PJ Paparelli returns for

**The Two Gentlemen of Verona**

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Dear Friend,

Welcome to the third issue of Asides for STC’s 25th Anniversary Season. This occasion marks PJ Paparelli’s return home to direct one of Shakespeare’s earliest plays, The Two Gentlemen of Verona. PJ was STC’s Associate Director from 1998 to 2004, and he played an important role in some of the theatre’s most memorable productions from that era. I can still fondly recall our time working together on The Oedipus Trilogy with Avery Brooks, which travelled to the Athens Festival in Greece. In this issue, theatre critic Maggie Lawrence talks to PJ about his new take on Shakespeare’s Verona.

In addition to our mainstage production of Shakespeare’s text, STC will showcase a special Bard’s Broadway concert staging of Two Gentlemen of Verona (a rock opera), January 27 to 29 in Sidney Harman Hall. John Guare, one of our greatest living playwrights, adapted the text in 1971 with Mel Shapiro and Galt MacDermot. I have known John for a long time, and it was a thrill to get his reflections on the genesis of the Tony Award-winning musical, the vitality of the early 1970s New York theatre scene from which it emerged and Shakespeare’s influence on him as a young writer.

Also in this issue, STC’s Literary Associate Drew Lichtenberg talks about dogs on stage and the play’s controversial critical history. We have included an update on our Education department and their new District Shakespeare initiative, which brings plays like The Taming of The Shrew into local schools, making classical theatre relevant to young people.

And Asides Online (which can be found at Asides.ShakespeareTheatre.org) will feature additional content, including exclusive updates on the production from members of the cast.

Happy reading, and I hope to see you in the theatre!

Warm Regards,

Michael Kahn
Artistic Director, Shakespeare Theatre Company

The Two Gentlemen of Verona is generously sponsored by Michael R. Klein

Media Partner: CiaoDC!

In 2005, I had the unique experience of directing two productions in Washington back to back: Romeo and Juliet at The Folger and columbinus at Round House Theatre. columbinus was an original play that I had developed by interviewing teenagers across the country as well as Littleton, Colorado, the site of the 1999 Columbine Shootings. At the center of both stories were impulsive decisions made by adolescents in the world where adults were on the parameter of their worlds. Shakespeare’s uncanny observations on human behavior rang equally as true as the material pulled from teenagers in the interview process for columbinus. Teenagers then were very much like teenagers are now.

And now, I have come back to STC and Washington with another play about passionate, impulsive teenagers. The Two Gentlemen of Verona is immensely concerned with the transformative power of love, in good ways and bad ways. It’s also immensely concerned with young people, wealthy young people (they are “gentlemen,” after all), young people who are often ignored by adults and left to their teenage caprices. One thing I learned years ago is that teenagers always assume they hold the reigns in their lives. It comes as a sudden and devastating shock when they discover they are powerless, powerless to control another person’s actions, powerless to make someone love them. The characters make tremendous choices in this play. And there are no adults around to guide them. You may think that sounds like Romeo and Juliet—and it does.

And yet, unlike Romeo and Juliet, this play isn’t a tragedy. It’s unbelievably funny, and it has one of Shakespeare’s most famous comic monologues in it. Launce’s love for his dog, unparalleled in its comedic possibility, is yet another acute study of human behavior. As some of you may know, the relationship between pets and their owners can be mini-dramas played out in real life. Shakespeare, who observes the intensity of the friendship shared by Proteus and Valentine, is doing the same thing here. We see Launce, madly in love with his mangy mutt Crab, immersed in his wandering, whimsical, one-sided conversations. Love makes everyone in this play do crazy things.

Shakespeare’s language expresses all the broiling emotions and driving passions in this play, and so I wanted to live in that world as fully as possible. However, I couldn’t help but see today in this play. Two Gentlemen reminds me of wealthy suburban life, where parents are wrapped up in their worries about the crashing economy and teenagers are left to their own devices. Our challenge is to allow the play to exist in its period while also releasing the energy and the echoes of today’s world.

We have created a hybrid world that is complex, but ultimately timeless. The flavor of the costumes is Elizabethan, as are the class structures. There are servants and masters, rapiers and farthingales. But at the same time, product placement suggests the world that consumes modern teenagers, from McDonald’s to Trojan condoms to Apple. The images that you’ll see in the Lansburgh are fragments of the world we live in: busted up, dangerous, energetic. I want to have the teenagers of today—their recklessness, their abandon, their passions, their fun—echoing through the design and Shakespeare’s words. I am madly in love with this play, and I would love to find a way to celebrate Shakespeare’s incredibly modern and observant feel for the passions and desires of the young. You will be surprised and invigorated.
John Guare burst onto the national theatre scene in 1970 with _The House of Blue Leaves_: a kitchen-sink drama with “lots of songs and talking to the audience.” In 1971, Guare was asked by director Mel Shapiro to help with the text of Shakespeare’s _The Two Gentlemen of Verona_. The project quickly transformed into a full-blown rock musical, with songs from Galt MacDermot, the composer of 1967’s _Hair_. The energetic Guare, whose _House of Blue Leaves_ had its third Broadway run this April, spoke from his home in Manhattan.

**ON SHAKE SPEARE**

I went to London in 1965 and saw a series of Shakespeare productions that were just revelations. He was a fellow playwright. He was a bottomless well. And I love that he always went too far, he always showed you everything...

The main lesson I learned from Shakespeare early on was that he had no stage directions. That seemed to me to be the greatest lesson I could learn from playwriting: you had to pack the line, and the line had to do the work of the set, the costume and the lights, since these plays were meant to be done in daylight with minimal scenery. I had always loathed all the stage directions in O’Neill and Shaw. I loved the plays, but I hated the stage directions. You know, those long, involved ones:

“with a sigh of relief, but a bitter determination to go on, yet a ruefulness of what she’s lost, she says, ‘No’—or says—‘Yes.’”

I love the way that Shakespeare does it. The only lesson—to me, the most important lesson of playwriting—is that the line has to contain everything.

What I love about Shakespeare is that he writes his subtext. The subtext is always visible. He strangely demands clarity of thought. The beauty and density of the language can blind people to its meaning, but as Sir Peter Hall once said to me, you can find a declarative sentence in every speech that tells you what the sense of that particular moment is. And that’s why that John Barton book about understanding Shakespeare (Playing Shakespeare: An Actor’s Guide) is one of the most astonishing books about perceiving Shakespeare. It’s both the clarity and the shameless theatricality of it. I must always remember to write my play as if it is to be done on a bare stage and the line has to carry everything.

**ON THE MAKING OF THE 1971 MUSICAL**

Mel Shapiro was asked to direct _The Two Gentlemen of Verona_ for Shakespeare in the Park. Joe Papp and Bernie Gersten [the leaders of the New York Shakespeare Festival] had run through the whole canon, and it was time to go back and start all over again with the first play, _Two Gentlemen_.

That summer of 1971 had been a summer of great racial unrest. The summer before, they had sent _Macbeth_ up to the streets around the boroughs. And when they got to 125th Street the actors were stoned—rocks were thrown at them. _Two Gentlemen_ was also going to be designed for the flatbed truck, to go around the five boroughs. Mel said, if we bring these sentiments of courtly love up to the streets that are about to burst into flames, we’re going to be machine-gunned down.

Since we had just worked on _The House of Blue Leaves_, Mel asked me if I could take the text of _Two Gentlemen_ and shape it into a 90-minute entity. I didn’t feel any compunction about doing that, really. The play itself was freewheeling enough that it didn’t have the sacred textual holiness of _Lear_ or _Hamlet_. It’s shot through with beautiful poetry, and a damn good, funny little story.
ON GALT

So I started shaving it down. And Galt MacDermot was the resident composer that summer. He was going to write incidental music for all three plays to be done in the Park. So, since Galt was going to be there, we had this idea that people could appreciate the poetry and not be straining to understand what it meant out on the street. We would have a few songs that would act like pre-subtitles. The song, in modern conversational tone, would give the sense of what they were about to hear. You would have the meaning floating in your head, and you could just say, “My God, this poetry is beautiful.”

THE RELATIONSHIPS IN THE PLAY

The things that we had to strengthen were the real friendship between the two guys [Valentine and Proteus], to really establish the depth of their friendship... I knew that we loved the two actors playing Speed and Launce, Jose Perez and Jerry Stiller, and so we wanted them to have a song. And they were outsiders, so I wrote the song “I Want to Be a Hot Lover,” which is a line from Shakespeare, a hot lover like the kids in the play. And “Love’s Revenge,” when Valentine falls in love, that was another phrase from Shakespeare, and that turned into a song. It was about amplifying and strengthening all the emotional connections in the play.

We cast Raul Julia as Proteus, and then decided to have somebody from every neighborhood we were playing. It got to be this multi-ethnic, multi-racial cast. It was a thing of such joy, and the few songs ballooned to about 32 songs. And then the unbelievable happened: it got great reviews, and moved to Broadway where it ran for a couple of years and then had a long tour. So it was just one of those things that happens early in life, where it was written only in joy and cast in joy and performed with joy, and it was a wonderful time.

The Shakespeare Theatre Company will be producing a musical concert of The Two Gentlemen of Verona (a rock opera), running January 27 to 29, 2012, concurrently with the mainstage production of Shakespeare’s text.

Teaching artist Michelle Jackson working with students at J.G. Whittier Education Campus.

Above the door to the classroom reads an inspirational poster: “Every Day Counts.” Through that door come the red sweatshirted teaching artists. They enter with an energy that transforms the room. The students shift slightly, not quite sure about what they are going to see. Today they are getting a special District Shakespeare workshop. Today they will experience classic theatre—many for the first time.

District Shakespeare is the newest initiative coming out of the Shakespeare Theatre Company’s Education Department. Born out of the desire to build a stronger relationship with the students, teachers and administrators within the D.C. Public School system, District Shakespeare ambitiously envisions a future where every DCPS student has the opportunity to see an STC production before they graduate.

The first step, currently under way, is to bring the work into the schools. Pairs of teaching artists provide free workshops to one class in every public middle and high school. With more than 50 schools on the list, the teaching artists have been busy racing across the city.

At the end of the session, teachers are left with follow-up activities to keep the lessons alive in the classroom. Next year will bring an even greater chance for connection as STC hopes to welcome more students into student matinees. Seeing a production provides interested classrooms with the opportunity to connect deeply to classical work.

Giving a student the chance to see a dynamic performance can, as Director of Education Samantha K. Wyer phrased it, “elevate a young person’s life.” Through District Shakespeare, STC continues to make a commitment to enriching the lives of local students and helping them to see that the arts can inspire them to make every moment count.
A Hundred Two Gentlemen
by Laura Henry, STC’s Artistic Fellow

Major productions of The Two Gentlemen of Verona have been scarce in relation to the other plays in the canon. As noted by Carol J. Carlisle and Patty S. Derrick, the play has been produced in London a mere 24 times since Shakespeare’s time and five times ever in New York City. STC has produced it just once before, in 2001. More troublesome, many of Shakespeare’s most famous interpreters have tried to “fix” the play, particularly its problematic ending. Censored and abridged, structurally rearranged and reinterpreted in song, the play has nevertheless proven remarkably durable throughout the ages.

1587–1598 Shakespeare writes the play; no record of its Elizabethan performance exists.

1762 The play’s first recorded performance, at the Drury Lane Theatre in 1762, is also the first adaptation. In Benjamin Victor’s version, directed by David Garrick, the scenes are rewritten and reordered to further lighten the play’s mood. John Philip Kemble later revives Victor’s adaptation in 1808.

1821 Two Gents is adapted into a popular opera, with a libretto by Frederick Reynolds and music by Henry Bishop. In addition to further edits, the collaborators augment the play with a sizeable dash of spectacle. The show includes an elaborate half-hour Carnival pageant, complete with bonfires and the Temple of Apollo. George Bernard Shaw writes in response to the opera:

Everybody who pays to see what is advertised as a performance of Shakespeare’s play … does care more or less about the art of Shakespeare. Why not give them what they ask for, instead of going to great trouble and expense to give them something else?

1841, 1848, 1857 The three most famous (read: only) 19th-century stagings of Shakespeare’s text “unaltered” are mounted by the three most famous actor-managers of their era: William Macready, Charles Kean and Samuel Phelps. They are all commercial failures.

1892 and 1896 In an Elizabethan Stage Society production, William Poel attempts to return to “authentic” Shakespeare. Poel uses only minimal cuts, dresses his actors in Elizabethan garb, and turns them loose on a bare stage. For the next half-century, nearly all productions of Two Gentlemen in London and Stratford feature Elizabethan dress.

1904 Royal Court Theatre. Directed by Harley Granville-Barker.

1926 Apollo Theatre. Directed by Robert Atkins and starring John Gielgud.

1956 Michael Langham’s production at the Old Vic decisively breaks with the Elizabethan trend, setting Two Gentlemen amidst Regency-era Britain in the time of Byron and Shelley. The Romantic sensibility suits the swooning passion and poetic ideals of Shakespeare’s play.

1960 Peter Hall’s Royal Shakespeare Company presents Two Gentlemen in sequence with all of Shakespeare’s comedies.

1970 Robin Phillips’ contemporary interpretation at the Royal Shakespeare Company stars Helen Mirren as Julia and Patrick Stewart as Launce. Set at a decadent Italian resort, the wealthy young lovers trapse around a real swimming pool, rebelling against the mob-boss Duke.

1971 John Guare, Galt MacDermot and Mel Shapiro create the Tony Award-winning adaptation, Two Gentlemen of Verona (a rock opera).

1991 David Thacker’s 1930s-era RSC production sets the tone with a live, big-band orchestra. Popular songs like “Night and Day” and “Blue Moon” are laid in swinging counterpoint to the action.

2001 Douglas C. Wager’s production at STC is inspired by the film The Talented Mr. Ripley. Setting the production in the 1950s, he explores the idea of one young man that covets the life of another and the tension it breeds between Valentine and Proteus.

2009 Director Joe Dowling’s Guthrie Theater production also sets Two Gentlemen in the 1950s—but this time, on the set of television studio. Cameras broadcast the action onto large screens mounted next to advertisements for E-Z Pop and Leave It to Beaver. The entire play took the form of a sitcom being filmed for a live studio audience.

(HAPPY) ENDINGS

The climactic clash of the final scene is notoriously difficult to stage. In Shakespeare’s play, Proteus is about to force himself on Silvia when Valentine arrives to rescue her. Proteus apologizes, and Valentine forgives him—some would say much too quickly. Then to make matters worse, Valentine offers Silvia to Proteus. How have directors throughout the centuries dealt with this difficult climax?

Macready, 1841

When Valentine rushed in to save Silvia, Proteus wheeled around, ready to defend himself. Seeing his opponent was Valentine, Proteus dropped his sword in horror and the actors froze. The moment became an expressive tableau that gave Proteus’ remorse symbolic power.

Phillips, 1970

Valentine kissed Silvia, and then crossed and kissed Proteus as well. Delivered in this way, after the kiss, Valentine’s line, “All that was mine in Silvia I give thee”, took on new meaning: the love Valentine had for Silvia, he also offered to Proteus. Their friendship was mended.

Thacker, 1991

As Proteus begged for forgiveness, Silvia stood behind him, silently imploiring Valentine to forgive. By emphasizing Silvia’s mercy as well as Valentine’s, Valentine’s clemency makes more sense.
Play in Process

Director PJ Paparelli, Michael Gregory (Ensemble) and Nick Dillenburg (Proteus).

Matthew McGee (Ensemble) with Composer Fabian Obispo.

Andrew Veenstra (Valentine) and Natalie Mitchell (Silvia) with Fight Director Paul Dennhardt.

Todd Scofield (Eglamour) and Natalie Mitchell (Silvia).

Nick Dillenburg (Proteus), Music Director Jon Kalbfleisch, Matthew McGee (Ensemble), Brent Harris (Duke of Milan), Gene Gillette (Thurio), Aayush Chandan (Ensemble) and Michael Gregory (Ensemble).

Brent Harris (Duke of Milan), Gene Gillette (Thurio), Matthew McGee (Ensemble), Nick Dillenburg (Proteus) and Aayush Chandan (Ensemble).

Director PJ Paparelli and Stage Manager James Latus.

Miriam Silverman (Julia) and Inga Ballard (Lucetta).

Miriam Silverman (Julia).

To see more photos and renderings, visit Asides.ShakespeareTheatre.org

Andrew Veenstra (Valentine) and Natalie Mitchell (Silvia) with Fight Director Paul Dennhardt.
CAST

INGA BALLARD* LUCETTA
NICK DILLenburg* PROTEUS
DAVIS DUFFIELD* OUTLAW
CHRIS GENEbach* OUTLAW

GENE GILLETTE* THURIO
ADAM GREEN* SPEED
BRENT HARRIS* DUKE OF MILAN
STEPHEN PATRICK MARTIN* ANTONIO

NATALIE MITCHELL* SILVIA
EUAN MORTON* LAUNCE
TODD SCOFIELD* EGlamour

MIRIAM SILVERMAN* JULIA
ANDREW Veenstra* VALENTINE

JACOB PERKINS OUTLAW

AAYUSH CHANDAN, JONATHAN W. COLBY, MICHAEL GREGORY, AARYN KOPP, MATTHEW McGEE, JANEL MILEY, JADE WHEELER ENSEMBLE

ARTISTIC TEAM

PJ Paparelli
Director

Walt Spangler
Scene Designer

Paul Spadone
Costume Designer

Howell Binkley
Lighting Designer

Fabian Obispo
Composer and Sound Designer

Jon Kalbfleisch
Music Director/Vocal Arranger

Paul Dennhardt
Fight Director

William Berloni
Animal Trainer

Michael J. Bobbitt
Choreographer

Ellen O’Brien
Voice and Text Coach

Gus Heagerty
Assistant Director

Dave Bova
Wig Designer

McCorkle Casting, Ltd.
Casting

Daniel Neville-Rebbahn
Resident Casting Director

Drew Lichtenberg
Literary Associate

James Latus*
Production Stage Manager

Elizabeth Clewley*
Assistant Stage Manager

* Member of Actors’ Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers.

Cast subject to change.

Set model for The Two Gentlemen of Verona by Walt Spangler.

Costume renderings for The Two Gentlemen of Verona by Paul Spadone.

Celebrating 25 years of Classical Theatre
Teenage Dream
Maggie Lawrence speaks to Director PJ Paparelli about his new Two Gents.

Maggie Lawrence: Talk about your choice to do The Two Gentlemen of Verona. You had a successful run of Romeo and Juliet geared to a younger audience at the Folger in 2005. Do you see adolescence as the key to understanding some of the foolish contradictions of lovers?

PJ Paparelli: I’m very fortunate that Michael Kahn has allowed me to go after this play. It’s like walking in to direct a new play, unlike Romeo and Juliet, where people already have very specific ideas about how it looks. When Shakespeare wrote Two Gents, he was very young, away from his new wife, he had just moved to London. Two Gents comes out of a young author’s way of seeing. It’s a play where love has a theatrical effect; it’s capable of transforming you into something else. This is a theme in all of Shakespeare’s plays, and it begins here in a very powerful, concentrated form.

Shakespeare also writes about teenagers so well. His young aristocrats are uncannily like contemporary American suburbanites and adolescents, particularly those with wealth—that whole experience of not getting what you want, parents either not around or very controlling and not listening, it just struck me as a very contemporary issue. It’s important in Shakespeare to let the lovers set up the circumstances, watch them try to battle with love and control it, lose to it, and learn a lot about themselves along the way.

ML: Much has been written about the weaknesses of Two Gentlemen. What do you see as its strengths?

PJ: In Two Gents Shakespeare introduces many of his most successful devices—mistaken identity, women disguised as men, comic satire of the upper classes by the lower classes—for the first time. It was the first time audiences were exposed to these amazing ideas that were fleshed out in later plays. With the character of Proteus, Shakespeare presents a young man deeply embedded in a series of relationships he thinks he can control and he ultimately can’t. The play comes very close to tragedy. Shakespeare’s saying things about friendship and love and the self that still remain challenging…Adolescents do insane things, and that’s exactly what Shakespeare was capturing—jealousy, unbridled passion, the body as a minefield—and when these emotions die down, Proteus and Valentine sober up and return to friendship. That’s what’s most important. It’s such a common story. When we’re teenagers, we covet the lives of the people we know best, accepting their faults, and want to experience what they experience. Proteus falls in love with his best friend’s girl! What he does after that makes the story something new. Two Gents oscillates between intense drama and high comedy and it’s a huge strength of the play. Some of the comic scenes are unlike any other. The dog and Launce are unique.

ML: Is Crab comic relief, or do you see him as an exaggerated mirror of how the beloved abuses the lover?

PJ: Crab the dog will be very funny. I think Shakespeare is playing with the idea of masters, and masters and dogs sharing a relationship of love. Launce believes his dog is spiting him—he doesn’t know why, but is hurt because he loves him. At the same time, Launce is learning from his own master. Proteus says he won’t fall in love and then he does.

ML: Talk about your vision for the play.

PJ: The challenge has been to find a balance of periods rather than just sticking to one. We allow class situations—masters and servants are left alone—but it’s still a hybrid between classical and modern adolescent sensibility.

There’s quite a bit of music in the play—when adolescents are in love, an iPod is always playing. We allowed as much of those mediums as possible to come through using modern songs. It’s contemporary next to Elizabethan. It challenges you to use your imagination. The staging has a lot of inconsistency—but if you read the play, we’re indoors and outdoors at the drop of a hat. Shakespeare didn’t care about foolish inconsistencies. He just wanted to give people the story.

ML: How do you see the controversial attempted rape followed by the “all that I have in Silvia” line?

PJ: The stakes are very high—the tension between all of them comes to the surface. Shakespeare loved extreme situations on stage and we’ve embraced them.

ML: How might an older audience’s reaction to the play differ from a young audience’s take on it?

PJ: The Lansburgh is a very formal proscenium stage. Shakespeare created connections with the audience, and we’re playing with that as an adolescent statement—pushing past the proscenium, over the front rows, junk thrown around as if teenagers went through here. At first it’s a bit shocking. The opening is a montage of modern Friday and Saturday nights. When love starts to unfold, we hope the audience will remember what it was like.

I hope that people leave going, “Wow, what a passionate and funny play!” I love this play—Shakespeare’s observations are so uncanny. It reflects what’s happening today, and the young can realize, “This is about me and my life.”

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Maggie Lawrence is a retired English and drama teacher. She has written ten plays and two screenplays, both of which won the Screenplay Writing Competition with the Virginia Film Office. She is the theatre review columnist for the Culpeper Star-Exponent.
The Two Gentlemen of Verona: Shakespeare’s Apprentice Work
by Elizabeth Rivlin

The Two Gentlemen of Verona has the odd distinction of being at once a popular play and a critical ugly duckling, chastised by one of its early editors, the poet Alexander Pope, for containing scenes “composed of the lowest and most trifling conceits.” Another 18th-century writer, John Upton, went further in wishing that Two Gentlemen, along with Love’s Labor’s Lost, “should be sent packing, and seek for their parent elsewhere.”

Upton and Pope have been far from alone in finding serious flaws in this play, believed to be one of the earliest that Shakespeare wrote. The play has become known as an apprentice work, an artifact of a moment when Shakespeare was still learning the craft of playwriting. Two Gentlemen is among a handful of strong candidates for Shakespeare’s first foray into solo playwriting. Yet despite allegations of its immaturity, Two Gentlemen flourishes in theatrical production.

One reason that Two Gentlemen prospers onstage may well be its dogged appeal or more accurately, its dog appeal. The fact that even well-trained pets can be unpredictable creates ample opportunity for spontaneous humor: will Crab scratch himself indecorously or bark at the audience? How will the actor playing Launce react to such improvisations? When Launce announces, “I am the dog. No, the dog is himself, and I am the dog. O, the dog is me, and I am myself” (act 2, scene 3), in a sense he speaks for us in the audience. We are drawn to the comic confusion between animal and human even as we dismiss our enjoyment as inadequate to more appropriately “Shakespearean” emotions. The tension is central to the mixed legacy that Two Gentlemen carries with it in the theatre.

The sincere but unsettled laughter that Crab provokes is symptomatic of a larger critical problem with Two Gentlemen that somehow translates to theatrical success. The play’s main focus is supposed to be love, and yet generations of critics have had trouble swallowing the resolution that Shakespeare devises to the play’s romantic conflicts. The final scene pairs off the lovers through a series of bold, clunky plot machinations. But these apparent deficits can become virtues in performance. The abruptness with which these characters fall in and out of love lends itself to the audience’s sharp scrutiny: how substantial is a love that can be so easily assumed and discarded? For audiences today, Two Gentlemen holds up a clear, often unflattering mirror to conventional narratives of romance, desire, sex and love.

If the play effectively exploits and debunks romantic illusion, it does so largely through the agency of its servant characters. The prominence of servants in Two Gentlemen used to bother some readers, including one critic who sniffed that “Shakespeare gives the maid the best lines.” Although the servants were acknowledged to be funny, they were also perceived as improperly stealing the show from their masters. By the same logic that audiences were supposed to distrust their affection for dogs onstage, they were not supposed to allow the clowning of the servants to distract from the trials and tribulations of the lovers.

There is nothing extraneous about Shakespeare’s use of servant characters, however. Instead, the servants imitate, mock and parody their masters precisely to display their pretensions and weaknesses. In the process, they emerge as characters in their own right, with whom audiences identify strongly through the force of shared laughter. It is revealing that Will Kempe, the most celebrated comic actor of his day, likely did play the part of Launce in early performances. In allowing servants to take central, rather than peripheral, roles and in depicting them as more masterful, more sympathetic, or both than their masters, Two Gentlemen demonstrates strongly that personal identity and dramatic worth cannot be deduced from social position. That simple but elegant idea resonates today, when we readily question what it means to be a gentleman. By the end of the play, we contemplate whether or not the two gentlemen of Verona have lived up to their titles or whether the titles themselves prove empty. We can view Two Gentlemen as an apprentice work in a positive light: a young playwright just embarking on his career tapped into the marginal positions occupied by servants and animals to produce a work of enduring theatrical vibrancy and vitality.

Elizabeth Rivlin is an assistant professor of English at Clemson University and the editor of The Upstart Crow: A Shakespeare Journal. She has published essays in journals and book collections, and her book The Aesthetics of Service in Early Modern England is forthcoming from Northwestern University Press in 2012.
When is a Dog not a Dog?

When it’s a Crab.

As anyone who’s seen Shakespeare in Love can testify, The Two Gentlemen of Verona will always be “that one with the dog.” It’s true. I have told subscribers after speaking events that Two Gents is our next show, only to be met with blank stares. All I have to say is one word, “dog,” and their faces immediately crinkle with pleasure.

Launce and his dog Crab. This is not only the most memorable part of the show but one of the most memorable scenes in all of Shakespeare. It is a scene Beckettian in its minimalist genius and unanimous in its ability to make an audience laugh. A man and his dog, alone onstage. Just what is it about Launce’s monologue with his dog Crab that so delights and teases the imagination?

The answer is simple yet profound, and it comprises the subject of one of my favorite essays on the theatre: “The Dog on the Stage: Theater as Phenomenon,” by the late theatre scholar Bert O. States. According to States, it’s quite clear: we are delighted, theatre scholar Bert O. States. According to States, it’s quite clear: we are delighted, 

many a Launce throughout theatre history has felt their mind race in improvisatory frenzy when Crab has licked their faces or lifted his leg, throwing the already charged atmosphere of a theatrical performance into momentary, exciting disarray. "The theatre," writes States, "has met its match: the dog is so blissfully above, or beneath, the business of playing, and we find ourselves cheering its performance precisely because it isn’t one."

This paradox between acting and being is eternal for actors. The best of them seem to have an unconscious knack for existing onstage without quotations or affect. Marlon Brando was doglike, in the best of ways. But for most of us, attempting to appear relaxed onstage is somewhat like a high school mathlete attempting to calculate pi, another artificial formula that seeks to emulate nature. It is a process, once begun, never to be stopped.

Launce, or rather Shakespeare, was aware of this fact, centuries before it appeared as academic theory. And he thought it was funny. As Launce points out, in a moment of existential confusion, “the dog is himself, and I am the dog.” How right he is. The theatre really is a dog’s world. If only we could be so lucky.

As always, send notes and queries to DLichtenberg@ShakespeareTheatre.org.
want more? check out asides online for photos, updates and full versions of excerpted articles in this issue. asides.shakespearetheatre.org

creative conversations
join the free exchange of ideas! STC’s creative conversations give our audiences the chance to connect deeply with the work on stage. Whether you are interested in historical background, theological perspective, creative points of view or voicing your own experiences, we have a discussion for you.

windows on the two gentlemen of verona
Sunday, January 22 from 5–6 p.m. The Forum in Sidney Harman Hall
Join STC’s Artistic staff and a guest scholar as they provide a “window” into this production. This hour-long pre-show conversation articulates the production process through an insightful, lively discussion.

divining shakespeare
Wednesday, January 25 from 5–6 p.m. Lansburgh Theatre lobby
Explore The Two Gentlemen of Verona’s relevance from a theological perspective. Director of the Institute for Christian Formation at the Virginia Theological Seminary Reverend Roger Ferlo will be joined in conversation by STC’s Audience Enrichment Manager Hannah J. Hessel.

post-performance discussion
Wednesday, January 25 after the performance
Extend the experience by staying immediately following the evening’s production for a post-performance discussion led by STC’s Literary Associate Drew Lichtenberg.

classics in context
Saturday, February 18 from 5–6 p.m. Lansburgh Theatre lobby
Put the show in context with this lively roundtable conversation. The Classics in Context panel gives the audience the opportunity to discuss their thoughts on the production. Led by Director of Education Samantha K. Wyer, the discussion features a team of smart theatergoers who bring expertise from their own fields.