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THE CONCEPT OF MALE FRIENDSHIP IN SHAKESPEARE'S *THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA* : A CONTEXTUAL APPROACH

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Abstract

Male friendship has been the kind of human relationship highly esteemed throughout man's history. From ancient times to the Renaissance, it was regarded as something sublime. This traditional bonding between men is also seen in Shakespeare's plays. Male friendship in Shakespearean drama has a vital place in that it affects the plot development of some of his plays. In evaluating the importance of male comradeship in Shakespearean drama, it is a necessity that the views of almost all thinkers on male friendship up to the time of Shakespeare be taken into consideration in order to decide whether Shakespeare implied a homosexual interaction between his protagonists or not. This article will be an attempt to show that Shakespeare was fully aware of the traditional idea of male friendship and his primary aim was to reflect the significance of male comradeship in a male-dominated world and this will be explored in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*.

Keywords : Male Friendship, Classical Idea Of Male Friendship, Renaissance Idea Of Male Friendship, Homosexuality, Shakespeare, *The Two Gentlemen Of Verona*.

Introduction

Male friendship is one of the subjects Shakespeare has used predominantly. His use of the theme of male friendship affected the direction of a good number of his plays. For example, the plays *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Merchant of Venice* would not be the same in terms of their plot if there had not been a bond of friendship between Hamlet and Horatio, Romeo and Mercutio and Antonio and Bassanio. Although male friendship is of paramount importance in Shakespearean drama, it has drawn the attention of few critics so far. Many critics have focused on female friendship in Shakespearean drama (especially feminist and gender critics) or, if they happened to focus on the males, they have preferred to evaluate the heroes rather than the minor male characters; for example, they have concentrated on Hamlet rather than Horatio or the friendship between them. Another thing is that since some sexual historians like Philippe Aries label intimate Renaissance male friendship in relation to homosexuality, the friendship between Shakespeare's males was also interpreted as having homosexual traits (Watson, 1995: 236). However, some social psychologists like Drury Sherrod and Anthony Rotundo argue that intimate male friendship, as Peter Nardi explains, was "highly revered in ancient Greece and during the European Renaissance" (1992: 2). Literary critics, such as Reginald Hyatte, Joseph Pequigney and William Van Watson, have considered male friendship to have always been a traditional concept both throughout the history and in Shakespearean drama.

This article will mainly focus on male friendship and its idealizations up to the time of Shakespeare in order to clearly explore the concept of male friendship in Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. The article will argue that Shakespeare has reflected the Classical, Medieval and Renaissance representations of friendship between males which would challenge the general assumption that he had homosexual implications in his portrayals.

1. The concept of male friendship from the Classical times to Shakespeare

'Philos' was the commonest word used as a noun for 'friend' meaning one's 'nearest and dearest' no matter if they were kin, affines or related by blood (Easterling, 1989: 11). Another word for friend was 'xenos' meaning 'guest', 'host', 'stranger', 'foreigner' or 'mercenary soldier' according to context. The third word for friend was 'hetairos' which means 'comrade' as it was used in the *Iliad* for the friendship of

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Achilles and Patroclus that dominates most of the poem (Easterling, 1989: 13-15). As for friendship, the most commonly used word for it was 'amicitia'. The Oxford Dictionary explains it as 'one joined to another in intimacy and mutual benevolence independently of sexual and family love'.

Friendship is an optional social role. We have the freedom of choosing our friends. Friendship is something very special in that "it is a blessed and stable connexion of sundry wills making of two persons one, in having and suffering" as Sir Thomas Elyot described it hundreds of years ago (1998: 42). Friendship held a key place in pre-Christian philosophy because it served as the subject of many debates among the ancients as to its nature and ends as well as the end of supreme happiness in which 'amicitia' plays a large part (Hyatte, 1994: 2). However, most philosophers, writers, essayists and poets who described or discussed friendship were actually talking about 'male friendship' because they lived in a male-dominated world and the images of friendship in both myth and everyday life referred to that between males characterized in terms of bravery, loyalty, duty, chivalry, virtue, patriotism and heroism (Nardi, 1992: 1).

When philosophers and writers such as Plato (427-347 B.C.), Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 B.C.), Lucius Annaeus Seneca (4 B.C-65 A.D), Sir Thomas Elyot (1490-1546), Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592), Edmund Spenser (1552-1599) and Francis Bacon (1561-1626) wrote on the subject of friendship, they had the friendship of males in mind. The question of friendship was an important one especially for ancient thinkers as it is clear in the writings of classical antiquity. From ancient times through the Renaissance, friendship between men was considered to be the highest form of social relationship even going beyond the institution of matrimony. For example in Plato's *Symposium*, Socrates places male friendship higher on the scale of love than he does marriage between the sexes (1989: 533). As Jay Halio states:

Stories of devotion between male friends abound in classical literature and throughout later ages. In the Bible, the devotion between David and Jonathan became proverbial. The willingness of one friend to give his life for another was the true test of friendship (2000: 69).

As Halio tells us the biblical story of David and Jonathan appears in Sam and ends David's lament for Jonathan. It concludes with the famous lines: "'Woe is me for thee, my brother Jonathan. Very kind hast thou been unto me. Thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women'" (2000: 70).

The idealization of male friendship by ancient philosophers and their European successors is more or less the same. On thinking of the story between David and Jonathan, Jeffrey Richards believes that male friendship:

constituted a form of brotherhood ('my brother Jonathan') but a brotherhood of a spiritual rather than a physical kind. Secondly, it involved notions of service and sacrifice, frequently death on behalf of the beloved. Thirdly, it is higher than and different from, rather than a substitute for, the love of women. The difference lies

essentially in the fact that the love of women is sexual and therefore inferior; the love of a man is spiritual, transcendent and free from base desire (1987: 93).

In this attempt to produce a general picture of how male friendship was idealised throughout the ages, it will be proper to begin with Plato's *Lysis*, whose traditional subtitle is "On Friendship". David Bolotin in his introduction to *Plato's Dialogue on Friendship. An Interpretation of the Lysis with a New Translation* remarks:

The most immediate question raised in the *Lysis* can be stated quite simply. It is the question of the relationship between friendship, on the one hand, and the wants and needs of imperfect beings, on the other. Is there a friendly love which is wholly free of need? That is to say, does all friendship depend upon the friends' deficiencies, or is there a higher type of friendship that unites those who admire and cherish each other simply because of one another's goodness? (1979: 10).

Bolotin further explains that Plato's Socrates both asserts and denies that there is this higher friendship (1979: 10-11). Socrates first sees friendship in a Homeric view, which exists between likes. He believes that only those who are good can become friends. However, soon he challenges this claim by arguing that the good are self-sufficient and do not want or need anything. He finally argues that our friendly love of the good depends on the presence of evils and on our need to free ourselves from them. However, Socrates soon changes his idea and puts forth that friendship can still exist even if there is not any evil (Plato, 1989: 165). What is quite apparent and certain is that Plato depicts male friendship as something sublime through his mouthpiece, Socrates:

From my earliest childhood I have had a particular fancy, everyone has. One longs for horses, another for dogs, a third for money, a fourth for office. For my part, I look on these matters with

equanimity, but on the acquisition of friends, with all a lover's passion, and I would choose to obtain a good friend rather than the best quail or cock in the world; I should prefer one to both horse and dog-nay, I fully believe that I would far sooner acquire a friend and companion, than all the gold of Darius, aye, or than Darius himself. So fond am I of friendship (1989: 154).

Equality in terms of rank in friendship was also crucial and always emphasized in Greek thought. As stated in *The Dialectics of Friendship* by Roy Porter and Sylvana Tomaselli:

Educated free male citizens, blessed with leisure, could exercise the virtues required for being good friends; but the Greeks did not think it natural to suppose that such men could truly join in friendship with others (slaves, artisans, women, foreigners) (1989: 4).

Another philosopher who wrote on male friendship is undoubtedly Aristotle. Aristotle, in *Nicomachean Ethics*, expressed the famous case that the basis for male friendship is a non-sexual relationship, based on equality (of rank), with mutual regard for simplicity of heart, good manner, and conversation (1999: 461). He says that to be friends men must "(1) feel goodwill for each other, and (2) be aware of each other's goodwill, and (3) the cause of their goodwill must be one of the loveable qualities" (1999: 457). He classifies friendship into three categories: Friendships of utility, friendships of pleasure and friendships of virtue, the last one being the perfect kind. Besides, Aristotle underlines the influence of our friends on us:

The friendship of the good is good, and grows with their intercourse. And they seem actually to become better by putting their friendship into practice, and because they correct each other's faults, for each takes the impress from the other of those traits in him that give him pleasure (1999: 575).

In his Ph.D. Dissertation in Philosophy (Northwestern University, 1989) David H. Calhoun points out that for Aristotle "friendship plays an essential role in ethical development, the structure of the city-state, and the pursuit of the common good" (*Friendship and Self-Love in Aristotle's Ethics*, 1989) and that supports the quotation above.

According to a critic named Bruce Smith, Aristotle defines 'philia' as true friendship, and distinguishes it from 'eros', sexual desire. As Smith interprets, philia is rational and it respects the integrity of the other person. 'Eros' is, however, a sort of excess of feeling and it tries to overwhelm the other person and possess him (Smith, 1991: 36). Aristotle implies that lust toward a woman overpowers a man and leaves him finally unsatisfied.

Yet, Aristotle does not altogether dismiss the possibility of friendship between a man and a woman and also believes that friendship between wife and husband seems to be natural and that it may be based on virtue if both partners are of good character. However, he also asserts that woman's and man's virtues differ in nature concluding that even the best husband and wife (or any man and woman) cannot be alike in virtue, therefore, cannot become excellent friends (1999: 503). As Reginald Hyatte points out, Aristotle also believes married friendship is an unequal relationship in which the husband should be superior (1994: 18-19).

As stated earlier, it was definitely impossible to become friends with those who were not one's equals. Michael Neve points to Cicero's *De Amicitia* and explains the fact that Cicero strongly believed that true friendship could only be found among the virtuous and should be based on complete frankness (1989: 68). Cicero's *De Amicitia (Of Friendship)* was widely read and highly regarded in Renaissance England. It is in the form of a dialogue among Laelius, a well-known orator, and his two sons-in-law and advocates some of the principles of friendship that Renaissance authors admired as shown in the following extract:

For friendship is nothing else but a perfect agreement with good will and true love in all kind of good things and goodly. And I know not whether any better thing hath been given of God unto men, wisdom excepted, than this same friendship. Some set riches before, some health, others power, and others honour, many also pleasures. But certainly this last is for beasts, and those other uppermore be fading and uncertain, and be not so much within the compass of our wisdom as within the fickleness of fortune. But they which place our chiefest weal in virtue do therein very well; and yet, this same virtue it is which both engendereth and upholdeth friendship. Neither may friendship by any means be without virtue (Cicero, 1971: 187).

Cicero, without any hesitation, places friendship (along with virtue) higher than richness, health, power, honour or pleasure.

Seneca is the last Latin thinker to be handled who contemplated and wrote on the concept of male friendship. His ideas on 'amicitia' show that he is highly interested in ethics and indebted to Cicero (Hyatte, 1994: 36). In his *Letters*, Seneca offers that one should test a man's character before accepting him

as a friend in full confidence and says "Think for a long time whether or not you should admit a given person to your friendship. But when you have decided to do so, welcome him heart and soul, and speak as unreservedly with him as you would with yourself" (1969: 35). True friendship, he believes, is worth dying for and continues a lifetime. He is also of the opinion that true friends share all they possess, and they are two spirits joined with equal zeal. In addition, he thinks that a man must be a friend to himself first before befriending another. According to Seneca, 'amicitia' based on usefulness does not last long, but he imagines a friend to whom he can be useful. What is different about Seneca's thoughts on friendship is that he believes any man, no matter how wise he is, needs friendship, and since character, not birth or social standing, determines goodness, he may find a friend even among his slaves because a friend is everything to him: "And in effect a friend is an eye, a heart, a tongue, a hand, at all distances" (1998: 117).

Before examining the 16th century picture regarding the idealization of male friendship, it will be proper to remember two literary traditions of the Middle Ages, which also consist of depictions of male friendship: 'Friendship literature' and 'romance'. Friendship literature told stories of manly companionship, sometimes disrupted by the love theme but generally restored since magnanimity was standard in this tradition (Boyce, 1996: 672). Likewise, Medieval romances included the friendship and love themes by which the early Renaissance dramatists, as well as Shakespeare, were affected and bore some of their characteristics.

Sir Thomas Elyot was the first important writer in the early 16th century who handled the subject of male friendship. He was one of the greatest admirers of Cicero. He is best known as one of the early sixteenth century humanists. In *The Governor*, he talks about male friendship and puts forth that goodness and generosity are the qualities essential to true friendship (1998:58). He accounts several examples of great friendships such as the male friendship between Titus and Gisippus, Orestes and Pylades, and Damon and Pythias. The story of Titus and Gisippus is a narrative of Boccaccio (1313-1350) and reminds us of Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* in terms of its structure.

Montaigne, the outstanding essayist of sixteenth century France, contributed to the idealization of male friendship as well. He begins his essay "Of Friendship" by comparing friendship with matrimony, to the latter's disadvantage, and then focuses on the problems of what Halio considers to be 'homosexual relationships' (2000: 83). Montaigne's famous description of male friendship is worth mentioning. He describes friendship as "souls that mingle and blend with each other so completely that they efface the seam that joined them" (1958: 97). Montaigne goes on his description as follows:

To compare this brotherly affection [of friendship] with affection for women, even though it is the result of our choice-it cannot be done; nor can we put the love of women in the same category. Its ardour, I confess.... is more active, more scorching, and more intense. But it is an impetuous and fickle flame, undulating and variable, a fever flame, subject to fits and lulls, that holds only by the corner. In friendship it is a general and universal warmth, moderate and even, besides, a constant and settled warmth, all gentleness and smoothness, with nothing bitter and stinging about it (1958: 94).

Smith also draws our attention to the fact that while the question of sexual attraction between male friends is never raised by Aristotle and Cicero, Montaigne asks this question in his essay and concludes that sexual relations between men and boys is to be condemned not only because 'their' customs prohibit it but because it is a meeting of equals (1991: 41). Yet, the lawgivers of the time left no room for such moral discussions. As Smith puts it:

The letter of the law, in England as in Renaissance Europe generally, was unambiguous: sodomy was an offence punishable by death. In matters of deviant sexual behaviour the reign of the Tudor monarchs ranks with the third century A.D., the thirteenth century, and the early nineteenth century as one of the most intolerable periods in all of European history (1991: 41).

Smith also explains that tolerance for homosexuality in late antiquity and the earlier Middle Ages yielded to homophobia from the thirteenth century onward, reaching a climax in the sixteenth century, when homosexual relations between men were made capital offence under the civil law over Europe (1991: 42). At this point, it is of great importance to underline the fact that Shakespeare's England neither appreciated nor permitted homosexuality. This very fact in a way supports the idea that Shakespeare's portrayals of male friendships do not have any easily definable homosexual traits, which also supports the attempt of this article.

Edmund Spenser is another writer whose theory of friendship must be taken into consideration. Spenser was perhaps the most illustrious of Shakespeare's contemporaries. His famous unfinished epic romance *The Faerie Queene* (Book IV, Canto 9) reveals his theory of friendship. This theory is based on certain ideas most of which clearly have their origins in classical and earlier Renaissance sources, such as

those of Cicero and Elyot. Expressed in the simplest terms these ideas are: "(a) friendship is based on virtue, (b) friendship is based on equality, (c) friendship is based on similarity, (d) friends have but one soul, (e) a friend is a second self, (f) false friendship cannot last, and (g) friends' goods are common goods" (Halio, 2000: 80-81). As Halio writes, all these ideas were analysed by Charles G. Smith in his book *Spenser's Theory of Friendship* (1935). The first three stanzas of *The Faerie Queene*, Book IV, Canto 9 serve as a kind of prologue to the theme of friendship as Spenser develops it and indicates quite openly that the love between friends ('Faithful friendship') is superior to the love between the sexes ('Cupid's flame'). The first stanza of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (Book IV, Canto 9) manifests the value of male friendship as follows:

Hard is the doubt, and difficult to deeme,
When all three kinds of love together meet,
And doe disport the hart with powre extreme,
Whether shall weigh the balance downe; to weet,
The deare affection unto kindred sweet,
Or raging fire of love to womankind,
Or zeale of friends combynd with vertues meet,
But of them all, the band of vertuouous mind,
Me seemes, the gentle hart should most assured bind.

Sir Francis Bacon is another well-known essayist of the 16th century who wrote about male friendship. His thoughts on male friendship resemble that of Montaigne's. In his essay "Of Friendship", Bacon insists that true friendship is possible only between men who do not otherwise need something from one another-i.e. between social equals. His essay mainly handles the benefits of friendship, such as intimate communication and understanding. The famous proverb 'A solitary man is either a beast or an angel' is the starting point of Bacon's essay. He also observes that men need friends to carry out the things they cannot do by themselves (Smith, 2000: 60).

It had been hard for him that spake it to have put more truth and untruth together in few words, than in that speech, 'Whosoever is delighted in solitude is either a beast or a god'. For it is most true that a natural and secret hatred and aversion towards society in any man, hat somewhat of the savage beast; but it is most untrue that it should have any character at all of the divine nature; except it proceed, not out of a pleasure in solitude, but out of a love and desire to sequester a man's self for a higher conversation...For a crowd is not a company; and faces are but a gallery of pictures; and talk but a tinkling cymbal where there is no love. The Latin adage meeteth with a little: 'Magna civitas, magna solitudo' because in a great town friends are scattered; so that there is not that fellowship, for them most part, which is in less neighbourhoods (Bacon, 1999: 59-60).

As Hyatte argues, many humanistic writings of the later Middle Ages and Renaissance reintroduced the ancient Greek and Roman concepts of virtuous 'amicitia' from the ancient texts (1994: 40). While considering Shakespearean drama, it is a necessity that one evaluate his male characters and the friendship among them by taking the views of the Classical as well as Medieval and Renaissance writers and philosophers into account.

Historical, social and cultural factors of Shakespeare's time certainly had a great impact on the manner in which Shakespeare tackled the subject of male friendship. Although some critics, as mentioned before, have taken Shakespeare's males as homosexuals because of the intimacy of their friendship, the Renaissance picture does not say so. The eighteenth century critic Edmond Malone comments on the displays of emotion between Shakespeare's male characters, noting that such addresses to men were customary in Shakespeare's time and neither implied criminality nor were considered indecorous (in Pequigney: 1985, 30). Another critic named William Van Watson claims that such male bonds in Shakespeare's plays usually remain safely as heterosexual male behaviour patterns (1995: 236). As for Joseph Pequigney, he points out that the word 'lover' as 'friend' without erotic connotation, was quite common as it is often used in Shakespeare's plays (1995: 185).

Another important point regarding the treatment of male friendship in Shakespeare's plays is that

In Shakespeare's comedies and tragicomedies marital love's labour is always won. However diverse these plays may be in circumstance and character, however different they may be in emotional effect, however strong the demands of male bonding may be, all of Shakespeare's comedies and tragicomedies end with male friendship yielding place to heterosexual love (Smith, 1991: 72).

Yet Smith also claims that structures of power in early modern England fostered the homosexual potentiality in male friendship since the society gave official permission only to matrimony (1991: 73). All the same, there is no clear indication of such homosexual potentiality in Shakespeare's plays, although some of the male relationships he has depicted may be suggestive.

In *Shakespeare and Masculinity* Smith reports Marilyn Williamson's view that Shakespeare's comedies which include both male friendship and marriage with the opposite sex aim to:

reconcile two conflicting ideals: the classically sanctioned valuation of male-male friendship above all human ties and the more recent, distinctively Protestant ideal of companionate marriage, in which the relationship of husband and wife was one of 'communion' (in Smith, 2000: 87).

In his *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England* Smith also notes that

The scenario of two male friends set at odds by a woman clearly fascinated Shakespeare: he returns to it again and again in his plays, setting the dilemma up in different circumstances, changing the character of the friend and the woman, playing the plot out to different conclusion (1991: 66-67).

The relationships between Proteus-Silvia-Valentine (*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*), Romeo-Juliet-Mercutio (*Romeo and Juliet*), Bassanio-Portia-Antonio (*The Merchant of Venice*), Sebastian-Olivia-Antonio (*Twelfth Night*) can all be given as examples. Matrimony in Shakespeare's plays may have been a way for Shakespeare not to give way to any homosexual suspicion regarding his male characters and to underline the fact that he wrote his plays bearing the classical and traditional idealizations of male friendship in mind.

The status of women in Elizabethan England is also crucial to our understanding of the nature of male friendship Shakespeare depicted in his plays. That man was created of the dust of the earth while woman was made of a part of man was still in effect at that time (Pritchard, 1999: 38). Women were seen, legally and socially, as wives. As Jo McMurtry puts it in *Understanding Shakespeare's England*, "Marriage was a permanent state, and within it wives were subservient to their husbands. The state of conjunction with another person had legal implications; a wife could not testify against her husband in court" (1989: 5). Also, women did not have the right of voting at any level of government. They were left out of the inheritance of major property. Money left to a daughter was often put in the form of a dowry. To put it short, women depended for status on that of their husbands (McMurtry, 1989: 5). As this was the case regarding the status of women, if a male happened to fall madly in love with a woman as in the case of Romeo and Juliet - he still kept and secured his friendships with other males as in the case of Romeo and Mercutio because male friendship, as Montaigne put it, was "a tight knot that women's minds are not strong enough to endure" (1958: 95). Hence, as Smith argues in *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England*, "One very important way in which males prove their masculinity is by bonding with other males - but at the same time keeping other males at an emotionally safe distance" (1991: 58). Men in the Renaissance England wanted to be in a 'homosocial' environment on the one hand, which means the "social bonds between persons of the same sex" (Sedgwick, 1985: 1), and kept their friendships at a safe distance on the other hand due to their homophobia. Just as in ancient Greece and medieval Europe, bravery, loyalty, duty, chivalry, virtue, patriotism and heroism were still associated with close male friendship. To quote Richards, "manly love, as it was often called, was a central part of the definition of masculinity" (1987: 95).

As it was stated earlier, one should bear in mind that the idealization and images of male friendship and masculinity in Shakespeare's time were not like they are in our present century. As John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman claim in *Intimate Matters*: "Until the 1880s, most romantic friendships were thought to be devoid of sexual content. Thus a woman or a man could write of affectionate desire for a loved one of the same gender without causing an eyebrow to be raised" (1997: 121). There is no doubt that male friendship was highly valued not only in ancient Greece but also in the European Renaissance as also suggested by historical evidence.

As a Renaissance dramatist, Shakespeare naturally reflected all the traits of his age, culture and society in his works of art. The images and idealization of male friendship in Renaissance England were traditional and had their origins in classical times. In dealing with this theme, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* serves as a proper example of how Shakespeare has treated the theme. The terms "philia" and "eros" (as the critic Bruce Smith has used them to interpret Aristotle) have been utilised as the key terms.

2. Representation of male friendship in *The Two Gentlemen Of Verona*

3. *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* has its sources in the 'friendship literature' tradition that comes from the Middle Ages and extends through the seventeenth century (Leech, 1986: xxxv). The play is essentially, if not seemingly, concerned with the theme of male friendship. The play "begins with

the parting of friends and ends with their reunion after estrangement” (Smidt, 1986: 39). What happens between ‘parting’ and ‘reunion’ will be handled in this article in terms of the concept of male friendship and with regards to Shakespeare’s treatment of this concept by the juxtaposition and comparison of love and friendship.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona is set partly in Verona, partly in Milan. The two gentlemen in question are Proteus and Valentine, two noble young men. The play revolves around love relationships that threaten the friendly relationships between these two young men. As J. A. Bryant puts it “Friendship, depicted in opposition to erotic love, was already a popular topic in both Classical and Elizabethan times” (Bryant, 1986: 32).

As is explained, one of the crucial traits of male friendship defined by almost all Classical and Renaissance thinkers is that it must be based on equality, which we have in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. As the title suggests, both Valentine and Proteus are noble young gentlemen who come from the same social background.

The play opens with Valentine’s and Proteus’ farewell scene in which Valentine addresses Proteus as his “loving Proteus” (I, I, 1). Proteus has been trying to persuade Valentine to stay in Verona and Valentine has been trying to convince Proteus that he too should accompany him to Milan. However, Valentine is determined to go to Milan to improve himself. He wants his friend to accompany him, but knows that Proteus is unwilling to leave Julia, whom he loves deeply. At this opening scene of the play, we understand that the two young men are bound by a friendship based, as Aristotle advocates, on equality (of rank), with mutual regard for simplicity of heart, good manner, and conversation (1999: 461). Valentine is about to leave Verona to become an experienced gentleman. For the time being, he has nothing to do with love; he is totally in the ‘sphere of philia’, as their first dialogue shows:

Cease to persuade, my loving Proteus;
Home-keeping youth have ever homely wits.
Were’t not affection chains thy tender days
To the sweet glances of thy honour’d love,
I rather would entreat thy company
To see the wonders of the world abroad
Than (living dully sluggardis’d at home)
Wear out they youth with shapeless idleness.
But since thou lov’st, love still, and thrive therein,
Even as I would, when I love to begin. (I, I, 1-10)

In this dialogue, it is observed that Valentine wants Proteus, his best friend, to accompany him because those who stay at home have “homely wits”. However, he knows that Proteus is chained by his love for Julia and spends his youth “with shapeless idleness” (I, I, 8). Valentine seems to know nothing about love and confesses that when he begins to love, he would probably do the same. As Aristotle says, to be friends men must “feel goodwill for each other, be aware of each other’s goodwill, and the cause of their goodwill must be one of the loveable qualities” (1999: 457). With the same goodwill Proteus replies to Valentine as follows:

Wilt thou be gone? Sweet Valentine, adieu;
Think on thy Proteus, when thou (haply) seest
Some rare noteworthy object in thy travel.
Wish me partaker in thy happiness,
When thou dost meet good hap; and in thy danger
(If ever danger do environ thee)
Commend thy grievance to my holy prayers,
For I will be beadsman, Valentine. (I, I, 11-18)

Their dialogue in this scene continues with Valentine’s request from Proteus to pray for him, which he readily agrees to. Valentine dismisses the grievances love brings and labels his friend as a fool for being governed by love: “Love is your master, for he masters you; / And that he is so yoked by a fool / Methinks should not be chronicled for wise” (I, I, 39-41). Their dialogue ends with a mutual amicable farewell and Valentine’s urging Proteus to write to him (They will not meet until Act II, Scene IV). It is as if they have

promised to each other to remain as “two spirits joined with equal zeal” as Seneca puts it (1969: 48). After Valentine leaves, Proteus soliloquises shortly, accusing Julia of his neglecting the noble intent of developing himself as a young man - an act considered to dignify his male friend as well as himself:

He after honour hunts, I after love;
He leaves his friends, to dignify them more;
I leave myself, my friends, and all for love:
Thou, Julia, thou hast metamorphos'd me;
Made me neglect my studies, lose my time, (I, I, 63-67)

At this point in the play, it seems as if male friendship (the sphere of *philia*) is being disrupted because of Julia (the sphere of *eros*). We soon find out, however, that it is not Julia who has caused Proteus' stay in Verona, but his own father, who has not made up his mind about the future of his son yet. It is also clear that Proteus and Julia, although they love each other, do not have a true relationship since Julia has not yet made up her mind about her suitors. By the time Julia has realised that she loves Proteus and sends him a love letter, Proteus' father has already made up his mind about his son's joining Valentine as an attendant at the Duke's court in Milan. As it is seen, the representations of masculinity and nobility in this period are defined in terms of practising tournaments, hearing sweet discourse and talking with noblemen, all being traits of male friendship, since male friendship, as Montaigne puts it, was 'a tight knot that women's minds are not strong enough to endure' (1958: 95).

In the second act, the play shifts from Verona to Milan, where Valentine has fallen in love with the Duke's daughter, Silvia. It is now that he understands Proteus' position, while, before he fell in love with Silvia he scorned the idea of being in love. For the time being both young gentlemen are in the sphere of *eros* and their love is towards different women. Therefore, there is no problem regarding their male friendship.

In Verona, we learn that Julia and Proteus have confessed their love to each other and it is now time for them to part. The decision of Proteus' father makes neither Julia nor Proteus happy. They exchange rings as a token of their love and promise to keep loving each other. Proteus' words of farewell clearly show that he is fully in the grip of *eros*:

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,
For truth hath better deeds than words to grace it. (II, II, 7-19)

So far in the play, we have two good friends who have been apart and who will soon come together. When we are back in Milan in Act II, Scene IV, we see that the love between Silvia and Valentine has already thrived. Silvia calls Valentine her “servant” and Valentine addresses Silvia as his “mistress”, because as John Dover Wilson asserts, Valentine the perfect friend is also the perfect lover like the knights of old or the heroes of romance (1962: 45).

When soon the Duke enters with the news that Proteus has arrived in his court and questions Valentine about him, Valentine's reply is that of a good male comrade:
I knew him as myself; for from our infancy
We have convers'd, and spent our hours together,
And though myself have been an idle truant,
Omitting the sweet benefit of time
To clothe mine age with angel-like perfection,

Yet hath Sir Proteus (for that's his name)
Made use and fair advantage of his days:
His years but young, but his experience old;
His head unmellow'd, but his judgement ripe;
And in a word (for far behind his worth
Comes all the praises that I now bestow)
He is complete in feature and in mind,
With all good grace to grace a gentleman. (II, IV, 57-69)

The two friends have known each other from infancy. Valentine considers Proteus to have been wiser than himself in full use of his time and in developing himself mentally as well as physically.

When Proteus arrives, Valentine introduces him to Silvia telling her "Mistress, I beseech you / Confirm his welcome, with some special favour" (II, IV, 95-96) and "Sweet lady, entertain him to be my fellow to your ladyship" (II, IV, 99-100), which Silvia, as a "worthless mistress" accepts him humbly as a "new servant". In this scene Valentine seems to seek a balance between the sphere of *philia* and that of *eros*. When the two young men are alone, Valentine asks Proteus about his love affair with Julia. Upon being answered by Proteus that he has never liked talking on love, Valentine confesses that his attitude towards love has changed:

Ay, Proteus, but that life is alter'd now:
I have done penance for contemning Love,
Whose high imperious thoughts have punish'd me
With bitter fasts, with penitential groans,
With nightly tears, and daily heart-sore sighs,
For in revenge of my contempt of Love,
Love hath chas'd sleep from my enthralled eyes,
And made them watchers of mine own heart's sorrow. (II, IV, 123-130)

Proteus asks his friend if Silvia has returned his love. Valentine confides to Proteus that Silvia and he have been betrothed and are planning to elope. Valentine has prepared a ladder made of cords and Silvia will escape from her room by this rope ladder. Valentine asks Proteus for further assistance in this secret plan and Proteus promises to help him. After Valentine leaves, however, Proteus soliloquises that the beauty of Silvia has fascinated him; it has made him forget about his love for Julia and his friendship with Valentine; he can now do anything to win her:

Even as one heat another heat expels,
Or as one nail by strength drives out another,
So the remembrance of my former love
Is by a newer object quite forgotten.
Is it mine eye, or Valentinus' praise,
Her true perfection, or my false transgression,
That makes me reasoneless, to reason thus?
She is fair; and so is Julia that I love-
That I did love, for now my love is thaw'd,
Which like a waxen image 'gainst a fire
Bears no impression of the thing it was.
Methinks my zeal to Valentine is cold,
And that I love him not as I was wont.
O, but I love his lady too-too much,
And that's the reason I love him so little. (II, IV, 188-202)

Proteus (his name being the ancient sea-god best known for his readiness to change shape) is at the point of a sudden change that will dominate the rest of the plot. This is the very moment when Proteus'

sphere of eros clashes with that of Valentine. And naturally this is the moment when their male friendship in the classical sense begins to shatter.

In Act II, Scene VI, we see that Proteus is determined to forget about Julia and Valentine in order to win Silvia:

I cannot leave to love; and yet I do;
But there I leave to love, where I should love.
Julia I lose, and Valentine I lose;
If I keep them, I needs must lose myself;
For Valentine, myself; for Julia, Silvia.
I to myself am dearer than a friend,
For love is still most precious in itself,
And Silvia (witness heaven that made her fair)
Shows Julia but a swarthy Ethiope.
I will forget that Julia is alive,
Rememb'ring that my love to her is dead.
And Valentine I'll hold an enemy,
Aiming at Silvia as a sweeter friend. (II, VI, 17-30)

Being in the sphere of eros, Proteus violates the concept of male friendship he was brought up to cherish. He is no longer aware of the fact that friends "must feel goodwill for each other" (Aristotle, 1999: 457). He forgets that "true friendship is worth dying for" (Seneca, 1969: 39) and by saying that he is dearer to himself than a friend, he is no longer in the sphere of philia. Accordingly, he reveals to the Duke Valentine's plans to elope with Silvia: "Know, worthy prince, Sir Valentine my friend / This night intends to steal away your daughter; / Myself am one made privy to the plot"(III, I, 10-12). He also wants to be assured by the Duke that Valentine will not learn about his plot: "But, good my lord, do it so cunningly / That my discovery be not aimed at; / For love of you, not hate unto my friend, / Hath made me publisher of this pretence" (III, I, 44-47). Proteus' insistence that Valentine be left ignorant of his role as informer seems to stem from his desire to get Silvia rather than his embarrassment for having betrayed his friend. His eyes have been blinded by his love for Silvia and therefore the sphere of eros will be winning over the sphere of philia until the point of reconciliation in the play.

The Duke tells Valentine that he is planning a quick marriage between Thurio and Silvia because his daughter has been disobedient to him by rejecting Thurio's hand. The Duke has decided to disinherit her leaving her without a dowry and is planning to remarry and give his fortune to his new wife. He asks Valentine questions about courtship. Unfortunately, Valentine advises him to elope. The Duke pretends that he needs a ladder that night and does not know where to get one. Valentine promises to bring him one by seven o'clock. As he is describing the ways to hide the ladder under his cloak, the Duke pulls off Valentine's cloak and underneath discovers a rope ladder and a letter to Silvia. The Duke banishes Valentine from his territories. Valentine expresses his desperation in a soliloquy as follows:

And why not death, rather than living torment?
To die is to be banish'd from myself,
And Silvia is myself: banish'd from her
Is self from self. A deadly banishment.
What light is light, if Silvia be not seen?
What joy is joy, if Silvia be not by?
Unless it be to think that she is by
And feed upon the shadow of perfection.
Except I be by Silvia in the night,
There is no music in the nightingale.
Unless I look on Silvia in the day,
There is no day for me to look upon.
She is my essence, and I leave to be,

If I be not by her fair influence
Foster'd, illumin'd, cheris'd, kept alive.
I fly not death, to fly his deadly doom:
Tarry I here, I but attend on death,
But fly I hence, I fly away from life. (III, I, 170-187)

This is a moment when a man needs his friends most. So arrives Proteus to console Valentine. At this moment Proteus is so blinded by his love for Silvia that he refuses to see how his friend suffers. As Alexandre Leggatt says: "Being in love dominates the mind of the victim; it is a private, enclosed and very special state" (1987: 21). Valentine, unaware that Proteus is no more his friend, takes his words as friendly consolation:

Cease to lament for that thou canst help,
And study help for that which thou lament'st.
Time is the nurse and breeder of all good.
Here, if thou stay, thou canst not see thy love;
Besides, thy staying will abridge thy life.
Hope is a lover's staff: walk hence with that
And manage it, against despairing thoughts. (III, I, 241-247)

Proteus also makes the false promise that he will deliver Valentine's letters to Silvia. He is now behaving like a villain. His servant Launce suspects that his master is a knave. Even Launce can see this, but Valentine's ignorance of the facts keeps him in the sphere of *philia*. Meanwhile, the banished Valentine along with Speed has been taken by a group of outlaws on the road to Mantua. The outlaws, who claim to be banished gentlemen like Valentine, tell him to become their commander if he wants to survive among them. He agrees to become their commander.

The Duke wants advice from Proteus about uniting Silvia and Thurio. Proteus says that the best way to help Thurio to make Silvia love him will be accusing the banished Valentine of "falsehood, cowardice and poor descent" (III, II, 32), three things that women hate. And this will be only credible if done by his best friend. Proteus pretends to be unwilling to do this, but he says he will undertake it for his love of the Duke. His attachment to the sphere of *eros* has not only distanced him from the sphere of *philia*, but has led him to a complete loss of dignity and virtue.

Proteus is about to deceive Thurio as he did Valentine. Proteus assures him that he, too, loves Silvia only for Thurio's sake. Meanwhile Julia, who has come to Milan disguised as a page (Sebastian) and employed by Proteus, has found out that Proteus has been disloyal to her. When Proteus begs once again for Silvia's love, Julia, who has been watching and overhearing, is taken aback being reported by Proteus to be dead. "I grant, sweet love, that I did love a lady / But she is dead" (IV, II, 102-103). At this point, Proteus, completely taken in by the sphere of *eros*, has lost all his contact with the realities of his past life as a lover and a friend. He wants his page (Julia) to deliver a ring to Silvia, which is the very same ring Julia has given to him. He also orders Julia to remind Silvia to give him her picture. Silvia gives the picture to her and Julia gives her Proteus' letter, which Silvia immediately tears into pieces. Likewise, she does not accept the ring. Julia likes and appreciates Silvia for being so loyal to Valentine and overcomes her jealousy. So she brings Silvia's picture safely to Proteus.

Next we find Proteus involved in further plotting. He informs the audience that Silvia has rejected him by "accusing" him of disloyalty to his friend. Silvia, who has already heard from Valentine that Proteus is his comrade and loves Julia, is highly disturbed by his advances and detests him for his disloyalty to his friend and his loved one. She asks her friend Sir Eglamour to help her get out of the court so as to avoid marrying Thurio and to be reunited with Valentine. Moving through the forest, they are also overtaken by a group of outlaws. Sir Eglamour escapes and leaves her with the outlaws, whose commander luckily turns out to be Valentine.

The plot is carried on with the Duke's forming a searching party to find his daughter. Finally all the characters are brought together in the forest, where Valentine is now the commander of the outlaws. Valentine enters thinking about Silvia. He hears a noise and hides to see what happens. Proteus, Silvia and Julia, disguised as Sebastian, appear. Proteus has rescued Silvia from the outlaws before she could be taken to their commander. For this service, Proteus demands Silvia's love. He wants Silvia to give him just one fair look for his reward but is rejected. This is a very harsh moment for Valentine, who overhears his friend. In an aside he says: "How like a dream is this! I see, and hear: / Love, lend me patience to forbear

awhile" (V, IV, 26-27). Silvia says that she would rather have been a breakfast for a hungry lion than be rescued by "false perjur'd Proteus" and does not listen to his declarations of love:

When Proteus cannot love when he's belov'd.
Read over Julia's heart, thy first best love,
For whose dear sake thou didst then rend thy faith
Into thousand oaths; and all those oaths
Descended into perjury, to love me.
Thou has no faith left now, unless thou'dst two,
And that's far worse than none: better have none
Than plural faith, which is too much by one.
Thou counterfeit to thy true friend! (V, IV, 45-53)

Silvia portrays the whole picture skilfully, but Proteus is still governed by the sphere of eros and therefore answers her: "In love, / Who respects friend?" (V, IV, 52-53). This very statement is Proteus' open confession that the sphere of eros has overpowered that of philia. Who cares for his philia when he is governed by eros? At this point, he becomes so fully the victim of his carnal desire that he tries to rape Silvia. Fortunately, Valentine emerges and makes Proteus release Silvia. His friend's treachery has brought him to the point of spiritual collapse:

Thou common friend, that's without faith or love,
For such is a friend now. Treacherous man,
Thou hast beguil'd my hopes: nought but mine eye
Could have persuaded me: now I dare not say
I have one friend alive; thou wouldst disprove me.
Who should be trusted now, when one right hand
Is perjured to the bosom? Proteus,
I am sorry I must never trust thee more,
But count the world a stranger for thy sake.
The private wound is deepest: O time most accurst,
'Mongst all foes that a friend should be the worst! (V, IV, 62-72)

Valentine, who has been able to maintain a balance between the sphere of eros and that of philia, now feels that the loss of a friend causes far greater unhappiness than the loss of a loved one. Proteus, highly affected by Valentine's speech, repents now:

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, 73-77)

Now he is the same Proteus as at the beginning of the play. He comes to realise the ties and duties of friendship. (Smidt, 1986: 40) He is truly suffering. As Lisa Hopkins asserts:

In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, the character who in many ways appears the most vulnerable is not Valentine, whose good faith leads him into banishment, nor Silvia, distressed and frightened though she undoubtedly is by the attempted rape, nor even Julia, forced to witness the faithlessness and villainy of her lover, but Proteus himself, the man who causes the suffering of all of them (1998: 29).

However, Valentine still holds on to the sphere of philia. He forgives his friend and what is more, like a true friend gives Proteus his beloved Silvia:

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 pleas'd:
By penitence th' Eternal's wrath's appeas'd.

And that my love may appear plain and free,
All that was mine in Silvia I give thee. (V, IV, 77-83)

Thus he gives Proteus a good lesson by demonstrating the supremacy of friendship (Smidt, 1986: 44). In addition to this, as Peter G. Phialas puts forth:

It should be borne in mind that Proteus has already repented when Valentine offers Silvia to him; so that the only reason for the offer must be to show thereby that his love for his friend 'may appear plain and free'. This is what Valentine tells Proteus, but it has been suggested that the real reason is to test him, to see whether he has truly repented by allowing him 'to choose for himself between Silvia and Julia' (1966: 51).

At this moment, Julia, the supposed page, faints. Soon she reveals her true identity. Discovering that Julia has been so loyal to him, Proteus says "What is in Silvia's face but I may spy / More fresh in Julia's, with a constant eye" (V, IV, 113-114). Proteus, who has suddenly fallen in love with Silvia as if struck by the blind Cupid's arrow, now sees that his true love is Julia. Valentine declares that his and Proteus' friendship is restored: "Come, come; a hand from either; / Let me be blest to make this happy close: / 'Twere pity two such friends should be long foes" (V, IV, 115-117). The Duke, overtaken by the outlaws together with Thurio, is now released and pleased to announce that Valentine can marry Silvia. The Duke has realised that Thurio is not a true gentleman and Valentine is far nobler. Valentine proposes that his marriage to Silvia and Proteus' marriage to Julia take place on the same day. The play ends with the promise of 'one feast, one house, one mutual happiness'. Valentine requests one more thing from the Duke, to release the outlaws from the penalty of exile, which the Duke grants. The play ends with Valentine's promise of double marriage. As Hopkins puts it:

All is apparently well that ends well, and Valentine's extraordinary offer of his own interest in Silvia to Proteus could also be read as indicating that the friendship of the two gentlemen will, despite all the strains to which it has been subject, survive and even prosper (1998: 31).

With the promise of their marriage the sphere of eros and that of philia are reconciled. This ending and the events in the play mirror 'friendship literature' tradition of Medieval times: Friendship literature told stories of manly companionship, sometimes disrupted by the love theme but generally restored (Boyce, 1996: 672). Since magnanimity was standard in this tradition and "the act of forgiveness lies at the centre of Shakespeare's thought and it is the ultimate measure of human achievement" (Phialas, 1966: 53), the restoration of the two gentlemen's friendship has been inevitable.

The picture in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is that when at least one of the gentlemen is in the sphere of philia, there exists no vital problem about the integrity of their friendship. However, when both of them are in the sphere of eros at the same time and their 'eros' is towards the same woman, there exists a conflict and their friendship shatters. Reconciliation occurs when their 'eros' is moderated and they are able to reconcile 'eros' with 'philia'. More importantly, Shakespeare in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*:

explores issues of male identity and friendship felt as necessarily prior to marriage. In beginning by considering issues of male identity Shakespeare seems [to me] to recapitulate in his own career the development of the individual toward adulthood and marriage. For despite the implicit assertion of the comic pattern that sees conflict largely in generational terms, we do not move directly from family bonds to marriage without an intervening period in which our friendships with same-sex friends help us to establish our independent identities (Adelman, 1985: 75).

This assertion by Janet Adelman, which echoes Aristotle's emphasis of male friendship in one's ethical development, is vital to underline the fact that Proteus manages to establish his independent identity thanks to the intervening period in which he has had a bond of male friendship with Valentine. Although he hesitates between remaining in the family ties and getting himself ready to adulthood, he breaks the family bonds and becomes ready to marriage when he comes to realise the value of his male friendship. Thus, in taking Valentine as a model for himself, Proteus succeeds in establishing an identity toward adulthood and marriage at the end of the play.

4. Conclusion

As a humanist and a man of letters, Shakespeare was fully aware of the Classical, Medieval and Renaissance understanding of friendship between males. In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* he was concerned with dramatising the unpredictability of love and the supremacy of friendship (Smidt, 1986: 58). Love might be changeable; there may be times when eros becomes superior but Shakespeare, in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, shows that philia -male friendship- is and has been traditionally superior and sublime. As it has been discussed throughout the article, Shakespeare's primary aim to depict the friendship between males was to demonstrate the traditional concept of male comradeship. Although his depictions

might be taken, by contemporary readers and audiences, as suggestive of bearing homosexual implications, evaluating Shakespearean male friendship in terms of its traditional roots would do justice to Shakespeare and his time. Just like the *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Merchant of Venice* could be explored from the same angle.

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