conduct of Proteus and Valentine, not to mention the meekness of Silvia, who, in the first scene, allows herself to be bandied about between the two friends without uttering a protest or a single word of comment. At play’s end, we forgive Proteus when he realizes he does love Julia, a young woman who has somehow managed to remain in love with him all this time, and recognition and resolution of all difficulties brings the play to a happy close.

Even given these criticisms, the central issue of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, friendship and love, is one of man-kind’s universals to which Shakespeare returned frequently and dwelt upon with his unique force and insight.
Synopsis

Valentine, a young gentleman of Verona about to depart on a voyage to Milan, is unable to persuade his intimate friend, Proteus, to leave his beloved Julia and accompany him on his journey. Proteus’s father, Antonio, ignorant of his son’s love affair, insists that Proteus further his education in the world beyond Verona and sends him off to follow Valentine. Before departing, Proteus exchanges rings and vows of love with Julia.

Valentine arrives in Milan and falls in love with Sylvia, daughter of the duke of Milan. Sylvia returns Valentine’s love, but her father doesn’t approve. Proteus, soon arrives at court, meets Sylvia, and, instantly forgetting Julia, also falls madly in love. To escape from Sir Thurio, her father’s choice for her, Sylvia plans to elope with Valentine. Unaware that Proteus also loves Sylvia, Valentine and Sylvia tell him their plans. He immediately decides to inform the duke of the plot, hoping thereby to have Valentine banished and thus to have a better chance at winning Sylvia for himself.

Meanwhile, Julia, unaware of unfolding events in Milan, arranges to travel there in disguise, hoping to be reunited with Proteus.

After Proteus tells the duke how the lovers are going to make use of a rope ladder to escape that very night, the duke catches Valentine and banishes him from Milan. He then asks Proteus to aid Thurio in obtaining favor with Sylvia; Proteus accepts this opportunity to press his own suit. On his way from Milan, the banished Valentine is captured in a forest on the borders of Mantua by outlaws, who make him their chief.

Back in Milan, Sylvia scorns Proteus’s attentions. Dressed as a page, Julia arrives in time to overhear Proteus proclaiming to Sylvia that his former love is dead. She exclaims to herself that while she may be dead, she is not yet buried and vows to win Proteus back by becoming, unknown to Proteus, his disguised page. Proteus sends his new “page,” to Sylvia with a betrothal ring and a letter asking for Sylvia’s picture in exchange. Sylvia, still in love with Valentine, scorns the offerings, and learning that the “page” knows Julia, demands a detailed description of her.

With the aid of the faithful Sir Eglamour, Sylvia escapes from Milan in search of Valentine. In the forest she is captured by outlaws and then rescued by Proteus, who takes advantage of the situation to press his unwelcome attentions on her again. Valentine, who is thinking over his present situation and dreaming of his lady love, hears her voice, and, rescuing her from Proteus, reviles his former friend for his conduct. Proteus, suddenly realizing his contemptible actions, repents and is forgiven. The “page” reveals her identity to Proteus, who, repenting his inconstancy, returns to his first love.

The duke and Thurio, now in the forest in search of Sylvia, are captured and brought to Valentine by the outlaws. In the spirit of reconciliation, Valentine uses his authority as leader of the outlaws to free the duke, who then in turn sanctions Valentine’s suit for Sylvia, for whom Thurio relinquishes his claim. The outlaws are pardoned, and they all return to Milan.
Characters: The Two Gentlemen of Verona

Duke of Milan: Sylvia's father, the duke of Milan plans to wed his daughter to Thurio, but, in the end, he recognizes Valentine's bravery and honor, and grants to him his daughter's hand.

Valentine: A young gentleman of Verona, Valentine is a good friend to Proteus and one who “after honor hunts.” In Milan he falls in love with Sylvia and, after numerous setbacks, wins her heart and her hand.

Proteus: The other young gentleman of Verona, Proteus transforms from loyal friend and faithful lover when he too is struck by Silvia’s charms. Eventually Proteus repents, is forgiven, and is reunited with Julia, his true love.

Antonio: Proteus’s father

Thurio: A rival to Valentine, Thurio is the duke’s preferred suitor for his daughter’s hand.

Eglamour: A faithful knight, Sir Eglamour aids Sylvia in her escape from Milan.

Host, of Julia’s lodging in Milan

Outlaws: Former gentlemen, the outlaws have been banished to the woods near Mantua for petty offenses.

Speed: Valentine’s servant, Speed takes great pleasure in aggravating his master and engaging in word play with Launce, Proteus’s servant.

Launce: Proteus’s servant who travels with his master to Milan, Launce is accompanied by his ill-mannered but likeable dog, Crab.

Panthino: Servant to Antonio

Julia: In love with Proteus, Julia follows him to Milan disguised as a page, only to learn that he has fallen in love with Sylvia.

Silvia: The duke of Milan’s beautiful and high-spirited daughter, Sylvia is sought after by a number of eligible gentlemen. She falls in love with Valentine and plans to elope with him.

Lucetta: Julia’s waiting woman and true friend, Lucetta advises her on matters of love.
Pay attention now: Which of the following make *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* a comedy? Is it the goofy dog named “Crab”; the two slapstick servants, Launce and Speed; the bumbling, inept outlaws; the hilarious disguises; the intriguing mixture of friendship and love; or all of the above? If you answered “all of the above” you would be only half right, because determining the genre (or literary type) of a play depends less upon individual comic circumstance and more upon the overall design of the drama. Most people would agree, for example, that *King Lear* and *Romeo and Juliet* are tragedies despite the fact that both plays include comic characters and amusing situations? So if an occasional dog or joke doesn’t make a play a comedy, what does?

As we all learned in Miss Hickey’s ninth grade English class, tragedies move from good fortune to bad fortune, while comedies progress from bad to good. All Shakespeare’s comic plays, in fact, follow this evolution from problem to solution or from bad fortune to good. If we look closer at this theatrical paradigm, however, we can arrive at a much more sophisticated and satisfying definition of “comedy” that helps us understand the inner workings of the genre and also its deeper dramatic purpose.

Shakespeare’s comedies move in two distinct, intriguing patterns: either (1) from society to wilderness to improved society or (2) from union to wandering to reunion. The first of these models—most clearly illustrated by such plays as *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *As You Like It*, and *The Winter’s Tale*—takes its characters from an urban, civilized environment to the “green world” of a forest, then back to the original society which has become a better place because of the freedom and personal growth the characters enjoyed in the wilderness. In *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, for example, all four principal character groups—royalty, young lovers, fairies, and rude mechanicals—move from bad to good fortune because of a single, wonderful night in Shakespeare’s enchanted woods.

In contrast, plays like *Twelfth Night*, *The Comedy of Errors*, and *All’s Well That Ends Well* illustrate a movement from union to wandering to reunion. In *Twelfth Night*, for instance, Viola and her brother, Sebastian, are parted at the outset by shipwreck, wander separately throughout the script, and are then reunited in a climactic reconciliation scene that brings love and happiness to both. In similar fashion, the principal characters in many Shakespeare comedies gravitate toward wedlock at the conclusion, which certainly seems like “good fortune” to those of us with happy marriages.

An awareness of these important comic patterns also helps us understand the deeper, more significant manner in which watching a comedy transports us from our mundane, everyday world of bills to pay and kids to chauffeur into a theatrical dreamscape that restructures our imaginations and enables us to see our lives more clearly after the curtain falls. We are metaphorically “united” with our everyday lives, then “separated” from them so we can undergo the joyful journey of the comedy, and then “united” again with lives made richer, sweeter, and more meaningful by the dramatic progress of the play. Interpreted in this fashion, the action of viewing a play is “comic” because it carries us towards good fortune and solved problems through the ancient and timeless ritual of responding to actors on a stage.

Interestingly enough, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is unique within the genre because it fulfills both these comic patterns. The play begins in Verona, then moves rapidly to Milan, the “city of gold”—a highly sophisticated, urban environment from which the four lovers escape into a forest
near Mantua, where all the conflicts are resolved and the sweethearts return to their proper mates. In a play where the names of characters such as Valentine, Proteus, and Julia predict their behavioral idiosyncrasies, we should not be surprised that a brave and resourceful young woman named “Silvia” represents the sylvan wilderness that helps shape the outcome of the play. Similarly, through its focus upon the two title characters, Shakespeare’s comedy features the union of Proteus and Valentine in Verona, their separate adventures wandering through Milan and the forest, and their reunion and reconciliation as dear friends at the conclusion of the play.

Shakespeare’s reinforcement of these two comic patterns is more understandable when we recall that he yoked together two different sources in constructing his play: (1) Jorge de Montemayor’s *Diana*, a Spanish pastoral romance celebrating the virtue of love, which moves from society to wilderness to improved society, and (2) the story of “Titus and Gisippus” in Sir Thomas Elyot’s *The Governor*, which progresses from union to wandering to reunion in arguing that male friendship is a higher type of human behavior than erotic love. Although these two complimentary sources help define the play as a “double comedy” shifting in intricate, overlapping patterns to its optimistic conclusion, they also create dramatic tension by setting in contrast Valentine’s love of Silvia with his platonic affection for his friend Proteus. Both plots join instantaneously in the forest when Valentine, reunited with Proteus, presents his lover to his friend: “that my love may appear plain and free,” he offers, “All that was mine in Silvia I give thee” (5.4.82 83). Though the moment often elicits howls from the audience and a strong on-stage reaction from Silvia herself, it seems appropriate in a play that somewhat awkwardly straddles two comic patterns and two literary sources.

Shakespeare’s dual plots also allow the comedy to carry more than its fair share of important themes, including those concerned with maturity and metamorphosis. This is a play featuring very young characters, with few older people serving as positive role models. The four young lovers in particular must learn, through the progress of the play, how to function in an adult world. Appropriately, the comedy ends with the dawn, the beginning of a new day in the lovers’ journey into maturity. If, as Valentine argues, “Love’s a mighty lord” (2.4.136), so too, the characters discover, is friendship. And finding a proper balance between the two extremes of love and friendship is an important lesson in becoming an adult—in Shakespeare’s comic universe and in our own as well.
Courtly Love

By Ace C. Pilkington

From Midsummer Magazine, 1990

At the end of the eleventh century, a new net of ideas, a novel path for thoughts, a fresh way to feel, suddenly emerged in France. This cluster of ideals and passions was connected with the Troubadors and later with Eleanor of Aquitaine, among others. It was, according to CS. Lewis, in The Allegory of Love, characterized by “Humility, Courtesy, Adultery, and the Religion of Love” (Oxford University Press: London, 1938, 2). In part a rebellion against the bartering of marriage partners in arranged marriages and the dehumanization of women as the property first of their fathers and then of their husbands, courtly love rapidly developed its own conventions and even (in writers’ fictions if not in historians’ facts) its own courts. Such courts determined rights and wrongs of lovers’ lives and argued over the disposition of loyalties, balancing hypothetical troubles. Who, they asked, deserved greater truth and trust, the lover or the friend?

Courtly love may perhaps have been the greatest change in Western culture between the fall of Rome and the rise of the Renaissance. It put women on pedestals and glorified amorous passion in a way that was anathema both to Classical civilization and Christian salvation. Its doctrines were codified in Tractus de Amore et de Amoris Remedia, nominally by Andreas’ Capellanus but actually dictated by Eleanor’s daughter Marie. In it, as Marion Meade says, “the woman is the dominant figure, the man a pupil who must be instructed until he becomes a fit partner for his lady” (Eleanor of Aquitaine, Hawthorne Books, Inc.: New York, 1977, 252-3). Love is all powerful, and a man’s chief obligation is obedience.

By the time of Shakespeare, however, the songs of courtly love had a different burden. The increased emphasis on individualism that came with the Renaissance had altered the nature of marriage, and though many parents still arranged, most of them first consulted their children’s wishes, paying lip service at least (as Baptista does in The Taming of the Shrew) to the notion that love is necessary to a nuptial.

Courtly love was becoming romantic love, prelude to marriage, not a discord after it. As early as 1424, James I of Scotland (then a prisoner in England and about to marry Lady Jane Beaufort, granddaughter of John of Gaunt) advocated romantic, married love in his 379 line poem, The Kingis Quair.

Besides, the pedestal had proved an uncomfortable vantage. As Juliet Dusinberre argues: “When Humanists like More and Erasmus attacked medieval romance for deifying women, they saw it, like Christianity, as forging its own fetters for the individual, obliterating the individual woman, who was not a goddess but a rational being, capable of education on the same terms as men” (Shakespeare and the Nature of Women, TheMacmillanPress Ltd.: London, 1975,140).

In addition, courtly love, which had begun as a literary movement, had become a literary convention, ripe for parody, the lover as rich a maker of laughter, as he had previously been a matter for sighs. And like most literary conventions, courtly love was in danger of seeming merely conventional, something learned in the study, not lived in the world, a kind of inky inexperience waiting to be washed away by the tempestuous seas of real emotion.

Shakespeare was completely at home in this thick mixture of possibilities, this tapestry of dashing colors. He turned the cliches of Petrarchan portraiture upside down in Sonnet 130, maintaining that his mistress, though no goddess, was a rare as any of the real women about whom other poets lisped their fantastical lies.

Very much aware of flaws at the heart of even the most seemingly perfect manifestations of reality, Shakespeare is a master of parody by parallel and criticism by juxtaposition. So in The Two Gentlemen of Verona he has Proteus speak of love as an imperfection, “as in the sweetest bud / The
eating canker dwells, so eating Love / Inhabits in the finest wits of all” (The Arden Shakespeare: The Two Gentlemen of Verona, ed. Clifford Leech, Methuen: London, 1981, 1.1.42-44). The lines are almost identical with a later expression of the same sentiment in Sonnet 35, “Loathsome canker lives in sweetest bud!” Both the sonnet and the play are about two men in love with one woman, both are about the testing of love by friendship, friendship by love, and both concern the problems of living in a real, non-literary world.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona is, in fact, an elaborate examination of courtly love, romantic love, and the transition from well-tutored innocence to hard-won experience. Proteus, for instance, begins as the true lover, while Valentine is the flouter who ridicules his passion.

But the two exchange places in the kind of patterned dance which was to grace all of Shakespeare’s comedies. Eventually, Proteus proves as changeable as his name suggests, betraying both lover and friend, though maintaining in the process that he is being true to himself. Valentine, in turn, fulfills the prophecy of his name, becoming Silvia’s abject, constant servant.

Nevertheless, Valentine’s relationship with Silvia is not what its surface suggests. True; he is humble enough to follow his lady’s command and happily write love letters to himself, thus preserving Silvia’s modesty while conserving her energy, and fulfilling his duty even as he demonstrates his folly. Silvia appears to be the typical tyrant of courtly love, besieged by many lovers though accepting no one, judging wit combats which Valentine and Thurio stage for her amusement and their abasement, and generally accepting homage as though she were the divinity which Valentine insists she should be called.

Yet the truth is that this is not old-fashioned courtly love at all; it is the newfangled romantic variety, leading to marriage as a form of self-expression. Silvia and Valentine (like many of Shakespeare’s couples—Bianca and Lucentio, Juliet and Romeo, Hermia and Lysander, and Penelita and Florizel—plan a secret wedding, a private, defiant grasping of happiness.

In a similar way, Shakespeare presents Julia as “hard-hearted adamant” who will not read Proteus’s letters, only to scatter that notion as widely to the winds as the bits of the letter which Julia rips up and then wishes she could read. Far from being the unyielding she around whom the magnetized lover must revolve, Julia (like Helena chasing Demetrius through the wood) takes on the burdens of the male lover, and Julia even adopts the male costume. Just as Viola (another woman dressed as a man) does in Twelfth Night, Julia, who should, according to the dictates of courtly love, be served, turns herself instead into Proteus’s servant, wooing (again like Viola) another woman for her “master.” There is a kind of realism in this turnabout, an acknowledgment that women too are people, complete with passions and the capacity for action. Shakespeare’s women are too human to stand quietly in corners on pedestals, like marmoreal monuments.

And his servants are too humorous (and too useful to his parallels) to stay silent. Speed sees the symptoms of heroes (the illness of love) in his master, Valentine, and enumerates them at wonderful length: “You have learned, like Sir Proteus, to wreathe your arms like a malcontent; to relish a love song, like a robin redbreast; to walk alone, like one that had the pestilence; to sigh like a schoolboy that had lost his A B C; to weep, like a young wench that had buried her grandam; to fast, like one that takes diet; to watch, like one that fears robbing, to speak puling, like a beggar at Hallowmas” (2.1.17-25).

And even then Speed is not through telling Valentine how thoroughly he has been “metamorphosed with a mistress” and how completely Silvia has been “deformed” by the eye of Valentine’s love.

Speed also has the chance to mock at Launce’s proposed wife, who has imore hair than wit, and more faults than hairs, and more wealth than faultsi (3.1.344-5). However, perhaps the
most entertaining assault on love in the play is not the satire of a caustic tongue, but the parody of domestic wrongs. As Anthony Brennan, former seminar director at the Stratford, Ontario Shakespeare Festival, points out, Launce’s problem with Crab “throws the dramatic posturing of the lovers into perspective by having Launce feature his dog as the cold, heartless mistress of the courtly-love code” (Onstage and Offstage Worlds in Shakespeare’s Plays, Routledge London, 1969, 26).

Finally, at the end of the forest adventure, Valentine says to the penitent Proteus, “All that was mine in Silvia I give thee” (5.4.83). This is the friend and lover controversy returned with a vengeance, usually much to the audience’s annoyance. But it is one more of the conventions of the genre and should be expected as one more literary bramble for the lovers to be scratched by, one more song of innocence that leads on to experience. As Oxford Professor of Poetry Peter Levi notes in his excellent The Life and Times of William Shakespeare, “MacEdward Leach, who edited the late-thirteenth century Amis and Amiloun for the Early English Text Society in 1937, collected eighty-six examples of these ‘two brethren’ stories, and every single one had the same conclusion” (Henry Holt and Company, 1988,125).

In the words of Kathleen Conlin, director of the 1990 Utah Shakespeare Festival production of The Two Gentlemen of Verona, “Ultimately, Proteus, Valentine, Silvia, and Julia learn about love and the ethics of love through trial and error, not through the conventions of Petrarchan love poetry” (General Notes to the Designers).
Imagine that you found the love of your life and your most trusted friend came up with a devious plan to keep the two of you apart. Then imagine that the friend went after your love because he wanted her for himself. Would you consider your friend a hero? A villain? Once you learned of your friend’s betrayal, would you then give him your girlfriend since you knew he so desperately wanted her?

These are the precise questions that Shakespeare asks in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. The play involves two friends, Valentine and Proteus. Although Proteus is in love with Julia and is aware that Valentine is in love with Silvia, Proteus pursues Silvia by lying, cheating, and causing Valentine’s banishment. In the end, when all is revealed, Valentine speaks the lines “And that my love may appear plain and free, / All that was mine in Silvia I give thee” (5.4.82 83; all references to line numbers are from The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare: *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Clifford Leech [Walton-on-Thames Surrey: Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd, 1998]), which have perplexed Shakespeare readers for centuries because they cannot understand why Valentine would so freely give away Silvia to Proteus if Proteus is a villain. The question, then, is whether Proteus is a hero or a villain; if Valentine deems him worthy of Silvia, is he actually a hero in the play? Indeed, Proteus is both hero and antihero of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, which is partly why audiences find his character so difficult.

A hero is, of course, a principal character in a play and is invariably very honorable; an antihero, however, is defined by William Rose Benét as “a protagonist who lacks traditional heroic virtues and noble qualities and is sometimes inept, cowardly, stupid, or dishonest, yet sensitive” (*Benét’s Reader’s Encyclopedia*: Fourth Edition [New York: Harper Collins Publishers, Inc., 1996], 40). Proteus displays both heroic and villainous qualities in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, with a definitive shift from hero to antihero. As the story begins, Proteus and Valentine playfully discuss love, with Proteus trying to explain its virtues and Valentine explaining its folly. Clearly, Proteus believes in the value of love and actually wishes it upon his good friend: “Upon some book I love, I’ll pray for thee” (1.1.20). Proteus then confesses his love for Julia, and later when he is forced to leave Verona, Proteus and Julia exchange rings to represent their love and future union.

At this point in the play, audiences cheer for Proteus, anticipate Proteus and Julia’s union, and celebrate in Valentine and Silvia’s love. However, as soon as Proteus sees Silvia and listens to Valentine and Silvia’s marital plans, he disregards his promise to Julia and deceives his friend in order to have Silvia for himself. In his sixty-six line split monologue in 2.4 and 2.6, Proteus ponders over his love for Julia, discards it for Silvia, and sets a plan in motion to banish Valentine from Milan. By the time Proteus speaks the final two lines in his monologue, “Love, lend me wings to make my purpose swift / As thou hast lent me wit to plot this drift” (2.6.42-43), his character has shifted from hero to antihero. From that point until the final moments of the play, Proteus’s actions revolve around securing Silvia for his own.

The character of Proteus clearly presents a problem because audiences have a hard time believing (1) that his love can change so drastically in mere seconds and (2) that he will severely betray a true friend in order to win Silvia. Proteus’s betrayal in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* probably contributes to the play’s difficulty, just as Bertram’s unbelievable conversion in *All’s Well that Ends Well* undoubtedly confuses the play’s viewers. (Bertram marries Helena, but immediately falls in love with Diana; as a result, audiences wonder if Bertram will truly love Helena by the end of the play.) But is Proteus different from Bertram in that he is truly redeemed? He begins as a hero, turns into an antihero, and attempts to convert back to a hero.
when he says to Valentine, Silvia, and Julia “’Tis true: O heaven, were man but constant, he were perfect. That one error fills him with faults; makes him run through all the sin; Inconstancy falls off, ere it begins. What is in Silvia’s face, but I may spy more fresh in Julia’s, with constant eye?” (5.4.109 114)

Valentine’s surprising decision to give his lover to his friend should not be looked upon as a choice of friendship over love, but rather as Proteus’s opportunity for redemption. Valentine’s lines open the door for Proteus to complete his arc back to hero. In some respects, his character mimics the familiar comedic pattern from society to wilderness to improved society: His mind begins in a natural society, goes through a wild transformation, and returns to a more “constant” society at the conclusion. But do audiences still doubt Proteus by the final lines of the play?

In order for *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* to be successfully performed, audiences must believe in both Proteus the hero and Proteus the antihero. Both are essential to the believability of the character as a whole, to the magnanimous gesture by Valentine, to the pursuit of Silvia, and to the love story with Julia. The dual personalities of Proteus are unquestionably a major aspect of the play. But is he truly redeemed by the end, worthy of Julia’s love and Valentine’s friendship? Perhaps the only way to decide is to consider this: If he were your good friend, would you forgive him?
Shakespeare’s First Romantic Comedy
By Jerry L. Crawford
From Souvenir Program, 1990

The Two Gentlemen of Verona appeared to Ben Jonson to be a curious mixture of knowledge and ignorance, of competence and ineptness. He commented that Shakespeare had his characters traveling by sea from one inland town to another; that Proteus, after he has seen Silvia, mentions that he has seen only her picture. Such somewhat picayunish faults most probably occurred because, as Jonson observed, Shakespeare took the plot of his play from a contemporary novel which he “sometimes remember’d and sometimes forgot.” William Hazlitt noted that the play contains no more than the bare outlines of the original novel; the play was written in high poetical spirit, with a “careless grace and felicity” which mark it for his.

Logan Pearsall Smith noted that the play shows the beginnings of Shakespeare’s “gift of the magic phrase.” The earliest plays and poems show that Shakespeare’s gift was an acquired rather than a natural skill; they are couched, for the most part, in the poetic diction that was the ordinary language of the time. However, such lines in Two Gentlemen as “The uncertain glory of an April day” foreshadow the poetic heights the author was to reach—he is beginning, here, to be Shakespeare.

In this play Shakespeare exploits the potential of character to a large degree; the play contains perhaps the largest collection of odd human beings he was ever to bring together in a single play. Written as a court comedy for a select audience, it is an experiment in contemporary satire, containing linguistic affectations and topical allusions in reference to current fads, fashions and cults.

Two Gentlemen is Shakespeare’s first romantic comedy. While it cannot stand with its successors, it will lead to the likes of Twelfth Night. The central concern of the romantic comedies is the stuff of romance—love, youth, and beauty. The plot is always the same boy meets girl—and the complications arise out of the dramatic fact that “the course of true love never did run smooth.” The world of romantic comedy is one in which the improbable looks probable; in which dark moments always pass; in which danger, grief and evil are known to be transitory; and in which there is the constant reassurance that all will be well in the end. It is a world in which, for example, a merchant’s ships, after having been reported lost at sea, finally return home safe and sound. It has no specific locality—it is not just Verona, or Belmont, or Illyria—indeed, it is a world rather of atmosphere, of climate, of attitude, of mood; in it, realities are changed into a golden lovely, lyrical neo-reality in which the events of romantic comedy may come to pass.

The characters in Shakespeare’s romantic comedy may be roughly divided into the upstairs world and the downstairs world—a schism most effectively used in Twelfth Night, in which the activities of the servants burlesque and color the activities of the principals in the romance. Shakespeare’s most striking character creations in Two Gentlemen are in the upstairs world—specifically, the romantic protagonists. Julia, Silvia, Proteus, and Valentine are indicative of certain trends in character types which Shakespeare was to develop more fully in later plays.

The heroine of the play is Julia. Although she is not as fully realized a character as Silvia, she is the center of the dramatic action, and Silvia is the complication, the obstacle to the course of true love—although doubtless an utterly captivating obstacle; Silvia precedes such magnificent romantic heroines as Portia and Rosalind, who are more sharply individualized
and fully realized than she. Julia is the prototype of the “disdainful lady” to which the Elizabethan sonnet cycles were almost universally addressed. Julia is utterly delightful when she tears the letter from Proteus for the benefit of her maid, Lucetta, only to later fit the scraps together again.

Shakespeare’s romantic heroines never fail to get their men. However, such comments as Rosalind’s about Orlando in *As You Like It*, “I found him under an oak, like a dropped acorn,” denote their essential disrespect for their men, and make one wonder whether such men are really worth the getting. Certainly the virtues of men such as Claudio in *Measure for Measure* and Bertram in *All’s Well That Ends Well* are none too numerous. (Both are unregenerate heels and Bertram a liar as well.) Proteus is not too impressive as a man, and his reformation is not as convincing as it might be. But he is young, and, moreover, this is the world of romantic comedy. Furthermore, Silvia’s beauty is such as might well make a better man commit the threefold perjury of which Proteus accuses himself.

Valentine’s is a secondary role, created to complement and balance the hero’s. While he may be a better man than Proteus, he is not as interesting. This sort of complementary part is one Shakespeare used a great deal. A lover is depicted with a friend, talking of his love; in balance, Shakespeare creates the scenes of high comedy in this and other romantic comedies that show the heroine and a friend discussing the virtues and faults of the various eligible men in the play.

Launce, with his disrespectful dog, is the first in a line of professional fools which Shakespeare found indispensable to the world of romantic comedy. Launce foreshadows Launcelot Gobbo in *The Merchant of Venice*, Touchstone in *As You Like It*, and, perhaps the greatest of them all, Feste in *Twelfth Night*. The quality of their humor is so far removed from that of, say *The Comedy of Errors*, that Launce is to the Dromios as blood is to beet juice.

While Julia is perhaps a less striking character than Silvia, it may be with some surprise that one learns she and Proteus are actually the protagonists of the play. There is some confusion as to whether the play concerns the separation of friends or the abandonment and subsequent reclamation of lovers. A doubleness of Shakespeare’s interest in these two areas causes an uncertainty of focus which does little more than confuse an audience. The complexity of the denouement foreshadows even more intricate endings in the later comedies, but the dual interest, the shiftings of emphases throughout the play, make it perhaps more confusing than it need be, and detract from the overall quality of what is otherwise an excellently conceived and executed romantic comedy. Perhaps it is best to merely accept Valentine’s pronouncement as the play concludes: “One feast, one house, one mutual happiness.”
Vocabulary/Glossary of Terms

Since *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* was written, many words in English have changed their meaning, and some are no longer used. If you remember the slang you used a few years ago, it seems dated. Who now uses the word “groovy”? Shakespeare used the rich vocabulary of his day in his plays. When reading Shakespeare, read the line in context of the scene. Try translating the lines into your own words, use today’s vernacular.

**Braggadism**: excessive praise

“Why, Valentine, what *braggadism* is this?”

Proteus (2.4.164)

**Disfurnish**: deprive

“Of which if you should here *disfurnish* me,”

Valentine (4.1.14)

**Halidom**: sanctity, salvation

“By my *halidom*, I was fast asleep.”

Host (4.2.135)

**Hallowing**: shouting

“What *hallowing* and what stir is this to-day?”

Valentine (5.4.13)

**Hapless**: unfortunate

“If hap’ly won, perhaps a *hapless* gain:”

Valentine (1.1.32)

**Hard-favor’d**: ugly

“Is she not *hard-favor’d*, sir?”

Speed (2.1.48)

**Inly**: inward

“Didst thou but know the *inly* touch of love,”

Julia (2.7.18)

**Lubber**: stupid fellow

“A notable *lubber*—as thou reportest him to be.”

Launce (2.5.45–46)

**Lumpish**: spiritless

“For she is *lumpish*, heavy, melancholy,”

Duke (4.2.62)

**Month’s mind**: strong desire

“I see you have *month’s mind* to them.”

Julia (1.2.134)

**Noddy**: a simpleton

“Nod-ay—why, that’s *noddy*.”

Proteus (1.1.115)

**Parle**: talk

“That every day with *parle* encounter me,”

Julia (1.1.5)

**Pawn**: pledge

“Here is her oath for love, her honor’s *pawn*.”

Proteus (1.3.47)
Peevish: willful
   “No, trust me, she is peevish, sullen, forward,”
   Duke (3.1.68)

Puddings: stomachs or intestines of animals
   “Nay, I’ll be sworn, I have sat in the stocks for puddings he hath stol’n, other-
   wise he had been executed”
   Launce (4.4.30–32)

Quips: sharp jests, sarcasms
   “And notwithstanding all her sudden quips,”
   Proteus (4.2.12)

Want his meed: lack his reward
   “And duty never yet did want his meed.”
   Silvia (2.4.112)

Wasps: fingers
   “Injurious wasps, to feed on such sweet honey,”
   Julia (1.2.103)

Wot: know
   “’twas I did the thing you wot of.”
   Launce (4.4.27)

Wrack: shipwrecked
   “Go, go, be gone, to save your ship from wrack,”
   Proteus (1.1.148–149)
Figurative Language

Shakespeare uses figurative language as he speaks with metaphors, similes, and personification. Recognizing when his characters are speaking figuratively helps in understanding the play.

Simile

A simile is a figure of speech that draws comparison between two different things using the word “like” or “as.” For example: In answering Valentine’s question below, Speed uses many similes when giving his answer. How many can you find?

Valentine: Why, how know you that I am in love?

Speed: Marry, by these special marks: first, you have learned, like Sir Proteus, to wreathe your arms, like a malecontent; to relish a love-song, like a robin-redbreast; to walk alone, like one that had the pestilence; to sigh, like a school-boy that had lost his A B C; to weep, like a young wench that had buried her grandam; to fast, like one that takes diet; to watch like one that fears robbing; to speak puling, like a beggar at Hallowmas. You were wont, when you laughed, to crow like a cock; when you walked, to walk like one of the lions; when you fasted, it was presently after dinner; when you looked sadly, it was for want of money: and now you are metamorphosed with a mistress, that, when I look on you, I can hardly think you my master.

(2.1.17–32)

Metaphor

A metaphor is the application of a word or phrase to somebody or something that is not meant literally but to make a comparison. Launce compares his master Proteus to a stone. What other metaphors can you find in the lines below?

Launce: Yet did not this cruel-hearted cur shed one tear: he is a stone, a very pebble stone, and has no more pity in him than a dog: . . . This shoe is my father: no, this left shoe is my father: no, no, this left shoe is my mother: nay, that cannot be so neither: yes, it is so, it is so, it hath the worser sole. This shoe, with the hole in it, is my mother, and this my father; a vengeance on’t! there ’tis.

(2.3.9–11, 14-19)

Personification

Personification occurs when human attributes or qualities are applied to objects or abstract notions. Look how “love” is blind, has twenty pair of eyes and can wink.

Example One:

Valentine: Why, lady, Love hath twenty pair of eyes.
Thurio: They say that Love hath not an eye at all.
Valentine: To see such lovers, Thurio, as yourself:

Upon a homely object Love can wink.

(2.4.95–98)

Example Two:

Speed: If you love her, you cannot see her.
Valentine: Why?
Speed: Because Love is blind. O, that you had mine eyes; or your own eyes had the lights they were wont to have when you chid at Sir Proteus for going ungartered!

(2.1.68–73)
Shakespeare’s Language: Prose vs Verse

Many students—and adults for that matter—find Shakespeare difficult to read and hard to understand. They accuse him of not speaking English and refuse to believe that ordinary people spoke the way his characters do. However, if you understand more about his language, it is easier to understand. One idea that may help to remember that his plays are written in two forms: prose and verse.

Prose

Prose is the form of speech used by common people in Shakespeare drama. There is no rhythm or meter in the line. It is everyday language. Shakespeare’s audience would recognize the speech as their language. These are characters such as murderers, servants, and porters. However, many important characters can speak in prose. The majority of The Merry Wives of Windsor is written in prose because it deals with the middle-class. The servants in The Two Gentlemen of Verona speak in prose.

Example One:

Launce: I think Crab, my dog, be the sourest-natured dog that lives: my mother weeping, my father wailing, my sister crying, our maid howling, our cat wringing her hands, and all our house in a great perplexity, yet did not this cruel-hearted cur shed one tear: he is a stone, a very pebble stone, and has no more pity in him than a dog: a Jew would have wept to have seen our parting; why, my grandam, having no eyes, look you, wept herself blind at my parting.

(2.3.1–13)

Example Two:

Speed: True, sir; I was in love with my bed: I thank you, you swunged me for my love, which makes me the bolder to chide you for yours. (2.1.81–83)

Verse

The majority of Shakespeare’s plays are written in verse. A character who speaks in verse is a noble or a member of the upper class. Most of Shakespeare’s plays focused on these characters. The verse form he uses is blank verse. It contains no rhyme, but each line has an internal rhythm with a regular rhythmic pattern. The pattern most favored by Shakespeare is iambic pentameter. Iambic pentameter is defined as a ten-syllable line with the accent on every other syllable, beginning with the second one.

For Example:

Proteus: Here is my hand for my true constancy; And when that hour o’erslips me in the day Wherein I sigh not, Julia, for thy sake, The next ensuing hour some foul mischance Torment me for my love’s forgetfulness! My father stays my coming; answer not; The tide is now: nay, not thy tide of tears; That tide will stay me longer than I should. Julia, farewell!

[Exit Julia]

What, gone without a word? Ay, so true love should do: it cannot speak.

(2.2.8–18)
Example Two:

Valentine:  Belike, boy, then, you are in love; for last morning you could not see to wipe my shoes.
(2.1.79–80)

Shakespeare used this style of writing as a form of stage direction. Actors today can tell by “scanning” a line (scansion) what words are most important and how fast to say a line. When two characters are speaking they will finish the ten syllables needed for a line showing that one line must quickly come on top of another. This is called a shared line or a split line. For Example:

Lucetta:  To plead for love deserves more fee than hate.
Julia:  Will ye be gone?
Lucetta:  That you may ruminate.
(1.2.48–49)
Famous Lines and Passages

Home-keeping youth have ever homely wits.
    —Valentine, 1.1.2

I have no other but a woman’s reason:
I think him so, because I think him so.
    —Lucetta, 1.2.22–23

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, 1.3.84–87

That man that hath a tongue, I say, is no man,
If with his tongue he cannot win a woman.
    —Valentine, 3.1.104–105

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 helped, inhabits there.
    —Proteus, 4.2.39–48

A man I am, cross’d with adversity.
    —Valentine, 4.1.12

Nay, would I were so anger’d with the same!
O hateful hands, to tear such loving words!
Injurious wasps, to feed on such sweet honey
And kill the bees that yield it with your stings!
I’ll kiss each several paper for amends.
    —Julia, 1.2.101–105
Elementary School Discussion Questions

Textual
1. What is Launce’s relationship to his dog?
2. What is a promise? Which characters broke their promises in the play?
3. Why does Julia disguise herself as a boy?

Relative
4. How do you forgive someone that has hurt your feelings?
5. If your best friend moved away, how would that make you feel?
6. What does it mean to be a friend? How should friends treat one another? Can friends become enemies? How?
7. What kind of costumes do you imagine for the characters? Draw some pictures of these costumes.

Compare/Contrast
8. Who is your favorite character? Why? Who is your least favorite character? Why?
9. Compare and contrast the characters of Valentine and Proteus. How are they the same? How are they different? Which character would you choose as a friend? Why?
10. Would you change the ending? What would you change? Why? How?
Middle and High School Discussion Questions

Textual
1. What is “love.” Which characters do you believe are truly in love? Explain your answer.
2. Friendship is a major theme in the play The Two Gentlemen of Verona. Describe the friendship that Proteus and Valentine have. How does their friendship change over the course of the play? Is it the same as when the play began? Explain.
3. What are some other themes found in the play? Explain their importance. Find examples of words, speeches, and character interactions that support your theme. Write an essay to explain and support the theme.
4. What examples of forgiveness are found in the end of the play? Are they realistic? Would you have forgiven Proteus for his follies? Why or why not?

Relative
5. What type of moral vision do you think Shakespeare is proposing based on the play’s turn of events?
6. If you were in the same situation as Julia by the end of the play, would you accept Proteus back into your life? What if the situation were reversed? Would it be any different?
7. What is the importance of Julia’s use of disguise? What did her disguise allow her to discover? How would the situation have been different if she wasn’t disguised? What disguises do you wear? Why?
8. Which character would you describe as the protagonist? Explain. Did you like this character? Why or why not? Did this character change throughout the course of the play? How? Why?

Compare/Contrast
9. Compare the play’s opening scene to its ending scene. Would you change the ending? How? Why?
11. What scene/part of the play would you classify as its climax? What leads you to that conclusion? What is the resolution? How are things resolved? Is it realistic?
Activities

Love Poem
Have students make a list of characteristics that describe true love. Discuss responses. Have students write a poem using the characteristics they chose to describe true love.

Friendship Letter
Have the students write a letter to a friend explaining the reasons of what makes their friendship strong or weak.

New Ending
Rewrite the ending as a tragedy.

Favorite Scene
Pick a favorite scene and make an illustration/comic book depiction of the action. Include written captions.

Sing and Dance
Read the song that Proteus sings (4.2.39ñ53). Create a dance to go along with the song. Or create your own, modern version of the song and perform it.

Costume Design
Draw some sketches showing the costume for at least three characters. Provide written captions explaining why you would have a character wear the sketched costume.

Perform
Choose a speech from one of the characters—memorize it and perform it in front of the class. You can have a costume if you wish.

In Modern Terms
Take a speech or scene from the play and write it in modern day language.

Character Sketch
Write an essay analyzing your favorite or least favorite character from the play.

Playbill
Create a playbill for the play with a synopsis, character descriptions, illustrations, and sponsors.
Lesson Plan #1
Lesson process from Linda G. Wolford (September 1998); found on the Folger Shakespeare Library website (http://www.folger.edu).

Title:
Character Life Box

Age Level:
Middle and high school students

Objective:
In this lesson students will demonstrate analytical skills by creating a character life box which is a container with everyday items that represent a character.

Materials:
The text of The Two Gentlemen of Verona

Anticipatory Set/Hook:
Have students write a journal entry in which they write a paragraph or more describing three to five things that they have in their room at home that explain their personality or defines who they are or what they like.

Process:
Students will have read at least halfway through the play.
1. Explain the concept of a character life box. A life box is a container of carefully chosen items that represent a particular character in a play. The box must contain four to six things the character might use daily or have as a keepsake. A line from the play must be cited to justify each item. The lines can be either spoken by the character or by another character in the play. No photos—items only. For example, for Proteus, the students might choose a ring (2.2.5) and for Valentine gloves (2.1.1–4). A shoebox is a good container, but other students should find an appropriate container that will support their character analysis, i.e. pillowcase, backpack, purse.
2. Assign students to work in pairs. The students pick a character and gather items to put in their box (at home). They find text to support each item choice and record a description of the item, an explanation of why it was chosen, and a corresponding phrase or sentence from the play (during class). The assignment requirements should be handed out so there is no question as to what they need to do.
3. The students bring in the finished projects and present them to the class. They share their items and explanations by holding up and describing each item and reading or telling what lines of text support their choice.

Tools for Assessment:
The teacher will assess the studentsí understanding of the outlined objective by evaluating how each student compiled and presented his or her life box. Also, the teacher can assess understanding by going around to the student pairs and asking questions.
Lesson Plan #2

Ideas and Activities by Amanda Endsley and Amanda Parker (more of Parkerís ideas can be found on the Folger Shakespeare Library website, http://www.folger.edu).

Title:
Denotation and Connotation in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*

Age Level:
Middle or high school

Objective:
Students will demonstrate an understanding of denotation and connotation by analyzing the text of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and by creating an original dialogue.

Materials needed:
Text of play
One of the many Amelia Bedilia books

Anticipatory Set/Hook:
Have the students divide a sheet of paper into two columns; then, while you read an Amelia Bedilia book, have them list and describe the directions of Amelia's boss in one column and what Amelia actually does in the other column. At the end of the book, discuss what the students found and have them explain what the boss meant and then what Amelia thought the boss meant.

Process:
1. You can start with definitions of denotation (the dictionary meaning of terms) and connotation (the underlying meaning), but I suggest waiting to present the meanings until after you have read the Amelia Bedilia book to the class.
2. Next, have students write down the denotations of “cheap” and “inexpensive.” Discuss their answers. Next, give students a moment to write down the connotations of these two words in the spaces provided. When that is complete, ask students which of the words has a more negative connotation. They should answer, “cheap.” Hopefully, at this point, they will understand the differences between the terms.
3. Now, have students write the term “thin” on their paper. Have the students come up with six to ten synonyms for “thin.” Then, have students rank the words with “1” having the most positive connotation on down to the least positive connotation. Discuss the answers: did the students agree on a ranking? Why or why not?
4. Next, apply denotation and connotation to the following scene in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (3.1.280–288). Have them look at the interaction between Speed and Launce.
Some possible questions:
   a. How is Launce similar to Amelia Bedilia?
   b. What words/phrases does he misunderstand?
   c. What does Speed really mean by “mastership,” “black news”? What does Launce think Speed means?
Now, with a partner, let the students continue their analysis by reading the rest of Speed and Launce's discussion (3.1.289–384).
5. Have each partnership write an original dialogue using their understanding of denotation and connotation. Some specific topics could be:
A love triangle
Betrayal of a friend
Forgiveness of a jealous friend
What it is like to be bossed around

**Tools for Assessment:**
The teacher can assess the students’ understanding of the outlined objective by evaluating the class discussion of denotation and connotation, asking questions during the discussion and by going around to each student while they work on their assignment to see if they understand.