

By Paul Barnes, director

The Two Gentlemen of Verona, like other of Shakespeare's early plays—A Midsummer Night's Dream, Romeo and Juliet, Love's Labour's Lost—revolves around issues of young love. As with his other Veronese love story, Romeo and Juliet, Shakespeare evokes a time in which love is a matter of life and death, in which the world can be viewed in absolutes, in which children defy their parents' wishes to follow the stirrings of their own hearts—a time, in short, of exuberant, cataclysmic, all-or-nothing youthfulness. It is a time not unlike our own, for as surely as the earth continues to revolve around the sun, young people still fall in love, still risk everything for love, and mostly manage to survive intact when love veers off course.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona reminds me of that crucial, singular summer after graduating high school when the world lies promise-filled at our feet—when we chafe against the life we have known and yearn for the life to come. There is a ripeness about the play that seems so absolutely true to that time, so perfect in its zest and heartfelt belief that love doesn't just conquer all—it is all. Though ultimately a joyful story, The Two Gentlemen of Verona is not without its hard lessons—just as that last hope-filled summer can quickly turn bittersweet as we move from adolescence toward adulthood. As the young men of the play's title metamorphose with the immediacy of which only youth is capable, their friendship is suddenly pushed to the brink. Before their love can transform from self-absorption to maturity, their loyalty and honor are profoundly tested. Shakespeare rescues his young heroes from disaster in the nick of time, and, as always, we come away wiser, deeper people for the journey on which he has led us.

Along the way Shakespeare lets us experience love vicariously through a host of indelible characters: parents, friends, servants, outlaws, dogs, and young lovers. Each has his or her own song of love to sing. What Shakespeare kept discovering throughout his lifetime and continued to remind us of in his plays is that there is no more important song for each of us to sing.