RECUPERATING *THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA* AS CONDUCT LITERATURE

by

TYE MASTERS

(Under the Direction of Sujata Iyengar)

ABSTRACT

Conduct literature was a prolific genre in the Renaissance that had many inherent limitations. Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* poses an interesting critique and expansion of the tradition when read as a part of conduct literature. By bringing the tradition to the early modern stage, the play eliminates the exclusivity of the more traditional conduct manuals, making the instruction available to a wider audience. Dramatizing Proteus and Valentine's character development allows the audience to see how certain behaviors are undesirable while others are more ideal. The play challenges the limitations of the conduct literature tradition, while also becoming an extension of it.

INDEX WORDS: Renaissance, Conduct Literature, Shakespeare, Education, Feminist

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TYE MASTERS

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TYE MASTERS

Major Professor: Sujata Iyengar

Committee: Cynthia Camp
Miriam Jacobson

Electronic Version Approved:

Ron Walcott
Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2021

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CHAPTER

Introduction: *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Conduct Literature, and Early Modern England

Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (*Two Gents*) tells the story of two friends sent abroad to become true courtiers, or gentlemen, and the complicated love stories that follow. This fundamental storyline resonates with popular themes and philosophy from the early modern period such as male friendship, love conflicts, the education of nobles, and more. Valentine, the protagonist of the story, goes abroad willingly, seeking his education and unintentionally falling in love with the beautiful heiress Silvia. His friend, Proteus, is sent away from his love, Julia, to follow Valentine and become a proper gentleman of the court, commissioned by his father to "spend some time / With Valentinus in the emperor's court" (I.iii.66-7). Proteus immediately becomes interested in Silvia, forgetting his love for Julia entirely. He gets Valentine banned from the court, removing his competition for Silvia, but she runs away and pursues Valentine in the woods. In the climactic scene, Proteus attempts to force himself on Silvia, only to be stopped by Valentine. The problematic nature of the play is exacerbated by Proteus' apology:

> My shame and guilt confounds me.
> Forgive me, Valentine; if hearty sorrow
> Be a sufficient ransom for offence,
> I tender't here; I do as truly suffer
> As e'er I did commit. (V.iv.73-7)

Proteus' use of the word "ransom" and later "tender" call attention to the exchange taking place. His apology is issued with the expectation of an equal value return, which Valentine satisfies when he responds:

> Then I am paid;
> And once again I do receive thee honest.
> Who by repentance is not satisfied
> Is nor of heaven nore earth, for these are pleased;
> By penitence th'Eternal's wrath's appeased.
> And that my love may appear plain and free,
> All that was mine in Silvia I give thee. (V.iv.78-83)

By using the word "paid," Valentine is completing the monetary metaphor that Proteus began. Valentine then draws attention to more religious imagery, declaring that forgiveness is the natural consequence of repentance. For most audiences, Proteus' apology is understandably difficult to believe and Valentine's immediate forgiveness and offer of Silvia becomes a major interpretive crux. Why would Valentine give up his love of Silvia and deliver her to the man who just attempted to rape her? Is Valentine naïvely thinking Proteus is genuine or is something else happening on a different level? How can Valentine's action be interpreted in a way that appropriately and satisfactorily settles the issue and gives the play a good ending?

From the earliest productions and reviews of *Two Gents*, the final scene has been a problem that the theatre needed to solve. The first recorded production of the play is by Benjamin Victor in 1762. The fact that over a century and a half passes from the first publication of the play to the first recorded performance suggests that it was

controversial even to an early modern audience. Victor clearly states that the text is controversial in the eighteenth century, addressing the problematic portion of the play in an advertisement:

> It is the general opinion that this comedy abounds with weeds, and there is no one, I think, will deny, who peruses it with attention, that it is adorned with several poetical flowers such as the hand of a Shakespeare alone could raise. The rankest of those weeds I have endeavoured to remove; but was not a little solicitous lest I should go too far and, while I fancy'd myself grubbing up a weed, should heedlessly cut the threads of a flower. (525)

In a similar vein, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch referred to the play as a "damned spot" (102) on Shakespeare's reputation. While these reactions to the play are unfavorable, there is still a reason that the theatre continues to resurrect and produce it. Victor references a flower among the weeds, and Quiller-Couch's reverence for Shakespeare's reputation suggests that, at the very least, something about this play is recuperable.

In my effort to make such a recuperation of the play, I argue that *Two Gents* can effectively be read as a play taking part in the conduct literature tradition, while also serving as a critique and challenge of the tradition's limitations. Interpreting the play as conduct literature, Valentine and Proteus become embodiments of courtier ideals. Valentine takes on the role of the "perfect gentleman," with several key features being demonstrated throughout the play that are specifically highlighted in many popular conduct philosophies. Proteus, as his name suggests, takes on the role of the inconstant friend and lover, becoming the "imperfect gentleman" by exhibiting the wrong behavior when given similar opportunities to Valentine.

Conduct literature was a prolific genre throughout the Renaissance, manifesting in a variety of formats and directed to a variety of audiences. Works such as Baldassare Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* (1528) and Sir Thomas Elyot's *The Governor* (1531) are popular examples in the sixteenth century. These works, and others like them, outlined virtues, behaviors, and even physical bodies that were considered preferable to any others. While they were typically written as manuals, with a clear message to their audience, some texts such as Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590) or Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale* (1387) found ways to portray conduct literature through a story.

Texts such as Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier*, Elyot's *The Governor*, and many others lectured their readers on specific behaviors, virtues, and even bodies that were deemed ideal. Ferenc Hörcher's article "Dramatic Mimesis and Civic Education in Aristotle, Cicero and Renaissance Humanism" connects this concept from Aristotle all the way to the Renaissance Humanists. Hörcher observes that Cicero was concerned with how to "form the character (and to cultivate the soul) of the perfect Roman gentleman" (92-3). Cicero, he argues, looks at Aristotle's theories on learning through imitation and applies it to his philosophy on the Roman educational system. Hörcher links this to the Renaissance and states that the early modern period experienced a "reintroduction of Aristotle's views," which led it to "[aim] at moral and civic education as a premise to construct a Christian ideal society" (93).

From Aristotle to Cicero to the Renaissance, the concept of conduct literature, attempting to fashion the perfect gentleman in particular, was continuously resurrected. I argue that the early modern period became a time of re-exploration, establishing a

tradition that utilized various mediums to accomplish this purpose. Traditionally, however, it is only the more formal conduct manuals that we explore for their philosophy. While other works of literature might be considered didactic in nature, many texts such as *Two Gents* are overlooked for their participation in the tradition. When the play is examined as conduct literature, its function and didacticism become much clearer.

Conduct literature in the early modern period was problematic, however, for a few reasons. As Patricia Akhimie points out in *Shakespeare and the Cultivation of Difference*, “the progress of civility…can be measured by the restriction of social power and other benefits to an exclusive group most readily understood to be an upper or elite class” (17). Even the titles of some of these texts, such as Castiglione and Elyot’s, make their audiences obvious: courtiers and governors. The accessibility of these conduct manuals was severely limited to particular audiences. Nonetheless, looking back on literature in the early modern period and before, I identify more texts that qualify as conduct literature despite not explicitly being conduct manuals in the same way as Castiglione and Elyot’s work. Texts such as Edmund Spencer’s *The Faerie Queene*, Chaucer’s *The Knight’s Tale*, and Richard Edwards’ play *Damon and Pythias* (1571) instruct their audiences either on the stage or through their stories. (1571) instruct their audiences either on the stage or through their stories.

Sidney’s *Defense of Poesy* (1581) argues that the poet as teacher is “the first and most noble sort” (11). Using a story or the stage to “imitate, and imitate both to delight and teach” (11) diverges significantly from the more straightforward conduct manuals. It is the “delight” aspect that gives the didacticism a different functionality

altogether. Sidney posits that teaching “without delight they would fly as from a stranger” (11) but taking advantage of the popular poetic/dramatic forms “teach to make them know that goodness whereunto they are moved – which being the noblest scope to which ever any learning was directed” (11). In the case of these texts, the imitation that Sidney is talking about is clear for the audience: it is the conduct in action. Hörcher’s article addresses the imitation of conduct in action all the way back to Aristotle and Greek drama. He observes that instructing through drama challenges audiences to “identify themselves with protagonists…in doing so they can reflect on the similarities and dissimilarities of the play’s plot and the particular matrix of their own personal and political setting” (88). For the Renaissance Humanists, this meant “the strongest element of this reinterpretation [of Aristotle] was the emphasis laid on the civic pedagogical aspects of poetry and drama…[searching] for the model statesman” (94). With the stage as a medium for conduct philosophy, I argue the audience can see the proper behaviors and virtues being played out, and this enables them to learn more effectively through the delight of the medium as well. It is this second methodology that I posit *Two Gents* utilizes to challenge the format of the more traditional conduct manuals and instruct its audience on proper behavior.

Conduct manuals such as Castiglione’s *The Book of the Courtier* and Elyot’s *The Governor* are clear and direct in their didacticism. Their audience knows from the beginning that they are reading an instructional manual meant to aid in their self-improvement. This approach has a distinct benefit in that its audience has no need to interpret the teachings. For example, while *The Courtier* frames its teaching in the context of a debate among nobility, the purpose of the debate is to identify the traits of a

"perfect courtier," allowing the characters to present clear arguments for why characteristics are superior to others. Each quality that is introduced is justified and then countered, with the process repeating until there is agreement amongst the group that the quality should in fact be manifested in the courtier. The characters begin building the courtier with "this Courtier of ours should be nobly born and of gentle race" (26). They then must justify their rationale, observing that "it is far less unseemly for one of ignoble birth to fail in worthy deeds, than for one of noble birth" (26). The argument for a perfect courtier being of the nobility is essentially that there is more at stake for nobles.

Each quality also goes through a counterargument phase, however, allowing the audience to see a well-rounded argument for why certain characteristics are necessary. One character objects to the prerequisite of noble birth by saying:

> I say that this nobility of birth does not appear to me so essential in the Courtier; and if I thought I were saying what was new to any of us, I should cite instances of many men born of the noblest blood who have been full of vices; and on the other hand, of many men among the humbly born who by their virtue have made their posterity illustrious. (27)

Providing arguments, justifications, and counterarguments for each virtue as they go along establishes for the readership a clear, rational presentation of Castiglione's philosophy. It ensures that the audience is not only clear on what qualities a courtier must have, but why they must have them.

Similar to *The Book of the Courtier*, *The Governor* includes stories, such as that of Titus and Gisippus, to present Elyot's model of behavior. To mitigate any misinterpretation, there are multiple points in the text that inform the audience exactly

what message they should be receiving. When Gisippus surrenders his lover, Sophronia, to Titus, the text highlights that this surrender is elevating male friendship over romantic love. John D. Cox's "Shakespeare and the Ethics of Friendship" claims that the text is actually positioning Titus and Gisippus in a contest for moral perfection, making the surrender of Sophronia a winning move rather than a display of male friendship. The message of the text is blatantly clear, however: male friendship is a more important virtue than romantic love. Within the text this is made clear to the reader when Gisippus says, "nay god forbede that in the frendshippe of Gysippus and Titus shulde happen any suspition…whereby that honorable loue between us shulde be the mountenaunce of a cromme perished" (141). Cox's argument confuses the clear messages of the story, but the clarity of the message that a "cromme" or "crumb" of "honorable loue" between the men is more valuable than a romantic heterosexual relationship is a fundamental aspect of *The Governor*'s didacticism.

The clarity that *The Book of the Courtier* and *The Governor* share with many other conduct manuals is a core benefit to the texts. However, these manuals are extremely exclusive in nature. Akhimie's book identifies the typical audience for conduct literature as "that elite subject, who is literate, landed (genteel or aristocratic), and most often male" (17). These works, she argues, are used to differentiate between the ruling elite and the common (17). This is perhaps most clearly evidenced by *The Courtier*, which outlined noble birth as the first agreed upon quality of the perfect courtier. While some of the characters presented an argument that those of common birth can attain great things, the consensus is that noble birth, simply put, is better. From the start the majority of society is excluded from the text's audience. To extend Akhimie's argument

further, I argue the medium of the traditional conduct manuals limit the audience as well. Publishing conduct literature in books rules out the illiterate and allows for some degree of control on circulation and distribution.

In “The Concept of Male Friendship in Shakespeare’s *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*: a Contextual Approach,” Sibel Izmir draws attention to Aristotle, Cicero, Elyot’s *The Governor*, and other works to establish how male friendship was understood and why it was exalted in the Renaissance. In doing so, she argues for a common interpretation of *Two Gents*, positing that the play itself is an exaltation of male friendship and contributes to that tradition. Going back to Cicero, Izmir notes that friendship is placed higher than “richness, health, power, honour or pleasure” (162) in terms of virtue. For Aristotle, friendship as “philia” is “rational and it respects the integrity of the other person” (162). She then observes that Elyot’s *The Governor* goes to great lengths to prove that male friendship is to be exalted, extending its message to *Two Gents*.

To support her interpretation, Izmir notes some qualifications of male friendship that are commonly expressed. Aristotle dictates that friendship must be based on equality, otherwise the relationship can’t work. In *Two Gents*, the play begins with a clear indication that Valentine and Proteus are of equal social standing and class.

This interpretation falls short, however, even at this base qualification. If the play is an exaltation of friendship, and a basic qualification of friendship is that the two be equals, then the major turning points of the relationship between Valentine and Proteus should be when one or the other is no longer equal. The timelines are close enough to make it seem causal, but sequentially we see that the friendship itself is going through

turning points first, not the social status. Neither of their social statuses change until Valentine is banished from Milan, which is instigated by Proteus. For Proteus to orchestrate Valentine's downfall and be plotting to steal his love, their friendship must already be at a turning point. Similarly, Valentine restores their friendship at the end of the play before his social status is restored by the Duke. Based on the timelines and Izmir's qualification, the play struggles to be an exaltation of the type of friendship that she suggests.

Differing slightly from Izmir's argument, John D. Cox's "Shakespeare and the Ethics of Friendship" still engages with the exaltation of male friendship in a way, but argues for a new reading. Cox examines *Two Gents* alongside a selection of other Shakespearean plays as well as the story of Titus and Gisippus in Elyot's *The Governor* to establish that the play is making a comparison between friendship and competition. He posits that while Elyot claims his writing is about perfect friendship, the story itself is emphasizing a competition for moral perfectionism. This makes Gisippus' surrender of Sophronia to Titus a milestone in virtue, elevating himself morally and thus making him the victor of the contest. Cox transposes this argument onto *Two Gents*, claiming that a similar competition is being played out between Proteus and Valentine. This interpretation falls short, however, in the opening scenes of the play. Cox's claim that a moral competition is going on implies that there is an agreed upon contest between the two friends. He points to this in Titus and Gisippus, claiming that the two goad each other into action in order to keep the contest alive. A large part of Cox's support for carrying this interpretation into *Two Gents* rests solely on the plot similarities between the two tales, but not necessarily in the details that is used to

support this reading of *The Governor*. For one, at no point does Proteus seem to know of or intend to participate in this competition. In the opening scenes he willingly stays behind in Verona to pursue his own love of Julia while Valentine departs for Milan seeking education and self-improvement. If this were to be a contest between the two, Proteus would have left Verona as well to compete alongside Valentine virtuously.

Another key similarity between the Titus and Gisippus story and *Two Gents* is the surrender of the love. Cox points to Titus' lines in the story as evidence of the aforementioned competition. Titus calls his reception of Sophronia a "poison" that Gisippus passed on to him. For Cox, the reason for this resentment despite winning the hand of Sophronia is that Titus lost the moral contest. By taking the romantic love, Titus passed up on virtuous victory. Cox's explanation for this depends on an earlier encounter between the two friends where Gisippus almost goads Titus to fall in love with Sophronia and create the whole problem between them. This interaction does not occur in *Two Gents* in the same way. When Proteus arrives in Milan and Valentine has a moment alone with him, two topics are immediately brought up: Julia and Silvia. Valentine makes it clear that he still believes that Proteus is in love with Julia and even supports the matter now that he understands. He justifies this by then admitting his own love for Silvia. It would be more than a stretch to consider this an attempt to goad Proteus into loving Silvia, and so neither friend seems to believe they are engaged in any sort of moral competition against one another.

Other works of conduct literature take a less direct route with their didacticism. Works such as *The Faerie Queene* and *The Knight's Tale* present clear virtues that the audience should seek to attain, but some measure of interpretation is necessary. By

virtue of being more widespread than *The Book of the Courtier* and *The Governor*, these texts are significantly more accessible to audiences and don't inherently exclude people that aren't elite or upper-class, however, there are drawbacks to this methodology. An interpretation is required to understand the instruction and that invites the risk that the message will be misinterpreted.

In *The Knight's Tale*, Theseus alongside Palamon and Arcite contain the instruction for the audience. Stephen H. Rigby's book, *Wisdom and Chivalry*, argues that Theseus embodies Aristotelian virtues and is meant to be contrasted with Palamon and Arcite's behavior. From the beginning, Theseus is set up by the text to be the model of behavior for the audience. He is constantly referred to as noble and honorable, being perfectly chivalric in his actions. While Palamon and Arcite are violent, animalistic, and impulsive, Theseus is presented as prudent and just, exhibiting fortitude and temperance at several key points in the text.

In the grove scene, where Palamon and Arcite are fighting each other, the two are compared to wild boars in their frenzy. They act so impulsively that the Knight reduces their description to animalistic terms. Meanwhile, as Rigby observes, Theseus is described as displaying "virtuous fortitude…he fights 'not for woodnesse but for goodnesse' having won many lands 'with his wisdom and his chivalrie'" (43). The text utilizes these descriptions to clearly distinguish between the virtues of Theseus and the vices of Palamon and Arcite. This is reinforced by Theseus' justice, when he stops the lawless, bestial fighting that the two cousins are engaged in and redirects their conflict to a more civilized setting. He sets up a tournament for them to compete in and, most importantly, he limits the violence to ensure that nobody is killed.

Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* operates in a similar way to *The Knight's Tale*, but is more blatant with its message. In his "A Letter of the Authors expounding his whole Intention in the course of this Worke," Spenser does exactly what the title suggests and explains the purpose of *The Faerie Queene*. He writes, "the generall end therefore of all the booke is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline" (737). To ensure his audience makes no mistake about the allegory within, Spenser clarifies that he is in fact writing about conduct. He goes on to state not only whose philosophy he is borrowing from the most, "I labour to pourtraict in Arthure, before he was king, the image of a brave knight, perfected in the twelve private morall vertues, as Aristotle hath devised" (737), but also explain how he structured the text, "which is the purpose of these first twelve bookes" (737). Spenser's letter removes any possible confusion an audience might have, ensuring that the readers know exactly which characters to pay attention to and why.

Izmir's article also connects *Two Gents* to Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, arguing that Spenser's text "indicates quite openly that love between friends is superior to love between the sexes" (164). Of course, in *Two Gents* the common evidence of this is the offer of Silvia by Valentine. What this qualification, and the following interpretation, doesn't address is the fact that such a friendship needs to extend two ways. At least twice in the play we see Proteus choose a love over Valentine, first when he stays in Verona for Julia and again when he gets Valentine banished so he can make an attempt at Silvia. Before attempting his rape of Silvia, Proteus says, "In love / Who respects friend?" (5.4.54-5), explicitly choosing his love for Silvia, if it can even be called that, over his friendship with Valentine. Conversely, Valentine's language when he

offers up Silvia is not nearly as plain. Whereas Proteus clearly invoked phraseology that brought friendship and love into comparison, Valentine says, “And that my love may appear plain and free, / All that was mine in Silvia I give thee” (5.4.82-3). His love appearing “plain” and “free” could mean that he wants his forgiveness to appear genuine, and whether or not we believe that it is, the fact that his words do not clearly indicate that friendship is superior to romantic love makes it difficult to claim so. The foundational qualifications that Izmir introduces as vital to establishing the male friendship exaltation in the play do not hold up to a closer inspection of the text. Their equality does not seem to be a prerequisite for their friendship, but rather the status of their friendship seems to determine their equality. Furthermore, Proteus’ actions and lines in the text clearly refute the supposed superiority of male friendship when lovers are faced with a romantic option, and Valentine’s lines are not explicit enough to establish an exaltation of male friendship.

Continuing the trend of weaving conduct philosophy into a story, Richard Edwards’ *Damon and Pythias* is a precursor to *Two Gents*. It not only provides source material for Shakespeare’s play, but it also represents an earlier attempt to dramatize conduct literature. Taking the conduct literature tradition to the stage is pivotal in critiquing the problematic, exclusive nature of works such as *The Book of the Courtier* and *The Governor*. The theatre fielded an audience that was not limited to literate or elite classes. This establishes a strong precedent for *Two Gents* and other plays. and other plays.

Edwards’ play uses distinct pairs of characters so that the individual relationships can be compared and contrasted. It is easy to see clear differences when an

audience is able to view Damon and Pythias alongside Aristippus and Carisophus. The interactions within the friendships (or rivalries) and the storyline indicate for the audience which qualities should be prized and which should be avoided. Damon and Pythias are clearly not only the titular characters of the play, but are also the protagonists whose characteristics are depicted as desirable. In contrast, Aristippus and Carisophus have a relationship dynamic that is easily discernable as undesirable.

Two Gents builds on the precedent of *Damon and Pythias*, taking advantage of the theatre and dramatizing its philosophy. It extends the critique of the more traditional conduct manuals and makes conduct literature accessible to a wider audience. The play's instruction is woven into the story of the play, allowing the audience to see how the characters Valentine and Proteus develop over time.

The combination of theatre and conduct literature is not a particularly novel concept in criticism. Patricia Akhimie has used the two to show how early modern England justified class and race distinctions. Jessica Murphy explains that theatre and conduct literature perform similar functions, providing potential models of behavior for their audiences. Both ~~of~~ these authors not only show that the marriage between conduct literature and theatre is plausible, but they also argue for the relevance of it to modern scholarship. The implications of conduct literature and drama intersecting in the early modern period extend beyond early modern audiences. This intersection contributes significantly to critical race theory, feminist criticism, and, in my case, to recuperating a poorly-received play and understanding how it functioned with an early modern audience.

In *The Defense of Poesy*, Sidney posits that poetry and drama are justified when they are didactic. Using this justification, one could claim that *Two Gent*'s poor reception in the past is stemming from its inability to make its instruction clear, I argue that is not the case. As with any play, staging is incredibly important and no two productions are alike. Various decisions made to emend or even cut the text can disrupt the methodology that is necessary for *Two Gents*' message to be transmitted. Additionally, many audiences focus on the friendship between Valentine and Proteus, as we see with the critics mentioned before. A better interpretation can actually solidify the instructional nature of the play, however, making its message clear and mitigate many of the problematic parts. Interpreting the play as instructional satisfies Sidney's justification and allows for the play to holistically take on a purpose. *Two Gents* becomes a manual for behavior, modelling both a good and bad gentleman for its audience, and expanding the role that women typically have in conduct literature. The play's use of the theatre allows it to extend the typical audience of conduct literature to be more inclusive, incorporating a wider range of classes, races, and genders, taking part in the tradition and challenging it at the same time.

Chapter One: Education Through Character Development in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*

Understanding *Two Gents* as conduct literature is most efficiently done by examining the character development within the play and putting it in conversation with the popular conduct philosophies of the period. In particular, Valentine and Proteus' development is a fundamental aspect of *Two Gents* that differentiates it from the other texts that came before it. The play borrows from Elyot's presentation of Titus and Gisippus, where the two "seemed to be one in fourme and personage" (134). Valentine and Proteus are, for all intents and purposes, indistinguishable at the start of the play. No physical descriptions are provided of the two and we know they are roughly of the same social status. Their similarity crucial to the play's functioning as conduct literature. Beginning the play like this reveals a sort of pedagogy of the play to educate the audience about the courtier tradition. Rather than having Valentine begin the play as a completely virtuous gentleman, and Proteus the antithesis of Valentine, both have a roughly similar and basically neutral character. Neither character is made to seem like the protagonist or the antagonist, giving the audience no indication of their virtues or vices yet. Having such neutral characters in the beginning allows the audience to observe the two characters as they develop, making the characters' experiences stand out more and provide a model for good and bad behavior. As the play goes on, it is made clear to the audience that Valentine's behavior should be sought and Proteus' should be avoided.

Upon leaving for Milan in the opening act, Valentine's character begins the process of developing into Castiglione and Elyot's embodiment of the ideal, well-travelled gentleman. For Elyot, travel works on two levels: on the soul, helping one discern virtue from vice, and towards the society which might benefit from such just leadership. Much of early modern English nobility held the notion that the experience of travel added to the value of a gentleman and was necessary in courtly education. This idea in particular is elaborated on by Elyot when he says that nobility ought to "resort and peruse all parts of the countries…and insearch diligently as well what be the customs and manners of people good and bad" (232). The idea that if one were exposed to more people, both those virtuous and those full of vice, then that person would be able to discern virtue and vice and the natural influence for virtue would rise. This concept leans heavily on a presupposition that soon to be gentleman would identify with the virtuous and would recognize wickedness for what it is.

Elyot goes on to say that travel helps one to distinguish between "the commodities and discommodities [of virtue and vice and], how the one may be preserved, the other suppressed" (232), and to observe "them that have ministration or execution of justice…to taste and feel how every one of them do practise their offices" (232). Travel, Elyot argues, is a twofold experience. It is beneficial for the development of personal character, showing how one ought to behave and what virtues one ought to aspire to possess. He also argues that it is beneficial for instructing one in leadership, exposing the up-and-coming gentleman to as many offices within the court or governing body as possible. Seeing offices practiced both well and poorly provides the gentleman

with examples and precedents upon which they can assess their own performance of leadership.

This concept is reinforced by the play when Antonio and Pantino discuss Proteus' decision to remain in Verona. Pantino says, "[Proteus] wondered that your lordship / Would suffer him to spend his youth at home, / While other men, of slender reputation, / Put forth their sons to seek preferment out:" (I.iii.4-7). Proteus, in this case, is acting as an exception to the rule: young gentlemen went abroad for education and experiences of some sort. Pantino goes on to say Proteus should not be allowed to stay in Verona, "Which would be great impeachment to his age / In having known no travel in his youth" (I.iii.15-6). Pantino practically echoes Elyot's philosophy on travel, underlining its importance in developing a gentleman. Valentine embraces this perfectly, heading for Milan to learn from their court, while Proteus already is in contention with the ideal.

When Valentine arrives at court, he must face his first true test: falling in love and having to navigate the vast assortment of courtly mannerisms and barriers that are placed between himself and the Duke's daughter. It is ironic, as Camille Slights points out in her article "*The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and the Courtesy Book Tradition," that "Silvia, in fact, is instructing Valentine in just the kind of courtly wit and elegant discourse the young gentlemen from Verona have come to Milan to learn" (18). Valentine begins his education in courtly conduct being taught by the very person whom he intends to use the mannerisms and intricacies of courtship and conduct to win.

The most obvious example of this instruction is seen when Silvia asks Valentine to write a letter, supposedly to a lover of hers, which he does somewhat reluctantly. After delivering the letter Silvia commissioned, she hands it back to him, saying, "Yes,

yes, the lines are very quaintly writ, / But since unwillingly, take them again" (II.i.115-6). Valentine, believing that Silvia isn't satisfied with his writing, offers to write another letter that might be more moving. Silvia, however, grows weary of Valentine's ignorance and leaves the conversation, disappointed by her student's incomprehension. It is only later that Valentine realizes exactly what had occurred when his servant Speed reveals the cleverness of Silvia's actions and words, saying, "She hath made you write to / yourself? Why do you not perceive the jest?" (II.i.143-4). Castiglione writes on this exact situation, saying, "if [a young nobleman] must speak or write, let him do it with such modesty and so warily that his first words shall try her mind, and shall touch so ambiguously upon her wish as to leave a way…that may enable her…not to see that his discourse imports love" (207). In the play, this situation is reversed, and Silvia creates the cleverly wrought ambiguity that hides her intent, being an example for Valentine on how to execute what Castiglione is describing. Valentine is taught through this bungled exchange, educated on courtship and the nuances associated with that discourse. This provides Valentine with an education in the colloquy of the court, which was intended of him in the beginning that they might "hear sweet discourse, converse with noblemen" (I.iii.31), becoming knowledgeable in more than just the functions of the court.

From Valentine's clean slate starting point in Verona to the court in Milan, his character develops in such a way that he gathers the experiences and education needed in order for him to embody the ideals of the courtier tradition. A character such as this is best described by Castiglione when he states, "this Courtier of ours should be endowed by nature with beauty of countenance and person, and with a grace that shall make him so agreeable" (31), and explains further when he describes a courtier having

“a certain grace and (as we say) ‘air’ that shall…be an ornament that should dispose and unite all his actions, and in his outward aspect give promise of whatever is worthy in the society and favour of every great lord” (27). These words express the idea that a true courtier should have an innate, virtuous, and rounded character that can be seen or even felt by those around him as it drives and determines everything he does. This character, articulated by Castiglione as a sort of grace, coupled with an education on how to interact in a courtly scene molds Valentine to end the play with “a more complex understanding” (28) of himself and evolve into a complete gentleman, as affirmed by the Duke in the final scene when he says, “Thus I subscribe: Sir Valentine, / Thou art a gentleman and well derived” (V.iv.145-6). The character of Valentine is developed throughout the play, acquiring the virtues and qualities that are needed in order to be considered a gentleman. He travels, becomes educated, and behaves so that he line by line satisfies the necessary qualifications for a courtier as laid out by Castiglione and Elyot. Parsing out this process throughout the play allows for the audience to watch as the character is molded into form, creating a clearer understanding of the specific qualities expected of one within the courtier tradition.

The audience is also watching Proteus develop alongside Valentine. With their economic status, age, upbringing, and even dialogue being nearly identical, it would then follow that, were the two both courtier material, they would develop the same provided they have the same experiences. Already from act one, however, Shakespeare gives the audience a perspective that shows Proteus beginning to differ from Valentine. Proteus’ choice to remain in Verona for Julia also betrays a lack of desire to travel, experience, and learn, revealing that his character is not following the

same conduct guidelines as Valentine. Although Proteus argues that he can still gain wisdom in love, he would not have access to the experience and education that Elyot proposes is necessary for a gentleman. By the end of act one Proteus is already seen deviating from the development that Valentine undergoes. This lack of ambition to travel and gain experience does not immediately condemn Proteus, who is after all smitten with Julia at home and wishes to press his suit, but it immediately shows the contrast between Proteus and Valentine, foreshadowing the direction that each character is headed. Proteus' travelling to Milan only due to the bidding of his father versus Valentine's willing and eager drive to pursue this courtier ideology shows the disparity between the qualities that the two characters possess and are acquiring.

After Proteus arrives in Milan, he immediately becomes infatuated with Silvia, Valentine's beloved, and puts his romantic interest in contest with his loyalty to Valentine. According to Castiglione, a gentleman ought to have "perfect loyalty and unconquered courage, and…he [should] always be seen to possess them" (29). Proteus began the play pledging friendship to Valentine, someone to whom he not only now has spoken word and service to as Valentine's "beadsman" (I.i.18), but to whom he also was a dear friend. Valentine gives Proteus a glowing reference to the Duke: "I knew him as myself, for from our infancy…He is complete, in feature and in mind, / With all good grace to grace a gentleman" (II.iv.60,71-2).

Yet for all of this faith, owing his word and his position in the court to Valentine, Proteus still betrays Valentine so that he may pursue Silvia. Not long after meeting Silvia, Proteus begins to ~~work to~~ undermine the relationship between Silvia and Valentine, eventually getting Valentine banished from the court. No sooner is Valentine

exiled than Proteus begins to court Silvia, delivering a monologue in which he is deciding whether to court Silvia and in doing so to betray Valentine.

Proteus finally says, “I to myself am dearer than a friend” (II.vi.23). This line, spoken after voicing all his concerns about the situation, reveals the depth of the betrayal that Proteus commits against Valentine. Elyot, when reflecting on what drives one away from virtue, said, “noble men more grievously offend by their example…the most dangerous poison to nobleness” (16-7). Proteus’ behavior undermines his claim to being a courtier, showing his actions deviating from the expectations of his status as a supposed gentleman. Displaying the two scenes back to back, first having Valentine validate the friendship the between himself and Proteus, then having Proteus betray Valentine, provides the audience with continuous insight into the trend of the two characters: one towards virtue, the other towards vice.

Along the same timeline as his selfish betrayal of Valentine, Proteus displays a similar inconsistency with his relationship to Julia. Before departing Verona, Proteus pledges his loyalty to Julia, saying, “here is my hand for my true constancy” (II.ii.8); once Proteus is displaced from his home environment, however, and begins to face his first true test of character, he quickly abandons the loyalty, or façade of loyalty, he had for Julia. He vocalizes his betrayal, saying, “to leave my Julia shall I be forsworn…And e’en that power which gave me first my oath / Provokes me to this threefold perjury” (II.vi.1,4-5). This again puts Proteus in direct contrast with Valentine who, even after being exiled to live in the forest, stays constant and continues to love Silvia.

In the final scene, when Julia reveals her identity to Proteus, he abandons his unsuccessful suit for Silvia, saying, “what is in Silvia’s face but I may spy / More fresh in

Julia's, with a constant eye?" (V.iv.114-5). The only justification Proteus offers for his character is that the nature of man itself is dispositioned this way, stating, "O heaven, were man / But constant, he were perfect. That one error / Fills him with faults" (V.iv.109-11). This misogynistic defense, however, does not stand if we are to examine Proteus' behavior in light of Valentine's. Throughout the play Valentine remains constant to both Silvia and Proteus, setting an example that Proteus fails to follow.

Using a process throughout the story as the methodology for its didacticism is something that differentiates *Two Gents* from all but *The Faerie Queene.* Whereas the other texts like Edwards' *Damon and Pythias* and Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale* present their characters as fully formed and simply acting within character, *The Faerie Queene* has specific virtues and vices embodied by the characters themselves.

The Redcrosse Knight signifies holiness, and his journey performs the didactic function of sorting through which qualities (embodied by certain characters) are virtuous. The most prevalent example is his association with Una, who symbolizes truth. She is directly contrasted with Duessa, or falsehood, and as the Redcrosse Knight works to differentiate between the two and re-establish his connection with Una, the reader is going through the same journey as well, learning to seek truth over falsehood.

Similarly, Britomart signifies chastity and her journey teaches the reader to differentiate between virtuous love and the vice of lust. Both Britomart and the Redcrosse Knight's journeys depict literal battles between virtues and vices, an attempt to make it obvious to the reader that a similar struggle should play out internally. Holiness, truth, and chastity prevail over the many villains that manifest along the way. This development mimics that which we see in *Two Gents*, giving the audience an

opportunity to watch these virtues progress and grow in situations, especially where they are directly opposed to vices.

In Jessica Murphy's *Virtuous Necessity*, she states, "looking at the advice to women on stage…allows us an insight into early modern notions not only of feminine virtue but also of the self as it was formed" (53). Murphy notes that most of the advice offered to women both on stage and in conduct manuals is typically domestic or about love. We see an example of this type of counsel in the beginning of *Two Gents* between Lucetta and Julia. Julia asks, "wouldst thou then counsel me to fall in love?", to which Lucetta advises, "ay, madam, so you stumble not unheedfully" (I.ii.2-3). This advice shows how *Two Gents* contributes to the traditional women's conduct literature.

Two Gents is using two different methods to foreground advice for women, however. It does participate in the more traditional conduct advice to women at the time, but still treats Silvia in a completely different way. Her role becomes educator and advice-giver, to an upper-class man no less, challenging and critiquing the more traditional aspects of the tradition. To an audience watching and learning from the characters in the play, this delivers a powerful message about the role of women in education and even about women's conduct in general. For Castiglione, the role of educating courtiers is crucial. He writes that the perfect courtier ought to "learn the rudiments from the best masters. And how important this seemed to King Philip of Macedon, may be seen from the fact that he chose Aristotle…to teach his son Alexander" (36). Though Valentine was sent to Milan to learn at the emperor's court, his instruction came through Silvia. Adding the role of educator to Silvia's character

attaches a much higher significance to her part in the play and sets an important example for the audience.

Silvia's character fills a different role, becoming perhaps the most powerful and influential role within the play, subverting the audience's expectations. Elyot's views on travel and Castiglione's arguments for education would lead the audience to assume at the beginning of *Two Gents* that the duke, or some other authoritative noble figure, is going to be manifesting as the educator. After all, Valentine is going to "[attend] the emperor in his royal court" (I.iii.27) and "converse with noblemen" (I.iii.31). It would lead the audience to a logical conclusion that Valentine, and later Proteus, would be educated by one of these noblemen. Instead, Valentine's first scene when he is in Milan is directed by Silvia. In fact, Silvia is the first character from Milan or in the court that we are exposed to, making a strong statement about her role. It gives her a remarkable amount of influence, not only over Valentine and Proteus within the play, but over the audience as they are learning alongside the gentlemen. Considering the purpose of the play is to educate the audience, that means Silvia also becomes one of the key educators of the audience as well. Internally and externally, Silvia takes on a commanding influence over how the Valentine, Proteus, and the audience receive the instruction. By taking over and executing those duties, Silvia is effectively made the most powerful character in the play.

One character that many scholars interpreting the play as friendship literature, do not consider is Silvia and her side of the relationship with Valentine. J. L. Simmons' "Coming Out in Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*" interpreted the play as an exaltation of male friendship, but with a twist. Simmons argues that the play, being

widely recognized as one of Shakespeare's earliest works, was "traversed and thwarted by anxieties of 'coming out'" (857). While participating in a tradition popular at the time, Simmons posits that the text has a clear relationship with Shakespeare himself. This relationship creates a deep and significant intersection then between the play and the playwright. Just as Valentine departs Verona seeking education, knowledge, and growth, Simmons' argument is that Shakespeare is writing self-reflectively of his own debut into playwriting. The article goes on to claim that *Two Gents* was "an uncharacteristic failure on Shakespeare's part to give transhistorical significance to a cultural phenomenon" (861). The cultural phenomenon in this case is the friendship literature of the time and the failure was that the play does not recognize the temporary nature of that tradition. Simmons observes that heterosexuality was increasingly ascendant and a same-sex friendship must yield to that romantic love. This argument is interestingly siding with the interpretation of *Two Gents* as taking part in friendship literature but is not quite positing that the play itself is recuperated as "good" after removing the controversial complications.

Although Silvia is silenced after her attempted rape, she is not silenced throughout the earlier parts of the play. In nearly every scene that she appears in, Silvia embodies two significant roles: educator and constant lover. Despite the entrance of another gentleman and potential love interest as well as the cross-dressed Julia (a character that would most likely become Silvia's new love interest in other Shakespeare plays), Silvia keeps her eye fixed on Valentine. She constantly reminds Proteus of his friendship with Valentine, his love for Julia, and her love for Valentine. In a similar way, Julia remains constant throughout as she promised in the beginning, following Proteus

to Milan and eventually swaying him back and away from Silvia. Both of these characters represent the heterosexual relationship and constancy that Simmons claims is absent from the play.

Two Gents walks on both sides of the line when it comes to the more traditional aspects of conduct literature. In many ways it challenges and critiques the genre, such as giving Silvia, a woman, such a powerful role, but in many other ways it contributes to the same philosophy as other texts. While the instruction *Two Gents* provides is made available to more people and a wider range of social classes than the traditional conduct manuals, it is not entirely inclusive itself. The play borrows heavily from Castiglione and Elyot's philosophies, and the fact that the two main models of behavior are both upper-class men, makes some of the teaching still directed towards a specific audience. This is mitigated by the inclusion of Lucetta's advice, contributing to the traditional models of women's conduct advice, and by the unique power and influence that is granted to Silvia. While the play's subject matter is still dealing with gentlemen and the intricacies of court is problematic for delivering a model of virtue and behavior to people that are not a part of the upper-class. By virtue of being a play and extending these philosophies into the theatre, however, *Two Gents* is pushing the limitations of the more traditional conduct manuals. Whether the audience members are members of an upper or elite class, the conduct philosophy that was previously inaccessible is now made available to them. This enables the play to both contribute to the tradition and challenge it in the status quo.

Chapter Two: Performance History and Managing the Final Scene

Interpreting *Two Gents* as conduct literature facilitates a better understanding of the play's structure and characters, however, the final scene still makes the play problematic and must be resolved for it to be an effective conduct literature piece. In this chapter I will analyze various productions of the play over the years, focusing on how they staged the final scene. In the following chapter, I will propose my own suggestions for staging the final scene to encourage an interpretation of the play as conduct literature, as well as point out the complications of such an interpretation.

The performance and critical history of *Two Gents* reveals a consistent dance around the scene and a variety of choices made on how to address it. Some productions cut the scene altogether, seeking to avoid the problem entirely. Others choose to emend the lines, changing Proteus' apology, Valentine's offer, or something else. Finally, some productions choose to leave the scene untouched and stage it the best they can. All these decisions change the way the play as a whole can be interpreted by the audience. Removing crucial pieces of the final scene, such as Valentine's offer or the duke's affirmation of Valentine, negates significant aspects of the play and muddles the culmination of the conduct philosophy.

The earliest recorded production of *Two Gents* is Benjamin Victor's in 1762, where he opted to keep the final scene but edited the lines significantly. In his production, Valentine's offer of Silvia, "all that was mine in Silvia I give thee" (V.iv.83), is moved and changed. Instead, Valentine's speech ends with his acceptance of Proteus'

apology and Julia is revealed at that moment, “and Julia herself hath brought [the ring] hither” (V.iv.96). At that point, Valentine steps in and delivers the offer, though rather than offering up Silvia he offers himself and Julia to Proteus in reconciliation. As Victor mentions in his advertisement, he labored to edit out the portions of the play that might be too unsavory. Margaret Maurer addresses Victor’s emendations and cuts in her article, “Figure, Place, and the End of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*,” and points out that “in Victor's revision, Shakespeare has learned at last to tell a plain tale plainly…of course, in its original condition, *Two Gentlemen* is very much another story” (415). And she is right: editing *Two Gents* in this way diminishes a major interpretive crux in the play, namely Valentine’s offer of Silvia to Proteus. Maurer’s article points to this particular scene among many as a moment where the interpretation changes everything for the audience. For Maurer, the inconsistencies and conflicts that we find in *Two Gents* are not dissimilar to ones we find throughout the rest of Shakespeare’s work. There are several instances in the play where locations are seemingly mixed up, which most editors unanimously adjust to make the sense within the geographical context of the story. Instances like these only exacerbate the negative receptions of the play such as Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch’s. It is what has led many critics to further condemn the play entirely. Maurer does not disagree with many editors’ decision to adjust these “mistakes” and make the play more seamless, but she points to several other Shakespeare plays where the same or similar instances occur.

The desire to make these changes goes back to Sidney’s *Defense of Poesy* and his argument that poetry and drama are justifiable when they are instructional. Instances such as those that Maurer is observing are more likely to confuse audiences.

The clearer and more consistent a work is in its teaching, the better pieces of art and instruction they are. Thus, Shakespeare's mistaking Padua for Milan in *Two Gents* and referring to Milan as Verona later is a detriment to the work that editors must go through and "fix" by making them consistent.

Maurer sets herself apart from Sidney in this respect, though, and insists on the importance of interpretation. Shakespeare's work, along with most others, contains figurative language throughout and Maurer notes that at some point a line must be drawn and an interpretation rendered. It is the conclusion Maurer is drawing that I would like to extend to the final scene. Making edits, like Victor does to the offer, does not eliminate the problem. The final scene is still problematic for audiences and removing the offer of Silvia only exacerbates the crux by amputating a critical point of interpretation.

Interestingly, Victor's solution takes a more complex turn as he makes further edits to the final scene. Silvia's silence after the attempted rape is a noticeable one. While she held such a prominent, powerful position throughout the entire play, the pivotal, climactic scene is heralded by an unprecedented lack of presence. In Victor's production, however, Silvia is given lines towards the end in addition to Proteus being given the last words of the entire play.

In this production, Silvia is the one who joins Proteus and Julia's hands to bless their union, rather than Valentine. More of Valentine's lines in the final scene are redistributed to Silvia, and Proteus' final lines of the play have him say, "A convert to this truth I stand confessed, / That lovers must be faithful, to be bless'd" (5.4.172-3). From a performance standpoint, these edits do a good job of resolving a lot of the

major issues the final scene introduces. While in the original text, Silvia is silenced after the attempted rape, Victor's revision gives Silvia more of her power back. Now she is allowed not only to speak but also to take over a commanding role to the end of the play. She essentially replaces Valentine in blessing Proteus and Julia's union, while Valentine is the one that stands silently by until he can offer his approval afterwards.

Reflecting on Victor's production in light of the conduct literature tradition, some critical aspects change. Giving Silvia more lines and authority at the end extends her agency, allowing her to decide the just way to handle the situation, however, Proteus delivering the final lines of the play and removing Valentine's offer of Silvia complicates the models of behavior that the audience is learning from. A key aspect of Valentine's progression throughout the play is the Duke's affirmation of him, "thou art a gentleman" (V.iv.142), which is also removed from Victor's production. Ending the play with the Duke applauding Valentine as a gentleman communicates a clear final message to the audience: Valentine is the model of behavior to be sought. Replacing that with Proteus' lines distorts the message, making it more difficult for audiences to arrive at the proper conclusion.

John Philip Kemble's 1808 production, which was originally performed at the Theatre Royal, decided to cut the offer entirely. In 1984 the American Shakespeare Repertory revived his 1805 script from a prompt book preserved at the Folger Shakespeare Library. A *Shakespeare Bulletin* review of that production noted "that awkward moment late in the play when Valentine relinquishes [Silvia] to Proteus was handled efficiently by Kemble: it was left out" (27). While it is understandable that a critic

would call the cut “efficient,” it is again choosing to amputate the problem rather than investigate it.

Several productions since Kemble’s have opted to keep the scene with a range of different staging decisions. William Charles Macready took on the play in 1841, with his production being lauded for as most genuine to the Folio due to restoring Valentine’s offer. Macready still made significant alterations throughout the text, including adding lines, conflating speeches and more. Thanks to a preserved prompt book, we are able to determine exactly how he staged the controversial scene. Proteus kneels at Valentine’s feet and begs for his forgiveness, which he receives. Valentine then takes both Silvia and Proteus by the hand and speaks the lines while walking. The New Cambridge Shakespeare’s (NCS) introduction to *Two Gents* notes that the sequence was “spoken and acted rapidly” (35), with Silvia and Valentine moving upstage when Julia is revealed. Reintroducing the offer of Silvia and then delivering it with a noticeable uptick in pace is an interesting move. Perhaps Macready believed the offer was important in the scene but wanted to keep the audience moving past it. One of the more provoking aspects of this scene is not just the offer of Silvia but the quick forgiveness of Proteus by Valentine. Performing the scene quickly could make it seem rushed, which might be used to justify Valentine’s somewhat improbable reaction to Proteus’ apology.

No matter Macready’s intentions with the staging of the scene, we don’t need to speculate at the audience’s reactions. The production garnered a favorable reaction from some reviewers. The NCS’ introduction singles out a reviewer’s remark from *The Times* that says, “when Valentine rescues Silvia, and Proteus at the sight of his injured friend starts back in horror – this fixed group was admirably executed by both

performers and caused tumultuous applause" (36). In the *Pictorial Shakespeare*, Charles Knight proposed that the line would be better delivered by Silvia to Valentine, in a way offering her own forgiveness of the attempted assault. This would grant her agency in the action, something she sorely lacks in the text. It would also allow her to take on the role of educator for Valentine again, instructing him on how to handle the situation. The offer of Silvia is not the only issue with the scene, however, as Valentine's quick forgiveness of Proteus following the apology is problematic in and of itself. Offering Silvia is an additional gesture of goodwill and removing it does not negate the problematic nature of the scene.

One thing Victor and Kemble's productions and Charles Knight's suggestion have in common is that they've identified Valentine's offer of Silvia as the most problematic element. At least in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the dissuading aspect of the final scene doesn't stem from Proteus' apology or Valentine's forgiveness, but the fact that Valentine is giving up his lover to her attacker. Interestingly, the most common interpretation of *Two Gents* to be offered by critics focuses on the offer as a telling mark of male friendship. If this is a common element in the exaltation of male friendship, and there are many texts where male friendship is exalted over romantic love, then it ought to be the most understandable and recognizable aspect of the final scene. So what makes this scene so different that these productions decided to cut the symbolic offer? The assault by Proteus is the easiest answer. Whereas in Titus and Gisippus, the offer of Sophronia came merely after Titus confessed his love for her to Gisippus, Valentine's offer of Silvia comes directly after Proteus' act of violence. Rather than editing out the violence, which then makes the offer of Silvia more in line with the

common interpretations of the play, these directors (and one critic) choose to manipulate the offer itself.

In 1970, the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) produced *Two Gents* and left the final scene as it was. In a *Shakespeare Survey* review of the play, Peter Thomson observes a few interesting choices with the production made with its staging. Earlier in the play when Proteus describes Silvia's imprisonment, Valentine strikes him on the cheek. Thomson notes that "the blow was not well motivated, but its consequence is interesting" (121). Throughout the rest of the play Proteus indicates that he is still reeling from the shock of Valentine hitting him, soothing his cheek nervously at random intervals. After Proteus' apology in the final scene, Valentine kisses his cheek in the same spot to indicate a resolved forgiveness.

While certainly interesting, staging those moments as such reduces the effectiveness of the play as conduct literature. An unmotivated strike on Proteus early on is reductive for Valentine's character, making him less of a model to fashion one's conduct after. If the audience, such as Thomson, observes that the strike seems unmotivated and somewhat out of character, then the interpretation is clearly being thrown off course. Valentine's behavioral model is compromised and the philosophy gets entangled. Similarly, the strike creates a much more sympathetic Proteus early on and makes his next actions less despicable. One could interpret Proteus' future betrayals as motivated by Valentine's strike, rather than being a reflection purely on Proteus' poor conduct. It devalues the play's message, making it difficult to find a model for good conduct and likewise makes the poor conduct of Proteus less blatant.

The RSC produced the play again in 1990, with one of the most significant and intriguing staging choices. In this production, Valentine and Proteus' characters are allowed to go through their development, culminating in the final scene. Once Proteus apologizes, Silvia moves to stand silently by Proteus, giving her approval of his apology. It is only after this silent approval that Valentine offers his forgiveness and Silvia to Proteus.

Staging the final scene this way does a remarkable job keeping the models of good and bad behavior with Valentine and Proteus respectively, and it even takes steps towards making Valentine's quick forgiveness justifiable to an audience. Part of what makes it justifiable to an audience, however, is that it provides a clear motivation for Valentine's forgiveness. The problem with having the obvious motivation for Valentine's forgiveness be Silvia's approval is that it detracts from Valentine's development throughout the play. For the interpretation to work and for Valentine to be finalizing his development into a perfect gentleman, his forgiveness needs to be a mark of his loyalty and constancy, not inspired by Silvia. With this staging, the audience is unable to interpret his forgiveness and offer as anything other than Silvia inspiring him to do so.

The RSC produced *Two Gents* for a third time in 2014, with drastic staging choices. After Valentine prevents Proteus from raping Silvia, he becomes drastically violent. Valentine proceeds to waterboard Proteus (holding a cloth over his nose and mouth and pouring water on it, simulating the experience of drowning) and then hits him over the head with his pistol repeatedly. This torture is what encourages Proteus' apology, which Valentine accepts. Both couples, Silvia with Valentine and Julia with

Proteus, end the play wary of each other, seemingly tense and in opposition of one another.

These staging decisions prevent any interpretation of the play as conduct literature. Valentine's brutal displays of violence would hardly be perceived as admirable or perfect conduct. It diminishes all the development his character has gone through up to that point, ending the play with a protagonist whose morals have been completely overturned by Proteus' betrayal. The perceived, almost palpable, tension between the two couples similarly negates the reconciliation. At that point the apology and forgiveness seem more of a formal process with Valentine being so violent and the total distrust at the end. Furthermore, the lack of affirmation by the Duke at the end eliminates the official recognition of Valentine as a fully formed gentleman, solidifying the audience's perception of him after all the violence.

Altogether these productions, through either emending and cutting the text or staging, diminish the play's ability to cultivate Valentine and Proteus' characters in such a way that the audience clearly understands the conduct philosophy. The earlier productions focused their efforts on adjusting Valentine's offer of Silvia, which strips Valentine of a crucial moment. The RSC's productions in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries took varied routes in staging *Two Gents*, but in doing so Valentine and Proteus' development is similarly derailed. My next chapter will show how crucial keeping the final scene intact is so that the play can successfully contribute to and challenge the conduct literature tradition of the early modern period.

Chapter Three: *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* as Conduct Literature and the Final Scene

Whether you are analyzing or directing *Two Gents*, the final scene is the most problematic and critical part that needs to be addressed. As we saw with the previous productions, emending or removing pieces of it does not necessarily solve the problems and certain staging decisions can complicate it as well, however, interpreting the play as a piece taking part in the conduct literature investigates the nuances of the final scene more so than others. Proteus' apology, Valentine's acceptance and offer of Silvia, and Silvia's silence all come together to explore the benefits and limitations of conduct literature.

My interpretation of *Two Gents* as a play in the conduct literature tradition means reading Valentine as the "perfect courtier" and Proteus as the "imperfect courtier," to use Castiglione's terms. With that model in mind, Proteus must go the duration of the play continuing to trend in the wrong direction. He can be exposed as the imperfect gentleman, and he can even acknowledge that fact, as I argue earlier, but redeeming his character to be viewed as anything other than bad conduct is impossible. Otherwise, the clarity of the play gets muddled and the model of behavior that Valentine has set up gets conflicted. However, if Proteus' apology is not read as a genuine repentance, but as an acknowledgement of his misdeeds, the play's conclusion makes more sense.

When Proteus says, "I do as truly suffer / As e'er I did commit" (V.iv.76-7), he is recognizing his offenses for the audience's benefit. If the play's ending were to stand,

and Proteus were to go unpunished and happily reunited with Julia, it risks a conflicted message to the audience. To avoid a misinterpretation, the play must either punish Proteus or make it blatantly obvious whose actions are to be avoided. This actually helps provide clarity for the audience, sending a clearer message altogether. Proteus effectively gives the audience a confession in which he assures everyone that he is in the wrong. This is extended even further when his words later put his actions in a direct contrast with Valentine's, saying, "O heaven, were man / But constant, he were perfect! That one error / Fills him with faults, makes him run through all th'sins" (V.iv.107-9). As I mentioned previously, a crucial aspect of Valentine's behavior throughout the play is his constancy. Proteus' reference to "man" is in fact a reference to a single man, himself, and not mankind in general. His inconstancy sets him apart, filling him with faults and making him run through all the sins throughout the play. His final words in the play are a final attempt to emphasize that his behavior is the antecedent model to Valentine's.

Staging the apology as such would be difficult, but not entirely impossible. The purpose of the apology is important to keep in mind: Proteus is essentially admitting and recognizing his actions without issuing a sincere apology. This distinction is something that could efficiently conveyed by the performers, but its effect would rely heavily on both Proteus and Valentine working in concert. Proteus' apology should not seem as though he is legitimately begging, as Macready's production staged it; rather, its main purpose is to instruct the audience. Directing Proteus' apology to the audience as opposed to having Proteus speak the lines to Valentine could accomplish this goal, making the audience the receivers of his confession.

After Proteus' apology is dealt with, Valentine's quick forgiveness can be interpreted correctly too. Just as Proteus' apology is not genuine repentance, but an acknowledgement of his wrongdoing, so is Valentine's forgiveness a necessity of his character and not a naïve belief that his friend had truly changed. A key concept to keep in mind is how Proteus' inconstancy, which is constantly highlighted throughout the play (and echoed in his name), does an effective job of emphasizing Valentine's constancy. Despite how many times Proteus has wronged every character in the play, Valentine's continual acceptance of Proteus is a mark of his loyalty and constancy. It becomes entrenched in his character and conveys to the audience the importance of what Castiglione described as "perfect loyalty." While Proteus is lamenting his own inconstancy, Valentine is given a final opportunity to put this virtue on display and delivers the line, "and once again I do receive thee honest" (V.iv.78). It is necessary that Valentine remains loyal to Proteus, otherwise one of his key virtues that has set him apart from Proteus the entire play would be compromised. Rejecting Proteus might still set Valentine apart from Proteus, but doing so would equally be out of character.

Similar to Proteus' apology, staging Valentine's forgiveness is a challenge to convey the appropriate message to the audience. Just as Proteus is not truly repentant in this scene, neither should Valentine be portrayed as easily duped or fooled by it. His forgiveness is not reluctant, but freely given, more an exhibition of grace than naiveté. Recall~~ing~~ the words of Proteus' apology:

> Forgive me, Valentine; if hearty sorrow
>
> Be a sufficient ransom for offence,
>
> I tender't here; I do as truly suffer

As e’er I did commit. (V.iv.74-7)

The language here is economical. It indicates the initiation of a transaction between the two that Valentine must complete. When Valentine finishes the metaphor with “then I am paid” (V.iv.78), he is effectively doing so. The transactional nature of the exchange is how a production can stage the sequence to accomplish its goal. Proteus’ recognition of his wrong and confession to Valentine and the audience is his ransom. Valentine’s acceptance of the apology is satisfactory, and he can remain loyal and constant to his friend.

Following his forgiveness, Valentine’s character development comes full circle when he offers Silvia. This particular moment is a pivotal moment for Valentine himself. Throughout the play, Silvia has held the role of educator for both Valentine and Proteus, however, Castiglione emphasizes that a perfect courtier must “put forth every effort to resemble his master, and, if it were possible, to transform himself into his master” (37). Therefore, it is crucial that Valentine has an opportunity to take on the role of educator himself. Just as Silvia tested Valentine, having him write a letter to himself and then seeing if he had the wit to perceive the jest, so Valentine is testing Proteus. Proteus has spent the last several acts wrongly pursuing Silvia and now has just offered up an apology saying he sees the error of his ways. The easiest and most obvious way for Valentine to test that is to provide an opportunity to have Silvia again and see what Proteus does.

Before addressing how to stage the offer, let us explore the offer itself. Up until this scene, Silvia has held a powerful role throughout the play. Her position as educator of not one but both gentlemen effectively establishes her as the most authoritative

individual as far as the conduct aspect of the play is concerned. Castiglione's reverence for teachers and insistence on courtiers seeking out the best instructors they can is extremely significant in this play. Transferring that importance and reverence to Silvia gives her a lot of power, however, as I mentioned before, Silvia is silenced in the final scene, which presents a complication that must be addressed. It is no coincidence that this silence comes in the climactic moments of Valentine becoming a fully realized gentleman, even being affirmed by the duke as such. Valentine's acquisition of power in the play comes at the cost of stripping Silvia of her own. While, throughout the play, *Two Gents* has fashioned Silvia into a character that reimagines feminist roles in conduct literature, her role ends when Valentine's development is finished. So Valentine's offer comes at the cost of usurping Silvia's agency.

The complication presented by Silvia's silence can be mitigated somewhat by staging Valentine's offer a certain way. The RSC's 1990 production has Silvia giving her silent approval of Proteus' apology, which gives Valentine a motive other than purely internal character development to extend his forgiveness, however, if a pause is given between Valentine's acceptance of Proteus' apology and his offer of Silvia, there is room for Silvia to regain some of her agency. Valentine's lines have a distinct transition at the end of his acceptance of Proteus' apology:

> Then I am paid;
> And once again I do receive thee honest.
> Who by repentance is not satisfied
> Is nor of heaven nor earth, for these are pleased;
> By penitence th'Eternal's wrath's appeased. (V.iv.78-81)

At this point, a pause could be construed, during which Silvia is able to give her approval. If this approval comes before the forgiveness, as it does with the RSC's production, it conveys a motivation for Valentine, however, if the approval comes after the forgiveness but before the offer, it can mark a transfer of power. In this way, Silvia would regain some of her authority, passing the role of educator to Valentine. This also indicates for the audience that this is a test of sorts as Valentine is now filling the position of Silvia, who spent the earlier portions of the play testing both Valentine and Proteus themselves. It also becomes Silvia's own affirmation of Valentine's status as a gentleman, even before the duke comes in to officially declare it. By the end of the scene, Valentine (and the audience) would have become successfully educated on conduct.

Before I move on to Julia's reveal, I must address the complications stemming from Valentine's offer. No matter how Proteus answers, the offer itself is tough for an audience to imagine happening in real life. Valentine's embodiment of the perfect gentleman betrays a limitation of the didacticism of the play. It demonstrates an ideal courtier, but perhaps not an applicable one. There are obvious issues that would arise if every sexual harassment were met with forgiveness and offers such as Valentine's. By placing Valentine's perfect conduct in contention with Proteus' imperfect behavior, we see how some aspects of the tradition are not realistically attainable without severe consequences. This poses a significant challenge the tradition as a whole: to what extent should this philosophy be considered applicable to real life and to what extent do we consider it an unattainable ideal? There are certainly aspects of Valentine's behavior

that would not have such severe consequences, but once he reaches the point in the play that affirms his perfection, major complications arise.

Thankfully, Julia's reveal comes directly after Valentine's offer, preventing Proteus' response and allowing the moment to pass by. If Proteus were allowed to respond, any of his reactions could complicate the interpretation. If Proteus were to reject Silvia and pass Valentine's test, he would show character reformation, which introduces the same complications that a genuine repentance would: it indicates a reformed character, potentially conflicting the audience. Accepting Silvia would force another confrontation of some kind and would muddle the interpretation as well. Although stealing Proteus' chance to respond and revealing Julia at that moment allows Valentine to take the role of educator and present the test without the play dealing with the aftermath of Proteus' choice.

After these events, Valentine's actions continue to call attention to Castiglione's perfect courtier as he advocates for the pardoning of the outlaws that he led during his banishment. In *The Book of the Courtier*, the nobles decide that the perfect courtier ought to have a certain natural grace about them (31). While this grace can be defined in more physical terms, the use of grace also calls attention to internal virtue and forgiveness as well. This grace, coupled with the "perfect loyalty and unconquered courage" (29), necessitates that a true gentleman be forgiving and loyal to those around him. Valentine brings up his outlaw band to the duke and requests that they be pardoned:

> These banished men, that I have kept withal,
> Are men endued with worthy qualities.

Forgive them what they have committed here,

And let them be recalled from their exile.

They are reformed, civil, full of good,

And fit for great employment, worthy lord. (V.iv.148-53)

On top of the grace and loyalty that Valentine is displaying, his words also speak to the effect he has had on these men. Through their time with Valentine they have become reformed, civil, and good, internalizing the virtues that Valentine himself exhibits. The outlaws provide an example for the audience of the character reformation that can occur by modeling one's behavior after Valentine. The play not only uses Valentine as a model for perfect conduct but offers up proof that legitimizes the process entirely.

Finally, the duke, the most authoritative figure in the play, makes an appearance to ensure that the final moments officially declare Valentine the perfect gentleman. Though the duke has held a somewhat minor role throughout most of the play, his presence in the final scene is a way to officially and clearly communicate the proper interpretation to the audience. While Proteus is silent for a time after being reunited with Julia, Valentine is embraced and forgiven by the duke as he says:

I do applaud thy spirit, Valentine,

And think thee worthy of an empress' love.

Know then I here forget all former griefs,

Cancel all grudge, repeal thee home again,

Plead a new state in thy unrivalled merit,

To which I thus subscribe: Sir Valentine,

Thou art a gentleman and well derived;

Take thou thy Silvia, for thou hast deserved her. (V.iv.136-43)

The language used by the duke calls attention to all the key aspects necessary for Valentine to be a perfect gentleman. The duke references Valentine's internal virtue by referring to his spirit. This would be his displays of loyalty and constancy that Castiglione emphasizes. Officially forgiving Valentine's trespasses and pardoning him of his crimes ensures that legally Valentine has a clean slate. Were he to end the play still banished, the audience would have to reconcile the concept of a perfect gentleman as an outlaw, introducing complication that dilutes the instruction. To set him apart from the other courtiers of the play, such as Turio, the duke claims that Valentine has "unrivalled merit," which is necessary as a "perfect" gentleman. There needs to be a clear distinction not only between Valentine and Proteus, but Valentine and the rest of the court. Finally, and most importantly, the duke announces that Valentine is a gentleman and is worthy of Silvia, making Valentine's "perfect" model of behavior official to the audience.

Although what is said and done within the final scene does well to emphasize the benefits of conduct literature, what is missing from the play highlights the limitations of the philosophy. Silvia's silence throughout this exchange, and indeed the rest of the play, is just one casualty of *Two Gents*' discourse. The RSC's 1990 production is perhaps the best at mitigating this by having her show silent approval of Valentine's offer, but it still demotes Silvia's character significantly. While she has played a major role in educating both Valentine and Proteus, she remains completely silent through the most pivotal moments. This strips her of all the power she has held throughout Valentine and Proteus' development and takes her agency entirely out of the question.

Presenting conduct literature in this format also carries some limitations as well. Conduct manuals such as *The Book of the Courtier* and *The Governor* have a targeted audience but are clear and concise in the presentation of their philosophy. The risk of a muddled message or misinterpretation is low. Victor's 1762 advertisement, where he refers to the "weeds" of this play, and the majority of criticism for this play legitimizes the fact that interpreting *Two Gents* as conduct literature is not explicitly clear to audiences. Understanding Valentine as a model for perfect conduct, and Proteus as a tool to highlight and emphasize Valentine's actions, is difficult when the philosophy is buried within the play. Different productions cutting or emending the lines only worsen the effect, removing critical pieces of the play and diminishing its functionality. Although the theatre as a platform for conduct literature is more inclusive by nature and can reach wider audiences, the interpretive nature of it can also become a limitation. If the interpretation is effectively staged, the play can be recuperated, no longer existing as the "damned spot" on Shakespeare's reputation that Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch condemns it as.

Bringing the conduct literature tradition to the early modern stage created a more accessible version of the philosophy for a wider audience. Proper virtues and behaviors are demonstrated, with character development to create a learning curve for the main characters that mirrors the audience's own education. Though this play still has limitations and challenges of its own, taking on a new meaning when viewed as conduct literature allows us to look at one of Shakespeare's least regarded plays in a different light. The play no longer looks like an early, clumsy attempt at comedy by a young Shakespeare, but as a bold articulation of a popular tradition in a new medium.

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