***Two Gentlemen of Verona***

The most memorable question I was ever asked in a Shakespeare class was about this play: “Is it just me, or is this a bad play?”

It is Shakespeare’s first attempt at a romantic comedy. It already includes a heroine who disguises herself as a man, fickle men and faithful women, rivalry between friends for the same woman, and a wonderfully funny servant; Shakespeare did all this better in his later romantic comedies (except maybe the servant, who is superlative), but you can only appreciate that fact if you’ve read this first try.

It is clearly very much a classical comedy (i.e., farce), containing song, dance, disguises, and mocking or parodic characters; its stock characters (comic stereotypes) include the cowardly braggart, the rich-but-stupid rival, servants cleverer than those they serve, a fool, and an outwitted overprotective father.

Yet it is like the narrative romances in other stereotypical characters: our hero; the ever-faithful, loving heroines (who are also courageous, rude, and spunky – Shakespeare’s innovative characteristics for heroines); thieves with hearts of gold; a go-between; and, to some extent, Proteus himself.

To decide whether it is satire, farce, or some newer kind of comedy (situational/sentimental/romantic), consider the attitudes that the play seems to have toward romance materials.