

The Two Noble Kinsmen

Introduction To The Play By Shakespeare And Fletcher

Dr. Joanne E. Gates

JSU English

How to Classify? (Not as traditional Romance)

- ▶ But a late Tragi-comedy co-authored by Shakespeare.
- ▶ The theme of a generation gap, usually father redeeming a lost daughter, is touched on in subplot of Jailer and his daughter, but not as prominent.
- ▶ See later slide on this, points as taken from Arden edition.

The Chaucer Source is overt

- ▶ The Prologue names Chaucer.
- ▶ *The Knight's Tale* by Chaucer itself had a source; Chaucer took it from Boccaccio's *Emile*.
- ▶ All subplot characters do not have names: Jailer, Daughter, Wooer, Brother.
- ▶ Exception: Gerrold, the schoolmaster, who names some who are missing.

Consider the interpretive choices

- ▶ Should Palamon and Arcite be played like Tweedledum and Tweedledee: very little difference between the two and much too eager to fight it out.
- ▶ Or is it more satisfying to clearly point out that Palamon is the true "lover," willing to suffer all, yet miraculously rewarded?

Much of the play is symmetrical

5

- ▶ There are echoes in the kneeling queens and the supplication to Theseus to spare Palamon and Arcite.
- ▶ Jailer's daughter plot is effective counterpoint to Chaucer story.
- ▶ The supplication to the god each major character is devoted to:
 - ▶ Arcite / Mars
 - ▶ Palamon / Venus
 - ▶ Emilia / Diana

Arbitrariness of Fate

6

- ▶ Theseus' last speeches indicate his own powers to order a resolution have been over-ruled.
- ▶ Emilia cannot choose; Jailer's Daughter is given a substitute for Palamon almost without her recognizing that he is not Palamon.

Background, Comments

7

- ▶ Source for main plot is of course *The Knight's Tale* from Chaucer
 - ▶ (who himself borrowed it from Italian Source, Boccaccio's *Teseida*. See also Lois Potter in her Arden edition, page 1.)
- ▶ Again, the issue is how what Fletcher and Shakespeare changed, altered, what they added, and to what effect.

Jailer's Daughter

8

- ▶ This sub plot comments upon and counterpoints the main action.
- ▶ Does it underscore the arbitrariness of Fate?
- ▶ It of course prefigures and counterpoints the very different way Emilia rejects the idea of having a choice.
- ▶ How is Jailer's Daughter contrasted/ compared to Ophelia, to others "mad" for love?

Rehearsal of Morris Dance

9

- ▶ Most closely resembles *Midsummer Night's Dream* in the Mechanicals rehearsing of Pyramus and Thisbe.
- ▶ Could be a deliberate allusion to this earlier Shakespeare play.
- ▶ Other plays with conscious play within play scene include not only *Hamlet* but also *Love's Labours' Lost*, *Taming of the Shrew* (as Induction/Sly frame).

My "take" on Bavian and Jailer's Daughter in 3.5:

10

- ▶ The Bavian, or Man a in monkey suit, is told by Gerrold to carry his "tail without offense": a likely phallic joke.
- ▶ One of the women for the dance is absent: It seems to me that they attempt to get the Jailer's daughter to stand in for the missing dancer: how well she substitutes would be an interesting production element.

Emilia and her Past / Theseus and his:

11

- ▶ 1.3.55-9
- ▶ Emilia's reference to her youthful friendship. She contrasts this with Theseus/Pirithous mature friendship.
- ▶ Combined with Emilia's tense reluctance and the arbitrariness of which lovers are paired at end, does this comment on the disappointments in heterosexual love.

What is different from other Romances:

12

- ▶ Source for some of these points: Lois Potter, Intro to the Arden edition, 15.
- ▶ 1. Forgiveness there but not as present.
- ▶ 2. Characters not divided as old and young.
- ▶ 3. No reunions of long-lost children
- ▶ 4. Theseus not a father figure to P&A

How cured is the Jailer's daughter?

13

- ▶ When she stumbles into the Morris dance scene, the schoolmaster needs to get her off stage (or use her as a sub?) so he can be ready for the entrance of Theseus and the court characters.
- ▶ Is there textual evidence that her "mad as a march hare" scene contains aspects of sexual license?

Doctor's tactic

14

- ▶ Assumes that Wooer dressing as Palamon is for her own good.
- ▶ Encourages the sexual act, as a curative: this seems out of place, at least for a Victorian's image of Shakespeare, and likely one reason it was so little produced.

The ending:

15

- ▶ Theseus' end-of-play comment, "Never fortune / Did play a subtler game."
- ▶ How does it suggest a sobering, not so "happy ever after" evaluation of the action?
- ▶ Is the epilogue also more apologetic than, for instance, Prospero's or Puck's?
 - ▶ (Much depends on who speaks the epilogue. See Lois Potter for suggestions. I have seen modern productions assign a separate character to be Prologue / Epilogue, but it could make a different statement if, for instance, the Jailor's Daughter or the dead Arcite spoke the lines.)

Further observations:

16

- ▶ Mood is very different from other romances. Much of it derived from source.
- ▶ Shakespeare and Fletcher compress time (very typical in dramatic adaptations)
- ▶ Bevington on *The Knight's Tale*: Saturn as overseer god is omitted.

In Chaucer

17

- ▶ *The Knight's Tale* has a very elaborate description of the erecting of the arena and procession into it, as well as the narrative of the contest.
- ▶ The fact that the contest is not staged in the play (but reported to Emilia) might be explained by the fact that the play was written for the smaller, indoor space of the Blackfriars. (The Globe has burned when canon set off during a performance of *Henry VIII*.)

From Bevington, his further summary of Chaucer's Source:

18

- ▶ "All is fulfilled as destined. When Palamon falls in the lists, Theseus awards Emelye to Arcite--much to the distress of Venus, who complains to Saturn, only to be told to await the final end. Sure enough, an infernal fury, sent by Pluto at the behest of Saturn, causes Arcite's steed to shy and buck, throwing Arcite head-first to the ground. Dying, Arcite bestows Emelye on his dear cousin. Theseus orders an elaborate funeral for Arcite. After a decorous interval of some years, the Duke decrees an end to mourning so that the marriage of Palamon and Emelye can take place. They live happily ever afterward, with never a word of jealousy or other vexation." (A-57)

Of other sources, Bevington says:

19

- ▶ Aspects of other plays in the "invented" parts of the plot:
- ▶ Jailer's Daughter resembles Ophelia.
- ▶ Doctor's treatment somewhat resonant of Lady Macbeth. (but *The Coxcomb*, a play by Fletcher, and Sidney's Arcadia episode are closer).
- ▶ Competitive games are like Pericles

. . . Bevington says:

20

- ▶ The Schoolmaster is parallel to one in *Love's Labour's Lost*.
- ▶ *A Midsummer Night's Dream* shows commoners interested in performing for the court.
- ▶ [Of course the celebration of the recent marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta as the context for *Dream* and this late / last play makes a fascinating contrast.]
- ▶ Closer analogs to the foolishness of clown, baboon, are in Beaumont's *Masque of the Inner Temple*. Sidney's *Lady of May*.

Beyond Bevington's comments

- ▶ Upon the play picking up echoes of previous works by Shakespeare, we might add:
- ▶ Jailer's daughter's fear of the men being shipwrecked recalls Miranda in *The Tempest*.
- ▶ The Doctor's encouragement to Wooer to cure the Jailer's Daughter would have made the play uncomfortable to Victorian readers. Yet increasingly in the Romances, a doctor intervenes. Cerimon revives Thaisa in *Pericles*; and Cornelius, the physician in *Cymbeline*, has a fantastic power with poisons and deceives the Queen when she orders something she thinks is deadly.