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The Fall of a Gentleman: Structural Parallelism between the Myth of the Fall and Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*

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Abstract

Disregarded as an early experimentation of themes further treated in his mature plays, Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1623) portrays a preliminary view of the bases that lay at the heart of the Renaissance society: the sworn brotherhood oath and the principles of courtly love. Critics have been harsh with Shakespeare's early comedy during the centuries, probably on accounts of the play's lack of depth and the various theories surrounding Valentine's words in the last scene. Therefore, this paper aims at analysing *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*'s structural verisimilitude to the biblical Myth of The Fall as an attempt to solve the general animadversion this comedy originates among its readers. The analysis provides a parallelism between the events concerning the fall of humankind and the proposed Renaissance equivalent, the violation of the gentleman's principles.

Key Words

Renaissance, Myth of the Fall, sworn brotherhood, courtly love, constancy.

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Introduction

Indisputably, the Italian Renaissance is considered one of the greatest movements of Europe's history on cultural and philosophical terms. During the fourteenth and seventeenth century, the revival of Greek and Roman classics together with the raising significance of art, literature and philosophy, enhanced the major break with the restrictive Medieval principles of the previous centuries. The Renaissance Humanism, which studied the classical philosophy of Aristotle and Cicero, emphasised the inherent virtue and potential of the individual and eventually, recaptured the Myth of the Fall as a Renaissance motif. Indeed, the Medieval concept of the "Great Chain of Being" justified the humanist paradigm of man's superiority since, according to the Bible, "God created humankind in his image" (Gen. 1:27). The Italian Renaissance had a great impact all around Europe and consequently, English Renaissance, together with Shakespeare's career, bloomed during the reign of Elizabeth I (1558–1603), who firmly promoted the humanistic and artistic bases held by Italian authors. Certainly, William Shakespeare is widely regarded as one of the greatest contributors to English literature and specifically, as argued in this paper, an artful writer in providing his audience with an accurate portrayal of his context. *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (first performance 1589-93) is believed to be Shakespeare's earliest comedy and, unjustly, his most underrated play. This comedy has been often dismissed by critics and theatre companies on accounts of the considerable gap between its refined poetic lines and the still unripe dramatic techniques which could not solve the animadversion created by some scenes. Yet, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*'s essence lays at the connection between its plot and its context, being this work a superb representation of the Renaissance society.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona established a Shakespearean thematic line with regards to his particular view on human life, relationships, and interactions, recognisable in his mature plays (Sargent 1950, 1167). This comedy exemplifies Shakespeare's predilection for the exotic quality of Italian settings, in this case Verona, Milan and the frontier of Mantua, which "corresponds to the interest of English readers in . . . Italian courtly culture in particular" (Kullmann 2014, 57). Valentine and Proteus, two young friends from Verona, are about to immerse themselves in an educational journey. In portraying both friends, Shakespeare could have had into account Baldassare Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* (1528) a well-known book of behaviour which coupled humanist ethos of man's individual potential with the directives of the ideal courtier, highly appreciated in Elizabethan England (Slights 1983, 19-20). Proteus decides to stay in Verona with his beloved Julia whereas Valentine prefers to follow the

Elizabethan conventions of travelling and studying the courtly patterns of behaviour abroad. Love takes a prominent role in the plot, portraying the intrinsic connection between Castiglione's perfect gentleman and the concept of courtly love, adapted from the Medieval chivalrous code of love. Proteus is forced to leave Julia after his father decides that he has to share the same education Valentine is enjoying in Milan and eventually, Proteus is tempted with the beauty of his friend's mistress, Silvia. The realm of courtly love is juxtaposed with the classical idea of *amicitia perfecta*, recovered from Cicero's *De Amicitia* (44 BC), and exemplifying the struggle to maintain both ideals balanced. Certainly, Renaissance authors, as Shakespeare himself, linked the classical concept of the ideal friendship with Christian, chivalric and humanistic principles (Hyatte 1994, 2). Still, there is one topic which has been scarcely mentioned in contemporary analyses of the play: the evident structural parallelism with the biblical Myth of the Fall.

If we take a close look at *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*'s plot, we can recognise how Shakespeare, in the first two acts, portrays an idealised Renaissance context. The youthful Proteus and Valentine enjoy their noble status while sharing an intimate friendship, representing the ideal sworn brotherhood, and experimenting in the realm of courtly love with Julia and Silvia respectively. Shakespeare presents nothing else but a Renaissance paradise to his audience and provides them with the principles a gentleman must follow: constancy in love and friendship. This Garden of Eden is altered by the presence of temptation, inconstancy and eventually, the violation of the aforementioned gentleman's principles, bringing, from a Renaissance point of view, the fall of Proteus. Shakespeare is indeed using the Myth of the Fall framework and substituting its religious connotations with the bases of the Renaissance society so as to ensure the comprehension of the audience. Thus, this paper, which falls within the scope of Renaissance studies, aims at demonstrating how Shakespeare leveraged the Renaissance relevance of the Myth of the Fall by endowing *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* with the same effective structure, yet, substituting the religious message with an equivalent Renaissance parable: how to become a gentleman through constancy in love and friendship.

Previous analyses on *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* have examined different factors which have provided a wide range of interpretations such as Rossky's burlesque approach (1982) or Stephenson's adolescent world (1966). Nevertheless, the majority of readings of the play have explored the dilemma between love and friendship and its development in aristocratic atmospheres. The works used in this paper are mainly focused on the study of courtly love, sworn brotherhood and religion in Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Articles written by Girard (1989), Slight (1983), and Waith (1986), among others, will be considered.

Moreover, the works which have approached the Christian structure as well as the love and friendship thematic proposed in this dissertation are the ones by Cox (2008), Hunt (1982), Lindenbaum (1975), Sargent (1950) and Vyvyan (1960). This paper is divided into three main stages according to the succession of events in the Myth of the Fall: Paradise, Fall and Salvation. To begin with, the Renaissance paradise and the corresponding principles holding up this idealised context will be examined. Then, the fall of Proteus will be analysed in relation to the violation of the gentleman's principles: the sworn brotherhood and courtly love. Finally, in accordance with the doctrine of the Original Sin, how Proteus is redeemed through repentance and forgiveness will be highlighted.

Renaissance Paradise: Verona and the Gentleman's Principles

In analysing the beginning of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Shakespeare provides his audience with an exotic setting, the city of Verona, and the pillars holding up its Renaissance society, male friendship, and courtly love. As mentioned above, this paper focuses on a structural parallelism established between the Christian *Genesis*, specifically, the Fall of Mankind and its Renaissance equivalent, the fall of a gentleman. Yet, in order to make a clear connection between both, it is essential to start from the very beginning, the Christian paradise. In the same way God planted the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:8), Shakespeare portrays Verona as the springboard to Italian Renaissance paradise, endowed with fundamental directives which gentlemen must follow in the same way Christians follow the dictates of the Scriptures. Arisen from education and perpetuated with constancy, the love and friendship thematic is introduced in the first two acts by the youthful Proteus and Valentine, who are about to immerse themselves in an introspective journey through Renaissance conventions.

Education is the “central organizing principle” of Verona's paradise, instilling in both Proteus and Valentine the social values of chivalrous love and friendship required in gentlemen's behaviour (Lindenbaum 1975, 231). Travelling and learning the bases of courtly manners by visiting royal courts were remarkable stages in Elizabethan's education and Shakespeare used them as evident hints suggesting the protagonists' young age. These educational steps are introduced by Valentine in the first act when greeting his intimate friend Proteus before departing for the Milanese court. Valentine implies that Proteus represents the “Home-keeping youth,” (I, 1, 2)¹ chained, in this case, by love, in opposition to Valentine's own educational journey where he will admire “the wonders of the world abroad” (I, 1, 6). Even

¹ Further references to the 2008 edition of Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1623) edited by Roger Warren, shall be indicated by parenthetical references containing Act, Scene and Lines.

though the starting point of their learning process symbolizes different priorities, both young men are still under parental control and eventually, Proteus is sent to Milan with Valentine. Doubtlessly, parental concerns on their offspring's education involved travelling, the social and rhetoric arts of a courtier, and eventually, how to become a gentleman (Lindenbaum 1975, 232). Antonio, Proteus' father, together with Panthino, their servant, provide a detailed definition of what was expected of a "perfect man" (I, 3, 20). According to Panthino, a man of Proteus' reputation should "try their fortune in wars . . . discover islands far away . . . [or visit] the studious universities," representing the importance of travelling and studying the Renaissance humanist ideals (I, 3, 6-10). Hence, both friends, like Adam and Eve, are still inexperienced and unpredictable. They have a long educational process ahead before becoming what, by the title of the play, we expected they already were.

The educational process is only completed through experience and constancy. Certainly, "inconstancy" and "constancy" are key concepts in this comedy since they are respectively the engine for the conflict and the answer for the solution. Antonio clearly points out this idea when arguing that the perfect gentleman must be "tutored in the world" (I, 3, 21) since experience is "achieved / And perfected by the swift course of time" (I, 3, 22-23). In order to establish a clear religious parallel, we have to take a look at the very beginning of *Genesis*: The Garden of Eden was endowed with balance and harmony before being altered by Eve (Gen. 2:17). In the same way, the Renaissance paradise is composed by the constancy performed in love affairs and friendship. Consequently, "constancy" is intrinsically connected with the pillars of a Renaissance gentleman's behaviour: the sworn brotherhood oath and the chivalric love. Verona is hitherto considered the parallel to an ideal gentleman's Garden of Eden since both friends respect its main principles. According to Vyvyan the hero, in this case Valentine, "is seen to be constant to the highest quality" whereas his friend, Proteus, will be characterised by the "inconstancy to the ideal [as an] all-inclusive sin" (1960, 159). Thus, while education mirrors religion as a whole, "constancy" is differently embodied by each character in order to maintain love and friendship relationships in the same way that Christians need constancy to pursue a virtuous path.

One of the two pillars held by Verona's Renaissance Paradise is already implied in the title: masculine friendship. The first two acts are an accurate representation of the intimate relationship both friends have. In the first line of the play, Valentine exemplifies this ideal by addressing his friend as "my loving Proteus;" likewise, Proteus greets his "Sweet Valentine" confirming their affectionate bond. Demonstrations of affection are continuous between both friends on the stage, construed in this paper as Verona's Paradise. Even though these statements

could be interpreted as homosexual connotations, their relationship conforms merely to the Renaissance appropriation of classic ideals about male friendship as expressed in Cicero's *De Amicitia* (44 BC). This treatise on friendship was christianised in Medieval England by Aelred of Rievaulx in *De Spirituali Amicitia* (1163–1166), instilling religious principles into the realm of friendship (Waith 1986, 235). To give an illustration of this spiritual bond, Proteus requests Valentine to “Commend [his] grievance to [Proteus’] holy prayers” (I, 1, 17) stating that Proteus himself will be his “beadsmen” (I, 1, 18). Coupled with the classic conception, the idealised friendship portrayed in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* derived as well from the medieval sworn brotherhood oath based on virtue, utility, and mutual loyalty to death (Sargent 1950, 1168). Proteus cannot but praise Valentine, that “after honour hunts” and “leaves his friends to dignify them more” (I, 1, 63-4). The semantic field of honour and dignity resembles that of the chivalrous knights, repeated in Valentine's excessive adulations to Proteus in the Milanese court:

His years but young, but his experience old;
 His head unmellow'd, but his judgment ripe; . . .
 [Proteus] is complete in feature and in mind
 With all good grace to grace a gentleman. (II, 4, 67-72)

The high degree of affection mixed with a “self-conscious desire to impress his audience” makes Valentine's discourse an example of how his youth is translated into rhetorical exaggeration, yet, empowering their bond (Lindenbaum 1975, 237). In fact, the story of Titus and Gisippus from Sir Thomas Elyot's *The Book of the Governor* (1531) could have inspired Shakespeare in portraying the intimate relationship between Valentine and Proteus. Their bond has heretofore been based on an ideal friendship and thus, Verona's Renaissance Paradise is still balanced.

The second pillar of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*'s Garden of Eden is courtly love. Although at the beginning of the play is presented at the same level of friendship, love is firstly introduced by Proteus, who performs the courtier conventions adopted by the Renaissance society. It is by means of the epistolary form, “an essential ingredient of wooing,” that Proteus starts his romance with his beloved Julia (Kiefer 1986, 66). In fact, Shakespeare's high usage of letters highlights the importance of the courtier tradition, mainly influenced in Elizabethan England by Baldassare Castiglione, Italian humanist, author of *Il Cortegiano* (1528). According to George Bull, *Il Cortegiano* recommended a specific behaviour in Italian courts which “became accepted standard for English gentlemen” (2003, 22). This is evident in Shakespeare's portrayal both friends' attitudes, who, in their first conversation, mention a “love-book” (I, 1,

19) considered a “manual of courtship” by Norman Sanders, and indeed, analysed in this dissertation as Castiglione’s *Il Cortegiano* (quoted in Shakespeare 2008, 72). Eventually, Proteus’ attempts to perform Castiglione’s ideal reflect how his youth is transformed into romantic passion. In his first soliloquy, Proteus states that his love for Julia has “metamorphosed [him],” alluding directly to his name and Shakespeare’s predilection for Ovid’s poem *Metamorphoses* (I, 1, 66); yet, the central metamorphosis is about to happen. Meanwhile, his passion delights in praises to Julia switching to a religious semantic field. Proteus conception of Julia as “heavenly” embodies Renaissance bond of courtly love and Christian imagery (I, 3, 50). Similarly, it is worth mentioning the fact that Shakespeare’s romantic love was not just influenced by Castiglione’s courtliness but also by the medieval “chivalric code of knights and ladies” which was tied to Christian principles (Sargent 1950, 1168). Proteus allusion to Julia’s “oath for love” (I, 3, 47) as well as their exchange of rings before his departure (II, 2, 4-6) evoke those practices of virtuous knights, adopted in Elizabethan England as a betrothal ceremony, legally binding two lovers. Hence, in the same way Christian religion instilled the Great Commandment of Love, Verona’s paradise, influenced by Italian models and medieval traditions, encourages Proteus to love passionately.

At this stage, while Proteus is leading the role of the perfect lover, Valentine’s gentleman’s quest is about to become “an education in love” (Godshalk 1969, 177). Valentine’s choices have hitherto stressed his priorities: friendship and “[seeking] to perfect the Renaissance self by travel” (Hunt 1982, 8). Nevertheless, he is about to discover that his choice also involves wooing and falling in love with Silvia, the daughter of the Duke of Milan. It is the transition to the second act were, similarly to Proteus, Valentine is “metamorphosed with a mistress” as Speed, his servant, pinpoints (II, 1, 28). Shakespeare portrays Valentine’s early attempts to court Silvia with both, a high degree of humour and exquisite religious vocabulary. Speed states in prose, breaking Valentine’s rhythmic extravagance, how after criticising Proteus for being mastered by love (I, 1, 39) he is now following the same path (II, 1, 16-29). Valentine is presented as a Petrarchan lover since he defends himself by declaring his love at first sight (II, 1, 62); yet, Speed continues mocking him appealing to Cupid’s blindness (II, 1, 66). Once in the presence of Silvia, Valentine’s courtly language acquires an artificial tone due to his inexperience (Girard 1989, 235). He establishes hierarchical mistress-servant relationship that, apart from courtly conventions, resembles the biblical Christ-as-shepherd metaphor. Furthermore, Valentine already considers his beloved Silvia as a divine figure to worship, enhancing the religious semantic field (II, 1, 4-10). Consequently, the courtship tradition

established a solid bond between the gentleman's principles and courtier conventions, while including a religious base in their discourses and values.

The Fall of Proteus: The Milanese Court

Henceforth, the two young noblemen have pursued the path of a gentlemen and taken up residence in Milan enjoying the Duke's hospitality. In the court, they are able to "Hear sweet discourse, . . . converse with noblemen" (I, 3, 31-2) and consequently, exercise their rhetoric skills, considered an intrinsic art in gentlemen. However, their young age contributes to the development of the conflict since they struggle with their own identity and constancy, making Milan the ideal stage for "a quick and easy denouement" (Scheye 1974, 11). In *Genesis*, Eve is characterised by her naivety and for failing God in resisting the Devil's temptations. Similarly, Valentine's praises to Silvia tempt Proteus to violate the codes of love and friendship he maintains with Julia and his friend. In this stage, Proteus falls in love with Silvia, breaking the principles of Renaissance society in the same way Adam and Eve fell from God's grace when violating the only rule of the Garden of Eden.

Rooted in his youth, Valentine's inexperience and naivety blind his own common sense by leading his friend Proteus directly into temptation. Preceding Proteus fall, the atmosphere at the Milanese court encourages the young noblemen to perform their best courtier imitation with "grace and *sprezzatura*" (Bradbrook 1991, 164). Coined by Castiglione in *The Book of the Courtier*, the art of the *sprezzatura* was considered a "universal rule" for gentlemen which implied the practice of all courtier artistry by making them appear effortless (2003, 102-3). Nevertheless, Valentine's attempts to follow Castiglione's ideal end up being unnatural. This is exemplified in the first conversation between Valentine and Silvia, when Silvia together with Speed, mock Valentine's excessive manners (II, 1, 91-109). Besides Valentine's lack of spontaneity, Shakespeare reinforces the young age of the two gentlemen by portraying the capricious and naive side of an adolescent behaviour. Adapting René Girard's conception of mimetic friendship, "[Valentine's] desires are not really convincing until they are mirrored by the desires of [Proteus]" (1989, 239). Seeking your friend's acceptance in love affairs was not an unusual practice in Renaissance society, bearing in mind the intimate relationship gentlemen had. Therefore, after the first encounter between Proteus and Silvia, Valentine forces his friend to approve the divine superiority of his mistress. This is done by means of Valentine's hyperbolic praises venerating Silvia as a "heavenly saint" figure (II, 4, 143) "sovereign to all the creatures on earth" (II, 4, 151). Silvia, who is sacralised as a Goddess, paradoxically adopts the image of temptation thereafter. Even though Proteus seems reluctant to accept Valentine's

statements, the seed of temptation has already been planted and eventually, he is “converted to the cult of Silvia” (Girard 1989, 237). He convinces Proteus of Silvia’s divinity with the same persuasion the Devil tempted Eve with the fruits of the tree of knowledge, the only one God forbid to eat from (Gen. 3:1-5). Indeed, Silvia is presented as an irresistible forbidden fruit by Valentine, being this stage the only one in which we could blame him for overstepping the limits of pretension.

Proteus’ moral decay is introduced in two soliloquies at the equator of the play. First, after Valentine’s praises, Proteus’ discourse ponders over his prompt metamorphosis, already anticipated by the name Shakespeare gave to the character. He starts hesitating about whether his sudden love for Silvia has a greater significance than his affection for Valentine (II, 4, 201-2). His heretofore sworn brother takes a secondary role in Proteus’ priorities just like his beloved Julia. He laments how the “remembrance of [his] former love / Is by a newer object quite forgotten” (II, 4, 192-3), fact that mirrors his inconstant nature and young age. Furthermore, Proteus interrupts the discourse to correct himself enhancing the “fragility of words as guarantors of emotional commitment” (Kiefer 1986, 73):

[Silvia] is fair, and so is Julia that I love—
That I did love, for now my love is thawed,
Which like a waxen image ‘gainst a fire
Bears no impression of the thing it was. (II, 4, 197-200)

These lines are contrasted with his last words addressed to Julia in Verona, where he asked for “patience” (II, 2, 1) and ironically, offered his “true constancy” (II, 2, 8). In accordance with, Ralph M. Sargent, the following soliloquy portrays the transformation of Proteus by “dramatizing the fault of men. . . who [know] the cause, the ideal, which [they are] breaking, yet [succumb] to the power of desire” (1950, 1175-6). This is equal to Adam and Eve’s passage in *Genesis* and indeed, a great source of inspiration for John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667). Proteus is having an inner conflict in which he is aware of the consequences that can trigger his fate. He states that by leaving Julia, loving Silvia, or betraying Valentine, he will be condemned for a “threefold perjury” (II, 6, 1-5). Moreover, Shakespeare endows Proteus’ words with religious allusions reinforcing the connection between his transgression and the Original Sin: “oh sweet-suggesting love, if thou hast sinned, / Teach me, thy tempted subject, to excuse it” (II, 6, 7-8). Proteus is advancing his image as a sinner since he is determined to accomplish his desires. The last rhyming couplet of both soliloquies exemplify this idea, closing his internal debate with a tone of self-determinacy.

From this point forward, Proteus is portrayed as a villain-like character, who, driven by his youth and passion, succumbs temptation. In the two previous soliloquies, Proteus has condemned himself, aware of the crime he is about to commit. As opposed to Cicero's ideal of perfect equality between male friends, Shakespeare portrays a rather "inherent imperfection" in Proteus, that can certainly be understood as the Original Sin (Cox 2008, 23). Scholastics in the Medieval and Renaissance period taught the two phases that divided the doctrine of the Augustan² Original Sin in European universities: the *peccatum originale originans* known as the sinful condition of Adam and Eve, in this case, Proteus, and the *peccatum originale originatum*, the consequences the Original Sin had on mankind, and in Shakespeare's play, on Valentine, Julia and Silvia. Consequently, Proteus' fall is not a single occurrence, but a succession of events understood as whole process in which he plans, step by step, the violation of the gentleman principles affecting those surrounding him. Proteus, by simultaneously falling in love with Silvia and breaking his oaths of love and friendship, falls from the grace of Renaissance society and therefore, parallels the Fall of Mankind from God's Grace.

The *peccatum originale originatum* in the *Two Gentlemen of Verona* involve Valentine, Julia, and Silvia as the victims of Proteus' egocentrism. The sworn brotherhood oath and the principles this pledge required are the first obstacles for Proteus in the way to Silvia's heart. Hence, Proteus condemns Valentine as his legitim "enemy, / Aiming at Silvia as a sweeter friend" (II, 6, 29-30) and violating the Renaissance code of friendship. Proteus, blinded by his own ego, plots against his friend by telling the Duke the intentions of her daughter to elope with Valentine and get married. First, he deceitfully stresses on the "law of friendship" (III, 1, 5) and hides his "egotistical love for Silvia" under the layer of a virtuous gentleman who is just doing the correct by telling his host about the lovers' plan. (Kullmann 2014, 65). Eventually, Valentine is discovered and exiled from the Milanese court. According to Thomas Scheye, the duke is "denying Valentine his status, his position at Milan and his state as a nobleman, two essential props to his identity at this point" (1974, 18). Despite being partly responsible of aggravating the conflict, Valentine is portrayed as the ideal lover who has been dispossessed of his most valued treasures, his beloved Silvia, and his identity as a gentleman. Shakespeare writes for Valentine's grief one of the most remarkable love soliloquies of his early comedies:

And why not death rather than living torment?

To die is to be banished from myself,

And Sylvia is myself. (III, 1, 170-72)

² Saint Augustine spread the doctrine of the Original Sin during the 5th and 6th century AD throughout Europe. This doctrine was restated by The Council of Trent (1545-63) as a response to the Protestant Reformation.

Valentine's words anticipate Romeo's speech when banished from Verona (III, 3, 21-4) in Shakespeare's tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet* (2008), enhancing the thematic relevance of this play in his mature works. On the whole, following the structure of the Myth of the Fall, Valentine suffers the consequences of Proteus' sin and, as Adam and Eve, is exiled from paradise.

Julia is the second character who suffers the *peccatum originale originatum*, the collateral damage of Proteus' decisions. It is worth mentioning the fact that the tale of Felix and Felismena from Jorge de Montemayor's *Diana* (1559) must have been a great source of inspiration when portraying Julia's loyalty and love thematic. First, in the same way Valentine's friendship obstructs Proteus' desires, his former love oath to Julia impedes him from freely wooing Silvia. Therefore, he violates the chivalric code of love by considering his sentiments and his former lover dead. Before stating that "he will forget that Julia is alive" (II, 6, 27), Proteus already excuses himself by comparing Silvia with a "swarthy Ethiopie" as opposed to the Renaissance beauty cannon that evidently characterises Silvia (II, 6, 25-6). Conversely, the loyalty Julia professes for Proteus makes her undertake a journey in quest of his love. Her vocabulary acquired a religious tone when describing herself as a "true-devoted pilgrim" (II, 7, 9) and Proteus as a "divine perfection" (II, 7, 13). Ignorant of Proteus' treachery, Julia dresses as a male page and sets out on a "pilgrimage of desire" to Milan "by which men and women [will be] tested and either damned or saved" (Hunt 1982, 14). Once in Milan, she witnesses Proteus and Thurio, a wealthy suitor of Silvia, performing a song under Silvia's window. It is at this point that Julia realises Proteus' inconstancy and condemns him for "[playing] false" (IV, 2, 57); yet, she will personify the "painful testing of constancy in service" as the ultimate symbol of true love (Vyvyan 1960, 124). Julia is eventually employed as Proteus' servant under the image of Sebastian, a trustful page. In charge of delivering the ring she gave to Proteus, Julia claims that she "cannot be true servant to [Proteus] / Unless [she proves] false traitor to [herself]" (IV, 4, 102-3). Nevertheless, she follows his lover's wishes portraying the ultimate sacrifice of love, fact that contrasts with Proteus' villain nature.

Silvia is the last character affected by Proteus' drastic transformation. Certainly, together with Julia and Valentine, she respects the code of love and the oath she has made to Valentine. Silvia is considerably outspoken when directly accusing Proteus for being "subtle, perjured, false, [and a] disloyal man" (IV, 2, 92), fact that only encourages Proteus more by motivating his "firmly grasped ego" (Hunt 1982, 9). Thus, she repudiates Proteus' attempts to court her, aware of his falsehood towards his own friend and lover. Proteus restates the fake death of Julia and additionally, claims that Valentine could have died as well (IV, 2, 103-9). However, Silvia reinforces her constancy and true love for Valentine and assures that, if

Valentine is dead, so is her love and herself (IV, 2, 110-1). Furthermore, there is a sense of sorority and comprehension between Silvia and Julia, who, instead of being rivals, like Proteus and Valentine, become allies. Silvia rejects Proteus' token of love by claiming that "[his] false finger has profaned the ring" and "[hers] shall not do his Julia so much wrong" (IV, 4, 133-4). Julia thanks her kind gesture and, apart, praises her virtue as a gentlewoman (IV, 4, 177). Therefore, Silvia and Julia portray the maturity that lacks in their respective lovers and, moreover, embody the ideal constancy of true love that Proteus is violating (Vyvyan 1960, 122).

Salvation: Shakespeare's "Green World"

Among Shakespeare's literary sources, the classical pastoral tradition was highly influential in the development of his works. Authors fantasised with the idealisation of the rural setting, being a great source of inspiration for Renaissance romances. Precisely, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is Shakespeare's first comedy "of rural retreat where courtly lovers overcome their difficulties and adjust their values before returning to civilization" (Slights 1983, 26). This idea is better known within Shakespeare's plays as the "green world". This term was coined by the Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism*, considering *The Two Gentlemen of Verona's* forest as the "embryonic form of the fairy world of other mature plays" (1957, 182). This setting is considered a micro-cosmos within its main dramatic world, in which characters undergo a process of introspection and self-realisation thanks to the detachment from courtly artificiality. In this play, the "green world" is infused with Christian ideals of repentance, forgiveness, and redemption. In accordance with the doctrine of the Original Sin, everyone is born in a sinful condition and we can only be saved by God's grace, implying the acceptance of our sins and the Lord's forgiveness. By the same token, Proteus in attempting to culminate his villainous plan of possessing Silvia, is intercepted by Valentine and Julia, whose intervention will be essential in Proteus' redemption and conversion. Eventually, Shakespeare's "green world" gives Valentine and Proteus the opportunity to prove their gentleman's skills, concluding the play with the restoration of love and friendship codes and a universal reflection on man's inconstancy.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona's "green world", set in a forest nearby the frontier of Mantua, is firstly portrayed as a place in which some of protagonists will "become vulnerable to physical brutality, threatened with robbery, murder [or] rape" (Slights 1983, 26). References to the "green world" are introduced in the fourth act by Valentine, who will cope with the threats of the wilderness. After being banished from the Milanese court, he is detained by three outlaws

who threat him to death in his way to Verona (IV, 1, 3-4). Nevertheless, they recognised he is a “proper man,” who has been exiled as themselves (IV, 1, 10). Empathizing with his condition, the outlaws propose him to be the general of the group (IV, 1, 68), taken by Valentine as an opportunity to start recovering his noble identity. Similarly, Silvia, in his love quest seeking Valentine’s whereabouts, is captured by the same outlaws who are now under his lover’s governance. She has been previously deprived from Valentine’s hand, and still, continues suffering from Proteus’ egotistical love in the forest when he attempts to sexually force her. Indeed, Silvia’s fate is anticipated by Valentine’s allusion to the “nightingale’s complaining notes” (V, 4, 5), a reference to Philomena’s transformation after being raped by Tereus in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Thus, the “green world” requires the characters to suffer several obstacles before leading them to the resolution of the conflict. These obstacles resemble what Christianity explains as the effects of the Original Sin on humankind: cruelty and suffering.

Shakespeare endows the rural realm with a principle of self-revelation, exposing the character’s actual selves. This setting is essential for Proteus’ unmasking since he proves his real villain nature and sets the climax of his fall. The fact that Silvia is kidnapped gives Proteus the opportunity to perform a chivalrous rescue as his last attempt to win her affection. Nevertheless, Silvia explicitly states her refusal to Proteus “plural faith” (V, 4, 52) alluding to his arbitrary love and the betrayal of Valentine’s friendship. “In love / Who respects friend?” questions Proteus after rescuing her (V, 4, 53-4); Silvia, mature and aware of the importance of respecting the Renaissance codes answers that “All men but Proteus” (V, 4, 54). Her reiterative rejections make Proteus abandon courtly manners since they prove to be insufficient for fulfilling his desires:

Nay, if the gentle spirit of moving words
Can no way change you to a milder form,
I'll woo you like a soldier, at arms' end,
And love you 'gainst the nature of love—force ye. (V, 4, 55-8)

Proteus attempt of raping Silvia symbolises the crux of his moral degeneration and sinful condition as well as his false devotion which, at the end, was nothing else but sexual desire (Kiefer 1986, 78) Valentine hears the whole conversation and condemns his friend for his double treachery. Proteus, who has been hitherto considered a perfect gentleman, is now a “treacherous man” (V, 4, 63) of an “ill” condition (V, 4, 61). In these lines Valentine reacquires the natural diction of his speech, which was lost in his artificial attempts to perform courtly manners. Nonetheless, considering that Valentine has been exiled and Proteus has ultimately violated the principles of Renaissance society, they have failed to achieve the noble status of a

gentleman (Slights 1982, 23). Still, the “green world” is about to provide them with the opportunity to prove themselves. Proteus redemption is viable through repentance and the merciful forgiveness of those who he has betrayed.

Henceforward, the “green world” becomes a redemptive and purifying realm for a happy resolution. John Vyvyan approaches the concept of Proteus’ salvation by means of the “Shakespearean salvation principle” which is only accomplished through the constant power of justice, portrayed by Valentine, and love, exemplified by Julia (1960, 133). The doctrine of the Original Sin states that in order to clean your soul, the individual must first confess their sins and repent. Likewise, Proteus announces his remorse and sorrow, and pleads to be pardoned (V, 4, 73-77). Valentine immediately accepts his friend’s apologies completing Proteus’ last line. His prompt decision symbolises his merciful nature “because forgiveness it at once naturally in human and imitative of divinity” (Slights 1983, 27). Then, he utters the famous lines that have condemned this comedy to *damnatio memoriae* within Shakespeare’s works: “All that was mine in Silvia I give thee” (V, 4, 83). Yet, this paper considers that by offering his beloved Silvia to his esteemed friend, Valentine is appropriately following the dictates of Renaissance sworn brotherhood oath. Moreover, as it has been already mentioned, Silvia does respect the codes of society and understands her lover’s decision. Proteus is given the opportunity to act correctly and reject the offer, as expected by Valentine and Silvia. At this point the second major force of Proteus’ redemption is revealed, Julia’s constant love. After hearing these last lines, Julia faints (V, 4, 84) and, once she’s back to herself, reveals her true identity by mistakenly giving a wrong ring to Proteus (V, 4, 90-100). Consequently, Proteus realises Julia’s loyalty to their oath of love and her constant nature as a model of behaviour. Thus, Valentine and Julia represent “the two major forces [that] redeem Proteus” and the ideal of constancy in Renaissance realms of love and friendship (Scott 1965, 286). At this point, Proteus has repented and has been forgiven; therefore, his conversion is imminent according to the doctrine of the Original Sin.

The reestablishment of the main principles in the Renaissance Garden of Eden restores the harmony between the characters’ bonds. In accordance with Frye’s concept of “green world”, once the “resolution is achieved, [they return] to the normal world” (1957, 199), in this case, Renaissance paradise. Proteus has finally understood “constancy” as the essential key for an ideal gentleman behaviour. After being shown the ideals of constancy in Valentine and Julia, he reflects on his inconstancy as a state inherited by mankind due to the Original Sin:

O heaven! were man

But constant, he were perfect. That one error

Fills him with faults; makes him run through all th' sins;

Inconstancy falls off ere it begins. (V, 4, 109-112)

Proteus' use of "man" in general terms suggests that his own fall has been a revelation of man's sins and thus, his words are a universal lesson to mankind or in this case, on how to become the perfect gentleman. Lindenbaum's approach of Proteus' lines reaches a closer analysis to the one proposed in this paper; he considers Proteus' words as an "aphoristic *sententiae* or a general truth . . . [as if] Shakespeare wished us to view Proteus at this stage not as a particular case but as a representative of all mankind" (1975, 241). Proteus conversion is by this moment accomplished and both friends ultimately achieve a gentleman's status. First, Valentine in rescuing Silvia from Proteus' hands and confronting Thurio's claims, wins the Duke's esteem, who recognises him as a gentleman and a worthy companion for his daughter (V, 4, 138-145). In his final speech, Valentine states that the Renaissance codes of chivalrous love and sworn brotherhood will prevail from then on through marriage (V, 4, 170), embodying the ultimate Christian love union and "mutual happiness" (V, 4, 171), enhancing their intimate friendship bond. They have finally understood the key for success –constancy in both Renaissance codes– and ultimately, they have earned the title of this play by achieving their quest: becoming the two gentlemen of Verona and, in religious terms, becoming virtuous men.

Conclusion

All things considered, it seems reasonable to assume that in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Shakespeare exploits the structural framework of the Myth of the Fall as an attempt to approach his audience through an already known biblical passage. Verona's paradise is portrayed as a Renaissance equivalent of the Garden of Eden considering the fact that both contexts share a harmonious nature which is only kept by the respect of their correspondent rules. Shakespeare's mastery on representing sixteenth century Renaissance society is exemplified, as it has been examined in this paper, in Proteus and Valentine. The two young friends, while aiming at becoming the perfect gentlemen, portray the main values endorsing the Italian Renaissance cosmos. In the same way Christians understand constancy in faith as the key for a virtuous life, the Renaissance paradise requires constancy in two main codes —the sworn brotherhood oath and the bases of courtly love— in order to maintain a balanced society. However, their youth is translated into immaturity and inconstancy mirroring Eve's naivety in the Myth of the Fall. They struggle to seek equilibrium between their intimate friendship and their upcoming love affairs, triggering an imminent conflict. Following the events of the Myth of the Fall, Proteus is tempted by Silvia's beauty in Milan, making him fall out from the right gentlemen's path.

Clearly, Shakespeare substituted Adam and Eve's violation of God's main rule with a sixteenth century equivalent, the violation of Proteus oaths of love and friendship. That is to say, Shakespeare adapted the idea of "falling from God's grace" as equative to "falling in love" by stressing on the negative meaning of the word "fall". Thus, by falling in love with Silvia, Proteus is altering the harmonious Renaissance paradise by simultaneously violating the two main Renaissance principles. Eventually, he condemns himself and those surrounding him with the Original Sin that in this case is the collateral damage of his own egoism affecting Valentine, Julia, and Silvia.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona depicts the prototypical happy ending present in Shakespearean comedies, characterised by the union of the characters in a feast and the marriage, in this case, of both parts; yet, as it has been demonstrated in this paper, there is a second factor favouring the positive resolution of the play. If Shakespeare indeed mimicked the structure of the Myth of the Fall, the plot could not have had a tragic ending, since, in accordance with the Scriptures, redemption is always possible through repentance and God's mercy. Therefore, the so-called Shakespearean "green world" enhanced the viability of Proteus salvation thanks to Julia and Valentine's constancy in their respective love and friendship bonds as well as their merciful attitude towards Proteus. Hence, the Renaissance principles are re-established, Paradise is restored through constancy and, once both friends have finished their education, their status as gentlemen is finally earned. It is undeniable that the humanist influence is present when dealing with man's free will, understood in this play as the "Fury of ungoverned youth" (IV, 1, 43), in conflict with an established cosmos endowed with rules and directives. Moreover, the Christian idea of man's twofold nature also represents the contrast of the character's choices on either physical desires, as Proteus, or spiritual virtue, as Julia, Valentine and Silvia, finally portraying the ultimate moral cultivation the Myth of the Fall instilled in the Renaissance period. All in all, Shakespeare creates with this play a Renaissance parable on how to become a perfect gentleman in the same way the Myth of the Fall taught Christians how to follow a virtuous path in life, making *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* a superb representation of Renaissance society, embodying sixteenth century traditions, beliefs, and values.

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Appendix



Figure 1. The relevance of the Myth of the Fall in Renaissance society exemplified by Michelangelo Buonarroti's *Il Peccato Originale e la Cacciata dal Paradiso Terrestre* (1508-1512) in the Sistine Chapel (Vatican Museums), Rome.