The Two Noble Kinsmen Study Guide

The Two Noble Kinsmen by William Shakespeare

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Contents

Introduction

The conflict between love and friendship dramatized in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is not an issue limited to one period of human history or to one culture. Friendships—particularly those that begin in childhood or adolescence—have always been among the most meaningful relationships in a person's life. But what happens if two friends love the same person? Today such friends would probably stop short of trying to kill each other, but it's likely that anger and resentment would threaten their relationship. When a young man or woman becomes involved in a love affair, he or she will usually have less time to spend with old friends. Thus love may put a strain on friendship or limit its expression. On the other hand, the loved one may be jealous of the lover's old friends. The friendship between Theseus and Pirithous continues even after Theseus marries Hippolyta, and it seems apparent that she is not always confident that she is the most important person in her husband's life. Even when a couple is as rational as they are, doubts may arise about conflicting loyalties. Sometimes a friendship ends tragically, as with Emilia and Flavina (Emilia's childhood friend who died when the girls were eleven). How might this affect the surviving friend's outlook on life and love? Persons who die young are likely to be idealized, and those who survive may have difficulty establishing new friendships, because no one can ever measure up to the romantic images that live in our memories.

Emilia's nostalgic remembrance of Flavina (in I.iii) may indicate an unwillingness to let go of youthful innocence. As a person matures, the uncomplicated delights of childhood are replaced by concerns that burden our lives, or at least make them more problematic. Reluctance to let go of carefree days and take on the responsibilities of adulthood is a natural emotion. Yet movement from one stage of life to another is an inevitable consequence of human existence. Hippolyta seems to understand and accept this. Emilia does not, but it's hard for us to blame her. Maturity brings opportunities and experiences that are denied to children and adolescents. If one is fortunate, it also brings satisfaction or contentment. Some people may question whether these are acceptable substitutes for the uninhibited joy of childhood. But maturity is part of nature's design, and most people, like Hippolyta, accept it. That doesn't mean, however, that we will always face it without the same hesitation demonstrated by Emilia.

It's also hard to accept the idea that we have less control over our lives than we like to think we have. *The Two Noble Kinsmen* portrays a world in which human destiny is manipulated by impersonal or superhuman forces. Arcite seems to be a young man who knows what he wants and pursues it aggressively; he seizes opportunities and makes the most of them. He wins the tournament and gains Emilia, and then, because of some stroke of fate or intervention by the gods, he loses his life. The unpredictability of events and our inability to know what courses our lives will take can be frightening to contemplate. Theseus accepts, with sadness, what ever outcome the gods—or fate or chance—decree, and he urges others to do so, too. Many people think that this is easier said than done. We'd like to believe that if life isn't predictable, at least it isn't arbitrary or unfair. Some readers see the death of Arcite as unjust. It may be that Palamon and Emilia were predestined to end up together. If we're unable to locate a pattern in human

events, or in our own lives, does that mean there isn't one? Or does it perhaps mean that such patterns are hidden from human sight?

The play also seems to suggest that we are at the mercy of love unless we learn to channel our natural desires in ways that promote our personal wellbeing and benefit society. It's possible to look at the jailer's daughter as a pathetic example of what happens when love and sex rule our lives. Her obsession with Palamon leads her to endanger her father's job, run away from home, neglect her health, and even consider whether life is worth living without the man she loves. By contrast, Palamon and Arcite become bitter rivals and try to destroy each other because they are so overcome by Emilia's beauty. Hippolyta gives up her life as a warrior and subdues that part of her personality in order to marry Theseus. However, she appears content with the choices she has made. The lusty desires of the jailer's daughter are tamed and redirected, and she appears headed for marriage with her devoted wooer; but we don't see for ourselves how satisfied *she* is with her new role. By the end of the play, is Emilia content? If she had been given the choice of continuing to resist heterosexual love, would she have taken it rather than marrying one of the cousins? In the world of the play, she has no such choice, for society requires that she marry. Is there a wider range of possibilities for young men and women today than the ones available to the characters in *The Two Noble Kinsmen?*

Plot Summary

Act I

A Prologue precedes the start of the dramatic action. It praises the literary source of *The Two Noble Kinsmen:* Chaucer's "The Knight's Tale," a narrative poem set in legendary Greece. The play itself begins with an elaborate procession accompanying Theseus, duke of Athens, and Hippolyta, the Amazon queen, to their wedding. The ritual is interrupted by the sudden appearance of three queens, dressed in mourning clothes, who fall on their knees and beg Theseus to help them. They report that their husbands were slain in battle by Creon, king of Thebes, and that Creon has refused to allow their bodies to be buried. The queens ask Theseus to delay his marriage to Hippolyta and go to war against Creon at once. As Theseus considers whether to proceed with the wedding or postpone it, the queens appeal to Hippolyta and her younger sister Emilia to intercede on their behalf. Hippolyta urges Theseus to put off the ceremony in deference to avenging the slain kings, and Emilia endorses her sister's petition. Theseus agrees to set out with his army for Thebes as soon as possible. The setting shifts from Athens to Thebes, where Palamon and Arcite, Creon's nephews, are discussing his vicious rulership. They resolve to leave Thebes but change their minds when they learn that Theseus has declared war on the city and its sovereign. In Athens, Hippolyta and Emilia converse with each other about friendship, love, and marriage. The scene shifts back to Thebes, and the triumph of Theseus over Creon. Theseus tells the three queens they are now free to retrieve the bones of their dead husbands and honor them appropriately. A herald tells Theseus that Palamon and Arcite have been captured, and the duke orders that they be treated well. In the final scene of Act I, the three queens perform funeral rites for their husbands' remains.

Act II

In a jail near Theseus's palace in Athens, the jailer talks with the young man who is wooing his daughter. The daughter enters and speaks excitedly about the new prisoners□Palamon and Arcite□ who have been placed in the jail. The cousins, in shackles, appear in a room above and talk together about their imprisonment and their friendship for each other. Emilia walks into a garden below their cell. Palamon sees her and decides immediately that he is in love with her. A moment later, Arcite does the same. Friendship turns into rivalry, as the young men dispute who is more worthy of Emilia and who has the greater claim to her. The jailer interrupts their dispute and takes Arcite away to meet with Theseus. When the jailer returns, he tells Palamon that Arcite has been banished from Athens. However, in some woods outside the city, Arcite vows not to leave the kingdom. Hearing about the sports competitions being held as part of the celebration of the spring festival in Athens, Arcite decides to disguise himself and enter the contest. Somewhere near the prison, the jailer's daughter soliloquizes about her love for Palamon, acknowledging the hopelessness of her passion. Arcite triumphs at the ceremonial games and Theseus, not realizing who he is, praises his

accomplishments. Arcite is given a position as Emilia's attendant. In the closing scene of Act II, which takes place in some woods near the prison, the jailer's daughter searches for Palamon, whom she has released from his jail cell.

Act III

Drawing apart from the May Day celebrations, Arcite retires to a secluded place and happily contemplates his role as Emilia's attendant. Palamon bursts from behind a bush and accuses Arcite of treachery. Arcite says he will bring him some nourishment and tools to cut through his prison irons and then they can fight a duel to determine who will have Emilia. When Arcite returns, the cousins reminisce about their earlier romantic encounters with young women. Meanwhile, the jailer's daughter appears alone in the woods twice. On the first occasion, she relates that she hasn't eaten or slept for two days. The second time, she appears to be on the edge of madness. She stumbles onto a group of countrymen and women who are preparing a traditional morris dance as part of the May festivities, and they persuade her to join them in the dance. Theseus, Pirithous, Hippolyta, Emilia, and Arcite arrive on the scene and are entertained by the performance.

When they have all returned to the city, Arcite and Palamon meet and prepare for their duel. Their swordfight is interrupted by the arrival of Theseus, Hippolyta, Emilia, and Pirithous. Theseus angrily charges them with breaking the law of Athens and orders that they be killed. Palamon reveals his own and Arcite's identities, and explains that Emilia is the object of their dispute. Hippolyta, Emilia, and Pirithous beg Theseus to show mercy toward the young men. The duke asks Emilia to choose one of them for her husband, but she declines to do so. Theseus then orders Palamon and Arcite to go back to Thebes. Each of them must find three knights willing to assist them and then return to Athens for a trial-by-combat. Under the terms established by Theseus, the victorious cousin will wed Emilia and the defeated one together with his three knights will be executed.

Act IV

The jailer, anxious to learn whether he'll be punished because his daughter has released Palamon from prison, is assured by his friends that Theseus has pardoned him. The young man who has been courting the jailer's daughter reports that, in his judgment, she has lost her wits. The jailer's daugh ter appears, and her conduct supports this assessment. The jailer, his brother, and his friends marvel at her deranged mind and treat her compassionately. In the duke's palace, Emilia contemplates pictures of Palamon and Arcite, describing to herself each man's virtues. When Theseus, Hippolyta, and Pirithous intrude upon her solitude, she maintains that she cannot choose between the two kinsmen even though she is overcome by the thought that one of them must lose the tournament and die. Act IV closes with a scene in which a doctor interviews the jailer's daughter and then recommends that the only way to cure her madness is to trick her into believing that the wooer is Palamon.

Act V

Outside Athens, the two cousins and their six knights prepare for the tournament. Arcite and Palamon embrace and bid each other farewell. Arcite and his knights withdraw to an altar dedicated to Mars, the god of war. Arcite prays for victory, and the response to his prayer is a clamor of banging armor and the sounds of battle. Palamon and his knights kneel at an altar dedicated to Venus, the goddess of love. He praises her powers and asks her to be on his side in the contest; music is heard and doves flutter from behind the altar. The final prayer is Emilia's. She appeals to Diana, the goddess who protects virgins, to ensure that the man who loves her best will gain the victory. A rose tree with a single bloom rises from the altar.

In the Athenian prison, the young man who loves the jailer's daughter reports to the doctor that he has almost persuaded her that he is Palamon. The doctor recommends a further step: the wooer should sleep with her. The jailer expresses grave doubts about this, but the doctor insists it's the most effec tive way to cure her insanity. The jailer's daughter, still in a state of madness, joins them. When the doctor and the jailer leave to attend the tournament, the wooer and the jailer's daughter slip away together.

The combat between Palamon and Arcite begins, but Emilia refuses to witness it. Still unable to decide which man she prefers, she sends a servant to find out how the contest is unfolding. For a time, Palamon appears to be winning, but Arcite is ultimately the victor. Theseus brings Arcite to Emilia and places their hands together as a sign of their betrothal. Soon after this, the jailer joins Palamon and his knights as they await their execution. When Palamon inquires about the jailer's daughter, the jailer reports that her health is restored and she will soon be married. Just as Palamon lays his head on the executioner's block, Pirithous bursts in with startling news: Arcite's horse has reared up and fallen backward, crushing Arcite's body beneath him. Mortally injured, Arcite is carried in by attendants, accompanied by Theseus, Hippolyta, and Emilia. Arcite urges Palamon to ' Take Emilia, and with her all the world's joy" (V.iv.90-91). Arcite and Emilia kiss, and then he dies. As Arcite's body is borne away, Theseus marvels at the turn of events and acknowledges that mankind has little choice but to accept the dictates of the gods. He gives instructions for Arcite's funeral rites and for the wedding of Palamon and Emilia that will follow it. The play closes with an epilogue, in which the speaker expresses uncertainty as to how the play will be received by the audience.

Characters

Arcite:

One of the play's title characters, he is the nephew of Creon, king of Thebes, and the cousin of Palamon. Arcite is the victor in the trial-by-combat to determine who will marry Emilia, but he is mortally wounded when his horse rears up and falls backward on him. With his dying breath, he bestows his right to Emilia on Palamon: his kinsmen, dearest friend, and rival. Arcite and Palamon resemble each other in many ways. Born into the same distinguished family, each of them has won many honors in competitions and on the battlefield. They have hunted wild animals fearlessly and pursued women with youthful warmth and enthusiasm. Each of them is determined to have Emilia for himself. Yet despite the many similarities between them, it is possible to find some differences as well.

Arcite seems more conscientious and practical than Palamon. When the two of them are discussing the impact of Creon's corrupt rule in Thebes, Palamon complains that veteran soldiers are being mistreated. Arcite reminds him that the entire community is affected and that there are "decays of many kind" (I.ii.29). In the Athenian prison, when Palamon laments that their future is bleak, he focuses on the loss of further honors. By contrast, Arcite mourns the fact that he will never have a wife and children. He points out to Palamon that at least they will find comfort in each other's company and that making the best of their situation is better than self-pity. When Arcite is released from prison, he disguises himself and enters an athletic contest sponsored by Theseus. He distinguishes himself there and is rewarded by being given a place in Emilia's household.

At the opening of Act III, thinking he is alone in the woods outside Athens, he soliloquizes about his good fortune and expresses some guilt that while he now has the opportunity to be in Emilia's presence every day, Palamon still languishes in jail. His cousin has, however, been freed and, hidden behind a bush, he overhears Arcite. He rushes out at Arcite and calls him a traitor. Arcite repeatedly tries to calm him down, addressing him as "Dear cousin Palamon," "kinsman," and "Sweet Palamon" (III.i.43, 69, 92), but he is unsuccessful. Despite Palamon's continued resentment, Arcite thoughtfully supplies him with food and wine for nourishment, clean shirts and perfumes, files to remove his prison irons, and a sword and a suit of armor so he will be well equipped for their duel. His repeated courtesies are generally met with only grudging thanks from Palamon. When their duel is interrupted by the sounds of hunting horns, signalling the approach of Theseus and his party, Arcite urges that Palamon hide himself. They can take up their swords against each other on another occasion, he counsels; for now they should be discreet. Palamon rejects his cousin's advice, and by the end of their encounter with Theseus the kinsmen are bound to the terms of a contest that will lead to the death of one of them.

Before the trial-by-combat begins, Arcite prays to Mars, the god of war and soldiers. This is a blunt, impersonal prayer, and it reflects Arcite's conviction that wars decide human destiny. He asks the god to guide him in the contest and help him to gain the victory. Whether through the intercession of Mars or because of his own skill, Arcite wins the tournament and Emilia. Other fates intervene, however, and, for no apparent reason except that he seems suddenly terrified by the sound of his own hooves on the pavement, the horse Arcite is riding tries to unseat him. According to Pirithous's description of the event (V.iv.48-84), Arcite's efforts to stay in the saddle and bring the horse under control are superlative. But then the horse stands upright "on his hind hooves" (V.iv.76) and pitches backward, crushing Arcite beneath him. As the fatally injured Arcite bids farewell to Palamon, he says that he "was false, /Yet never treacherous" (V.iv.92-93)□apparently conceding that he did not have the first claim to Emilia but denying that he was ever dishonorable. Arcite asks for his cousin's forgiveness and one kiss from Emilia, and then he dies.

Some modern commentators believe that the love between Arcite and Palamon is more than friendship. Calling attention to the intensity of their relationship and to the erotic language the young men use in the prison episode (II.ii) and in the scene where they arm each other before their duel in the woods (III.vi), these critics assert that there is at least a latent homosexual attraction between the kinsmen. Other commentators, however, find no evidence for this. They see Arcite and Palamon as devoted friends and comrades in arms, young men whose commitment to each other is an example of friendship in its noblest form.

Artesius:

An Athenian soldier, Artesius is one of the attendants in the bridal procession in Li and an observer of the three queens' appeal to Theseus. When Theseus decides to go to war against Thebes, he instructs Artesius to gather the Athenian forces and meet him at the port of Aulis.

Boy:

Wearing a white robe to emphasize his innocence, the Boy is part of Theseus and Hippolyta's wedding procession in I.i. He strews flowers as he sings a song calling on Nature to bless the marriage.

Countrymen:

Rustics from a village outside Athens, they perform a folk dance for the entertainment of Theseus and his court in connection with the festival of spring. In II.iii, four of the countrymen talk excitedly □and lewdly□about preparations for the performance, to be directed by the local schoolmaster. In high spirits, they speak of the honor the dance will reflect on their village and of how they will outshine all the dancers in Athens. In III.v, six countrymen meet in a clearing in the forest, costumed for the dance: one is dressed as

the Lord of May, another as a servingman, a third as the host of an inn, a fourth as a shepherd, and a fifth as a fool or jester. The sixth□the Bavian or Babion□is dressed as a baboon. When it becomes apparent that the countrywoman who was to dance the part of the female fool has failed to show up, the men fear the performance will have to be cancelled. But the jailer's daughter suddenly appears and is drafted into their troupe as a replacement.

In the course of hunting down a stag, Theseus, Hippolyta, Pirithous, Emilia, Arcite, and their attendants enter the clearing. At the schoolmaster's invitation, they interrupt the hunt to witness the morris dance, performed to the accompaniment of a small drum called a tabor and to the sound of the tinkling bells some of the dancers wear on their costumes. In *The Two Noble Kinsmen,* the morris dance serves as a comic contrast to the elaborate rituals and ceremonies that take place in Athens and Thebes.

Countrywomen:

They are women from a village near Athens who take part in the morris dance performed for Theseus and his court in III.v. Five countrywomen show up for the performance as they had promised. Wearing costumes and ribbons, they take the roles traditionally called for in a morris dance: the Lady of May, a chambermaid, the wife of an inn owner, a country wench or shepherdess, and a female baboon. Cecily, the sixth countrywoman, reneges on her promise to join the dance. Her part, that of the female fool, is taken by the jailer's daughter. For more on the performance of the morris dance, see Countrymen.

Doctor:

He is called in to evaluate and heal the deranged mind of the jailer's daughter. In IV.iii, he expresses pity for her condition and says there is nothing he can do himself to cure her obsession with Palamon. He suggests that the man whom she apparently loved before should take on the role of Palamon and make her fall in love with him all over again. He remarks that she is suffering from a delusion, and this must be replaced by another delusion. In V.ii, the he suggests an additional remedy: the wooer should take her to bed. The jailer objects that this is going too far, but the doctor says that preserving her chastity is much less important than curing her madness. When the jailer leaves, the doctor refers to him as a fool and expresses some doubt about whether the girl is still a virgin. It doesn't really matter whether she is or not, he says to the wooer, " 'tis nothing to our purpose" (V.ii.32). In lewd terms, he says that if the jailer's daughter indicates any willingness for a sexual encounter, the wooer should seize the opportunity. At the close of V.ii, the girl proposes to the wooer that they sleep together, and the couple slips away.

Some commentators are repulsed by the doctor's obscene language in the latter scene and appalled by his attitude toward the jailer's daughter. Others have argued that he is

doing no more than fighting fire with fire—diverting her sexual appetite from one man to another and channeling her lust in a direction approved by society.

Emilia:

Like her sister Hippolyta, she belongs to a race of female warriors, yet by nature she is gentle and passive. Some commentators regard her as an ideal figure rather than a real woman. They see her as cold and aloof, unwilling to choose between Palamon and Arcite because she lacks passion or sexual desire. Others treat her as an ambiguous figure, incapable of discerning the differences between the two men who love her and reluctant to move from maidenhood to maturity. It may be that her failure to choose between the cousins is no more than a reflection of dramatic necessity. Her betrothal to Arcite when he wins the tournament, and then to Palamon when Arcite is killed, would seem less justifiable if she had ever expressed a preference for one over the other. In the end, she must take whichever man the fates decree.

At times Emilia's love for Palamon and Arcite appears to be so unsubstantial that it hardly seems to matter which one becomes her husband. Though she has several opportunities to choose between them, she refuses to do so. Sometimes she appears to love the young men equally. For example, in IV.ii, she talks aloud to herself as she gazes at small portraits of them that she holds in her hands. "Good heaven, / What a sweet face has Arcite!" she remarks, "Here love himself sits smiling" (IV.ii.6- 7, 14). Yet only a moment later she exclaims "Palamon, thou art alone / And only beautiful" (IV.ii.37-38). Even during their trial-by-combat in V.iii, she continues to weigh their comparative merits. Apparently, she is not instinctively drawn to either one of them—as she was to her childhood friend Flavina.

Emilia's nostalgic reminiscence of Flavina, a girl who died when she and Emilia were only eleven, is often regarded as central to the issues of love and friendship in the play. With its emphasis on innocence and spontaneity, this speech (I.iii.55-82) evokes a time before questions of judgment and experience intrude on human relationships. Whatever song, whatever flower was the favorite of one girl, it immediately became the favorite of the other as well. If Flavina disapproved of something, then so did Emilia. Such innocent, unpremeditated love, says Emila, is not possible between a man and a woman.

Emilia's prayer to Diana, the goddess who protects virgins, seems to equate chastity with the suppression or inhibition of desire. The images she associates with the goddess—"shadowy, cold, and constant . . . / . . . solitary, white as chaste, and pure / As wind-fanned snow" (V.i.37-40)—suggest a wish to withdraw from the world and remain a virgin. Emilia describes herself in this prayer as dressed in the robes and flowers of a bride, but still a maiden at heart.

She faces a change in her life from which there will be no return. In her soliloquies, she sometimes shows anxiety and resentment of this fact. And, on occasion, she also displays something approaching self-pity. For instance, when Theseus sets the terms of

the contest between Palamon and Arcite□the loser will be executed□Emilia begs him to change his mind. Otherwise, she says, her good name will be stained forever, and she will be "the scorn of women" (III.vi.250). When the cousins and their knights arrive in Athens for the tournament, she laments that her "unspotted youth must now be soiled / With blood of princes" (IV.ii.59-60) and her chastity will become the altar upon which her "unhappy beauty" (IV.ii.64) will be sacrificed. At the end of the play, she seems resigned to her fate, but there is no evidence that she welcomes the new role that society and the fates impose on her.

Executioner:

In V.iv, he is ready to carry out the execution of Palamon and his knights. But when Arcite is killed and Palamon becomes betrothed to Emilia, the executioner's services are no longer required.

Gentleman:

In IV.ii, Theseus sends him to Emilia to tell her that Palamon and Arcite have returned from Thebes.

Gerrold:

See Schoolmaster

Guard:

He keeps watch over Palamon and his knights as they await their execution in V.iv.

Herald:

He appears in I.iv, bringing Palamon and Arcite to Theseus. He tells the duke they are Creon's nephews and that they were wounded defending Thebes against the Athenians.

Hippolyta:

An Amazon queen, she becomes the wife of Theseus, duke of Athens. In Greek mythology, Amazons were a nation of female warriors. Armed conflicts between Greeks and Amazons were frequent, and the legendary Greek hero Theseus married Hippolyta after defeating her in battle.

In *The Two Noble Kinsmen,* Hippolyta's former status as a fearless warrior and her new role as Theseus's wife are emphasized early in the play by the second Theban queen. She points out to Hippolyta that the duke "shrunk thee into / The bound thou wast

o'erflowing" (I.i.83-84), that is, removed her from the ranks of males and placed her in a position appropriate to women. The Theban queen notes that when Theseus subdued Hippolyta in battle, he also captured her affections. Hippolyta speaks frequently of her love for Theseus and gives many indications that she is content with her role as his wife.

Though at I.iii.44-47, she remarks to Emilia that she isn't sure whether Theseus loves her more than he does his friend Pirithous, she doesn't appear to be truly anxious about this. Many commentators on the play view Hippolyta as a representative of mature, conjugal love. They see her as moving gracefully and willingly from one stage of her life to the next. In the opening scene, Hippolyta is the focus of the spectacular bridal procession, but as the play progresses her prominence shrinks, and she assumes a subsidiary role. In I.i, she is a bold and well-spoken advocate for the Theban queens. She frequently speaks on behalf of others□for example, when she pleads with Theseus (at III.vi.l95ff.) to show mercy toward Palamon and Arcite. Both in her response to people seeking her assistance and in conversations with her sister, Hippolyta demonstrates sensitivity and compassion. She also shows a sensible nature and an inclination to do what is expected of her. More than once, she urges Emilia to choose Palamon or Arcite and embrace the idea of married love. However, she fails to persuade her sister to adopt her own perspective on the proper role of women.

Hymen:

Representing the god of marriage, he is at the head of the procession leading Theseus and Hippolyta to their wedding in V.i.

Jailer:

The principal officer of a prison in Athens, he shows kindness and compassion toward the men placed in his custody as well as toward the daughter he evidently cares for very much. He is protective toward her, indulges her mad delusions, and looks out for her best interests. His concern for his daughter is evident from the beginning, when he tells her suitor, in II.i, that he will agree to a marriage only if she consents to it.

Palamon's escape from prison, arranged by the jailer's daughter, distracts the jailer from noticing that her health is deteriorating and leads him to view her erratic behavior as obstinacy rather than insanity. But when the wooer accurately names her condition □"she is mad" (IV.i.46)□and the jailer's Brother advises him to "take it patiently" (IV.i.l 14), he responds as a loving father. He joins the others in helping her act out her delusion that they are aboard a ship, with a fresh wind filling the sails. The jailer engages a physician to minister to his daughter. He goes along with the doctor's advice that her mad ness will be cured if she can be persuaded that her wooer is actually Palamon. But he strongly objects to the idea that her chastity must be violated before the cure can be complete.

Since it will be the jailer's duty to take into custody the men who lose the tournament, he leaves his daughter to the care of the wooer and goes off to witness the contest. When Palamon and his knights are defeated, the jailer escorts them to prison and stays with them while they wait to be executed. In answer to Palamon's inquiry about his daughter's health, the jailer reports that she is well again and will be married before long. He gratefully accepts on her behalf the money that Palamon and his knights give him, and he prays that the gods will look kindly on them.

Jailer's Brother:

In IV.i, he joins the jailer and the jailer's friends as they observe the jailer's daughter's erratic behavior. Showing pity and compassion for her distracted state, he indulges her fantasies and counsels the others to treat her gently.

Jailer's Daughter:

Her father is in charge of the prison where Palamon and Arcite are held after their capture in I.iv. She falls in love with Palamon, even though she realizes that he is far above her in social status. Her love becomes an obsession, and she loses her sanity. By the close of the play, she is reportedly restored to health and about to marry the man with whom she was in love before Palamon entered her life.

The jailer's daughter has a series of soliloquies which trace the course of her infatuation and gradual descent into madness. In II.iv, she recollects that when she first saw Palamon she thought he was a very attractive young man. Before long, she began to pity him, regretting that he was shut up in prison. "Then," she says, "I loved him, / Extremely loved him, infinitely loved him" (II.iv.14-15). She wonders how she can make her feelings clear, for she would gladly be his lover. She resolves to free him from prison, though she admits that by doing this she'll be breaking the law and endangering her father's position. In III.ii, after she has released Palamon, he disappears into the woods and she cannot find him. As she searches through the night, listening to the howling of wolves and other strange noises, she admits that she has lost all fear for herself; her only concern is Palamon's safety. She remarks that she's becoming bewildered and lightheaded: she hasn't slept or eaten for two days. She fears she may be slipping into a frame of mind that will lead to suicide "let not my sense unsettle, / Lest I should drown, or stab, or hang myself" (III.ii.29-30). This expressive prelude to madness is followed by another soliloquy which demonstrates her state of mind. Still wandering in the forest, she imagines she's by the sea. She thinks she spies a ship foundering on the rocks and sinking beneath the water, all its crewmen lost. She wishes she had a seashell, so she might transform it into a ship and voyage to exotic lands. She ends this soliloquy with a plaintive song about searching through the world for her lover.

The character of the jailer's daughter is a blend of pathos and comedy. Some of her delusions develop into exuberant games, in which her family and friends

sympathetically take part. She joins the countrymen and women in their morris dance, ironically taking the part of the female fool. Many of the remarks she makes to others in her mad scenes satirize love and poke fun at people. Her speeches are often interwoven with ribald humor and sexual allusions. A lusty young woman, the jailer's daughter is frank and open in expressing her desires□ both when she has her wits about her and after her has lost them. In her open pursuit of Palamon, she provides a sharp contrast to Emilia's hesitancy about love and sex. But in a way, she has no more freedom of choice than Emilia does. The jailer's daughter is led to accept a substitute lover and husband□the wooer□in place of Palamon.

Readers and audiences have demonstrated a wide range of responses to the jailer's daughter. Some find her charming, a breath of fresh air blowing through the formal, highly structured world of Athens. They admire her uninhibited attitude toward sexuality. Others wonder if perhaps she is infatuated with the idea of love itself, rather than with a particular individual; thus one object of desire serves as well as another. It has been suggest ed that her obsession with Palamon is self-destructive. And some late twentieth-century commentators assert that her open eroticism represents a threat to a well-ordered, male dominated society□a force that must be controlled and modified by marriage.

Jailer's Friends:

Two men who support and console the jailer, they appear in IV.i. They bring the jailer word that Theseus will not punish him for Palamon's escape from prison. They listen compassionately as the wooer and the jailer describe the jailer's daughter's mad delusions. When she joins them and acts irrationally, they follow the jailer's brother's lead and respond sympathetically, playing along with her fantasy that they are all aboard a sailing vessel.

Knights:

These are six Thebans who come to Athens for the tournament in Act V□three of them to fight alongside Palamon and three alongside Arcite. According to the terms dictated by Theseus for the contest, the cousin who is defeated will be executed, as will the knights who have supported him.

In IV.ii, as the Thebans approach Athens, Pirithous and a messenger describe to Theseus and the court their fierce and noble bearing. The messenger represents Arcite's principal fellow-in-arms as "hardy, fearless, proud of dangers," with broad shoulders and long, black hair "shining / Like ravens' wings" (IV.ii.80, 83-84). Pirithous counters with a description of Palamon's principal knight: a similarly fearless-looking man, with blond, curly hair, a beardless face, and a voice like a trumpet. The messenger raves about a third knight, this one with brawny arms whose sinews swell like women in the early months of pregnancy. Several modern commentators have remarked on the erotic nature of the verbal portraits drawn by Pirithous and the messenger.

When Arcite and Palamon pray before the altars of their patron god and goddess, the knights kneel with them. During the battle, Emilia's servant reports tha't at one point Palamon nearly had victory within his grasp, but Arcite's knights came to their leader's rescue. When Arcite wins the contest, his knights attend him as Theseus links Arcite's hands with Emilia's. By contrast, Palamon's knights accompany their leader to prison. They face execution with patient fortitude, and when Palamon mounts the scaffold, they indicate they will cheerfully follow him there. Their sacrifice becomes unnecessary, however, when Arcite dies and Palamon is betrothed to Emilia.

Messengers:

Messengers appear on three occasions during the play. In IV.ii, a messenger brings Theseus the news that Palamon and Arcite, accompanied by six Theban knights, are approaching Athens. He describes several of the knights in great detail. In V.ii, a messenger brings word to the jailer and the doctor that the tournament between Palamon and Arcite is about to begin. In V.iv, a messenger arrives just as Palamon mounts the scaffold and lays his head on the executioner's block. The messenger brings the proceedings to a halt and is immediately followed by Pirithous, who relates the death of Arcite.

Nymphs:

A group of young maidens representing demigoddesses, they form part of Theseus and Hippolyta's elaborate wedding procession in I.i.

Palamon:

One of the title characters, he is the nephew of Creon, king of Thebes, and the cousin of Arcite. Palamon is the first to see Emilia and declare that he's in love. As the one who survives at the close of the play, he is the last to claim her as his bride. The young men's passion for Emilia turns their close attachment to each other into heated rivalry. The relationship between Palamon and Arcite becomes the focus of one of the play's principal issues: the conflict between love and friendship. Some commentators find little basis for distinguishing one cousin from another. Both young men are nobly born, competitive by nature, brave in battle, deeply concerned with personal honor and reputation, and relentless in asserting what they see as their right to Emilia. Much of what can be said about Palamon applies equally to Arcite, but some differences can be found between them.

Palamon sometimes seems more impetuous, less thoughtful than Arcite. On the basis of one glimpse of Emilia, he links his honor and his life to winning her. When Arcite admits that he is in love with her, too, Palamon accuses him of treachery and threatens to use his prison shackles to knock his cousin's brains out. In III.vi, the kinsmen have a chance to avoid being recaptured by the duke, but Palamon scorns to take it, viewing it

as the coward's way out. He boldly tells Theseus who they are and reveals that all the time Arcite has been in Emilia's service, he has been in love with her.

Palamon also has a strain of melancholy or sullenness. Facing the prospect of a lifetime in prison, he fears the cousins will die unknown, their former triumphs forgotten by those who will outlive them. It falls to Arcite to raise his spirits by reminding him that at least they are in this together.

Palamon refuses Arcite's overtures of renewed friendship in III.i and has to be coaxed into eating the food and drinking the wine that his cousin brings him in the relationship between Palamon and Arcite. Others have disputed this, while agreeing that several of the exchanges between the cousins, particularly their conversations in prison (II.ii) and when they help each other put on their armor before their duel in the woods (III.vi), employ homoerotic language. Still others deny there is any sexual component at all. In their judgment, Palamon and Arcite's expressions of devotion and commitment to each other represent no more than the highest form of friendship. III.iii. When Arcite appears with armor and swords in III.vi, Palamon greets him ill-naturedly, and Arcite accuses him of pouting like a schoolboy. Emilia alludes to Palamon's inclination toward melancholy at V.iii.49-55, remarking that his "dark humors" make him more attractive.

Palamon's most famous speech, his prayer to Venus in V.i, is strangely morbid. It's appropriate that he chooses Venus to intercede on his behalf, for he is about to enter a contest that will determine whether he wins the woman he loves. Yet as commentators have pointed out, Palamon's prayer does not show love in a favorable light. His petition is filled with images of decay. Describing the power of love to transform people, Palamon gives as an example an eighty-year-old man□his body cramped and twisted, his eyes cloudy and swollen□who took a bride of fourteen and fathered a son. Increasingly grotesque as it develops, Palamon's prayer seems to regard love as a means of forcing people into absurd situations and behavior.

There is some suggestion, toward the end of the play, that Palamon is favored over Arcite. Emilia notes, at V.iii.74-76, that she carries Palamon's picture near her heart, while Arcite's is on the right side of her body; but she says this is not intentional □"chance would have it so" (V.iii.75). After Emilia is formally betrothed to Arcite, Theseus says he rather expected Palamon to win the tournament, since he is "as brave a knight as e'er / Did spur a noble steed" (V.iii.115-16). Palamon's noble nature is clearly apparent in V.iv. He faces execution with graceful acceptance of his fate, apologizes to his knights for leading them to this end, and spares a few moments□and his purse□to the matter of the jailer's daughter. And he assures the fatally injured Arcite that he is "Palamon, / One that yet loves thee dying" (V.iv.89-90).

Some commentators have called attention to what they see as suggestions of homosexuality in the relationship between Palamon and Arcite. Others have disputed this, while agreeing that several of the exchanges between the cousins, particularly their conversations in prison (II.ii) and when they help each other put on their armor before their duel in the woods (III.vi), employ homoerotic language. Still others deny there is any sexual component at all. In their judgment, Palamon and Arcite's expressions of

devotion and commitment to each other represent no more than the highest form of friendship.

Pirithous:

An Athenian general, he is Theseus's closest friend. According to Hippolyta (at I.iii.35-47), Pirithous and Theseus have fought side by side in countless battles and faced death together on many occasions. Hippolyta confesses to Emilia that she wonders who Theseus loves more: Pirithous or herself.

Theseus consistently relies on Pirithous for personal services, and at times he stands in for the duke. For example, Pirithous escorts Hippolyta in the wedding procession that opens the play, and at I.i.221-25, Theseus instructs him to stay in Athens and supervise the rest of the marriage festivities until after he returns from Thebes. In II.v, when Arcite distinguishes himself in the athletic contests held as part of the May festival, Theseus tells Pirithous to find a place for Arcite in the royal household. Pirithous installs Arcite in the service of Emilia□unaware of the young man's passion for her. Pirithous also draws out Theseus's fair-mindedness when the duke is inclined toward harshness. In Ill.vi, Theseus orders that Palamon and Arcite be killed because they have violated the Athenian law against private duels. Pirithous kneels to his friend and sovereign, and appeals to him to show mercy.

On two occasions in the play, Pirithous serves as a vivid narrator. In IV.ii.91-116, he describes, with what some have considered unusual warmth of detail, one of the Theban knights who will fight on Palamon's side in the tournament. And in V.iv.48- 84, Pirithous paints a stunning verbal picture of the catastrophe that leaves Arcite fatally injured.

Queens:

Three royal widows, they look to Theseus to avenge the wrongs done to them and their dead husbands. In I.i, they intrude on the wedding procession and recite their sad tale. Their husbands revolted against Creon's rule in Thebes and were killed. Creon would not permit their bodies to be cremated and buried according to religious customs, and thus their corpses lie rotting on the battlefield where they fell. The women implore Theseus to punish Creon for this violation of sanctity. When he says he will do so, but not until after his marriage to Hippolyta, they tell him he should not put his personal happiness above the duty he owes them and their dead husbands. They successfully appeal to Hippolyta and Emilia to intercede for them, and Theseus agrees to delay the wedding. After Theseus and the Athenian forces have at tacked and defeated Creon, the queens recover their husbands' bodies and, in I.v, bury them with appropriate honor and solemnity.

Schoolmaster:

A pedantic man who delights in showing off his learning, he serves as the choreographer, stage manager, and master of ceremonies for the morris dance in III.v. Unaware that he is a figure of fun, he laces his instructions to the dancers with Latin phrases and uses made-up or pretentious words to impress the countrymen and women with his intellectual accomplishments. The failure of one of the dancers to show up for the performance devastates him, though he reacts to the prospect of having to cancel the dance with his usual, high-flown diction: "Our business is become a nullity, / Yea, a woeful and a piteous nullity" (III.v.54-55). The jailer's daughter saves the day by suddenly appearing in their midst. Everyone urges her to take the place of the absent countrywoman. Before she agrees, she playfully skewers the schoolmaster's pompousness, calling him a fool, a mender of broken utensils, and a conjurer.

When Theseus, his royal household, and his courtiers enter the clearing in the forest where the villagers have gathered, the schoolmaster invites them to stay and watch the dance. He prefaces the performance with a long-winded introduction (V.iii. 102-34), full of self-conscious wordplay, in which he describes various characters in the dance. He closes the performance with an epilogue in which he promises they will repeat the dance at next year's spring festival. As Theseus and his party return to the hunt, the schoolmaster sends them off with ceremonious wishes for success and bestows generous praises□partly in Latin□on the performers.

At III.v.22, one of the villagers addresses the schoolmaster as Gerrold.

Servant:

During the combat between Palamon and Arcite in V.iii, he tells Emilia about the progress of the contest. Initially he reports that Palamon and his knights are winning, then he brings her word that Arcite is the victor.

Taborer:

A drummer who accompanies the morris dancers, he appears in III.v, when the countrymen and women entertain Theseus and his courtiers.

Theseus:

One of the greatest of the legendary Greek heroes, he was celebrated as an incomparable warrior. His numerous exploits included the destruction of the Minotaur in the labyrinth on the island of Crete. The mythology that developed around the figure of Theseus included his friendship with Pirithous and his marriage to Hippolyta, the Amazon queen.

In *The Two Noble Kinsmen,* Theseus represents justice and a well-ordered community. He defends virtue and avenges violations of the rules of a civil society. A serious-minded man, he faithfully adheres to the standard of behavior imposed on him by others and accepts□with some degree of sadness□ the notion that the fates are unpredictable and sometimes unjust. He embodies many of the principles of the ideal knight of medieval chivalry, yet on occasion he finds himself torn between conflicting demands of love and duty.

His sensitivity is evident in the first scene of the play, when the Theban queens disrupt the celebration of his marriage to Hippolyta. He recalls the beauty of the first queen on her own wedding day, when she was as young and beautiful as Hippolyta is now. The ravages of time and grief have transformed the queen, and Theseus is stricken by this recognition. When the Theban queens beg him to delay his marriage until after he has attacked Thebes and made Creon pay for his abusive treatment of their husbands' corpses, Theseus hesitates. The conflict he feels between love and duty is resolved when his bride, her sister Emilia, and his friend Pirithous add their voices to the queens', urging him to place his responsibility to order and justice above his personal desires.

Theseus's love for Hippolyta seems beyond question. Yet she herself wonders if his devotion to Pirithous is stronger than his commitment to her. The two men have been inseparable comrades for many years, and perhaps the bond between them is stronger than that between husband and wife. Theseus's struggle between love and friendship, however, is less evident than Palamon and Arcite's. Sometimes, as when he decrees that Palamon and Arcite must die because they have violated the prohibition against private duels (III.vi.136), Theseus demonstrates a harsh side of his nature. On these occasions, his wife and his best friend join together to persuade him to take a more merciful course. Perhaps Theseus's most prominent characteristic is his acceptance of the role of the gods in human destiny. He attributes to them (V.iii. 107-8) the outcome of Palamon and Arcite's trial-by-combat. And at the close of the play, he acknowledges that there is little that mankind can do but submit to the ungovernable turns of fate. It is useless for us to question reality, he concludes, so let us instead be grateful for it.

Valerius:

A Theban, he brings word to Palamon and Arcite in I.ii that Creon demands to see them. Valerius warns-the two young men that the king is enraged because Theseus has declared war on Thebes.

Waiting-woman:

One of Emilia's attendants, she appears with her mistress in II.ii. They walk in the garden near Palamon and Arcite's prison cell, and the waiting woman respectfully answers Emilia's teasing re marks about love. Toward the end of their conversation, Emilia turns the waiting-woman's innocent remarks into material for mildly bawdy jokes.

Wooer:

Known only by this designation, he is in love with the jailer's daughter. He remains faithful to her despite her obsession with Palamon and patiently devotes himself to curing her madness. His first appearance is in II.i, when he and her father discuss the possibility of a wedding. The jailer says that he's willing to settle all that he has on his daughter if she has given her consent to the marriage. The wooer assures her father that she has agreed to be his bride. However, the jailer's daughter becomes infatuated with Palamon. In IV.i, the wooer reports to the jailer that he believes she has gone mad. He relates that he observed her by a lake, her hair unbound, singing to herself, and sighing "Palamon, fair Palamon" (IV.i.81). When he approached her, he says, she plunged into the water, and he had to rescue her. At this point in the wooer's narrative, the jailer's daughter enters, and her madness is apparent to everyone.

The doctor called in by the jailer recommends that the wooer present himself to the jailer's daughter as Palamon and court her again, this time under the guise of the man with whom she's obsessed. The wooer follows the doctor's advice and reports, in IV.ii, that she is half persuaded that he is Palamon. The doctor tells the wooer to sleep with the young woman if she asks him to. "Please her appetite," he says (IV.ii.36), and the cure will be complete. The wooer regards this as sound advice and, at the end of the scene, when she proposes that they go off to bed, he readily agrees. When she asks him if he will be gentle with her, he assures her that he will. In the final scene of the play, the jailer reports to Palamon that his daughter is restored to health and will "be married shortly" (V.iv.28).

Historical Context

For more than three centuries, critics and commentators debated whether *The Two Noble Kinsmen* was the work of an individual author or the result of a collaboration between two or more dramatists. Most scholars now believe that the play was written by William Shakespeare and John Fletcher. It is impossible to determine precisely which scenes were written by which playwright, but several late twentieth- century scholars attribute to Shakespeare all of Act I as well as II.i, III.i-ii, IV.iii, V.i, and V.iiiiv. The remaining scenes□II.ii-vi, III.iii-vi, IV.i ii, and V.ii□are attributed to Fletcher. Thus Shakespeare is credited with the basic design; with the introduction of all the central characters; several scenes in the middle of the play; and all of Act V except the scene in which the jailer's daughter makes her final appearance.

Further Study

Bawcutt, N. W. Introduction to *The Two Noble Kinsmen,* by William Shakespeare and John Fletcher, 7-46. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977.

Bawcutt provides a lengthy discussion of the ways in which *The Two Noble Kinsmen* shows that human lives are manipulated by impersonal or superhuman powers. In Bawcutt's judgment, the play demonstrates that although "we may not understand the ultimate order that governs life," we should not question or condemn that order. He points to Thesus as the character most committed to playing out the role life has assigned him.

Berggren, Paula S. " 'For What We Lack, We Laugh': Incompletion and *The Two Noble Kinsmen." Modern Language Studies* XIV, no. 4 (Fall 1984): 3-17.

Berggren believes that the play demonstrates the difficulty of moving gracefully and naturally from innocence to experience. An important part of her discussion of interrupted or disconnected action in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* centers on Arcite's death, which she views as undeserved and lacking justice.

Brownlow, F. W. *"The Two Noble Kinsmen."* In *Two Shakespearean Sequences: "Henry VI" to "Richard II" and "Pericles" to "Timon of Athens,"* 202-15. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977.

Brownlow regards the play as a dramatization of the conflict between lust and violence on the one hand, and reason and order on the other. He sees Theseus as the spokesman for "a state of law, justice and reason," and the jailer's daughter as the representative of the maxim that sex brings an end to innocence.

Charney, Maurice. *"The Two Noble Kinsmen."* In *All of Shakespeare,* 361-69. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

Charney focuses on the sharp contrasts between different kinds of love in the play: the jailer's daughter's frank and open passion, Palamon and Arcite as friends as well as rivals, and Emilia's indifference to the issue of which man will be her husband. In this context, Charney explores the theme of adult love as destructive of childhood innocence. Charney's book is writ ten for the student audience.

Edwards, Philip. "On the Design of *The Two Noble Kinsmen. "Review of English Literature* 5, no. 4 (October 1964): 89-105.

Edwards views the play as a bleak treatment of the progression from innocent love to mature passion□a sequence in which people have less control over their lives than they believe, for we all must do "what chance and circumstance and our own sexuality" impel us to do. Edwards also maintains that the characters in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* show no real individuality, growth, or development.

Richmond, Hugh. "Performance as Criticism: *The Two Noble Kinsmen."* In *Shakespeare, Fletcher, and "The Two Noble Kinsmen,"* edited by Charles H. Frey, 163-85. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989.

Richmond offers an in-depth analysis of twentieth century productions of the play, pointing out that the majority of these productions emphasized elements of music, dance and ritual, and that many of them treated the play as a kind of sequel to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* especially with regard to ritual elements and the conflict between love and friendship. He also notes that modern audiences have generally shown strong, positive responses to the jailer's daughter, who is "more humorous, more dynamic, and more significant" in performance "than can easily be perceived on the printed page."

Roberts, Jeanne Addison. "Crises of Male Self-Definition in *The Two Noble Kinsmen."* In *Shakespeare, Fletcher, and "The Two Noble Kinsmen,"* edited by Charles H. Frey, 133-44. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989.

Roberts explores the ways in which female characters in the play challenge conventional notions of patriarchal societies and male dominance. She calls attention to Hippolyta's and Emilia's status as Amazons, that is, female warriors who are independent of men and compete with them as equals. By the end of the play, Roberts observes, two threats to patriarchal order□ Emilia's steadfast commitment to virginity and the jailer's daughter's unbridled eroticism□have been subdued by matrimony.

Waith, Eugene M. "Shakespeare and the Ceremonies of Romance." In *Shakespeare's Craft: Eight Lectures,* edited by Philip H. Highfill, Jr., 113-37. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982.

Waith proposes that *The Two Noble Kinsmen* should be read in the context of spectacle and theatrical pageantry, extremely popular modes of drama when the play was written. He calls attention to the relation between the stylized formality of the play and its thematic concern with chivalry and honor.

□□□□. Introduction to *The Two Noble Kinsmen,* by William Shakespeare and John Fletcher, 1-66. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

In the interpretive section of his introduction to the play, Waith focuses on the conflict between love and friendship. He also provides an extended description of the ideals of chivalry that are part of the play's literary background: bravery, duty, nobility and generosity of spirit, protection of the weak and powerless, compassion, loyalty to one's friends, and□in terms of courtly romance□love at first sight. In other sections of his introduction, Waith reviews the issues of authorship, sources, and structure as well as the play's stage history from 1613 to 1986.

Weller, Barry. *"The Two Noble Kinsmen,* the Friendship Tradition, and the Flight from Eros." In *Shakespeare, Fletcher, and "The Two Noble Kinsmen,"* edited by Charles H. Frey, 93-108. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989.

Weller maintains that the play centers on the conflict between marriage and friendship. In his view, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* dramatizes the idea that intense friendship□that is, when one's friend is virtually an "other self□is a threat to society and its continuance.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Shakespeare for Students (SfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Shakespeare for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

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Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

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