Passionate Convictions and Self Esteem in The Two Gentlemen of Verona*

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Man reveals and conceals his inner being by the manner in which he conducts himself in his relations with others. He pretends, hides, bares and clears his thoughts and obsessions in his renditions and associations. However, the manner, intentions or connotations in his language be it verbal or physical, together with the style of his expressions reflects his passion, concern in his social status and self-importance.

A tint of man's attributes, oddity, logic, beliefs and morality judgment can be discerned in his exchange and expression of thoughts. He presents his ideas and beliefs in ways which may be humbling, firing, lubricating or convincing. His tone or even his terms of concern or dread, line of reasoning and argument distinguish his human exclusivity. His mode and means characterize his priorities and idiosyncratic qualities.

His rationale and intentions be expressed or hidden are the end results of his inner and outer being. This being is molded by his upbringing, emotions, values, strengths and weaknesses of his mind or heart. His convictions compose his intelligence and sensitivities. This peculiarity is further uncovered by his regard and level of discourse with people he relates in various depths, ages and social positions.

His concealed passions initiate delight or released in a raging outburst in proving a line of reasoning or a personal principle. He discusses natural realities of life or moralize an issue to stand up for personal beliefs. From this manner of communication, he intensely desires to accomplish in maneuvering people toward his corner of contention.

A partial shade of his personality can be gleaned by his debates and reflections on situations he is faced to challenge and clear. The emergence of emotional expressions, involvement or control underlies the inner portion of his quality. His manner of exoneration of non-deliberated or willful deeds summarizes his potency which propels his very existence and continuation. The choice of communication mode by which he delivers his thoughts can be shrouded by a deeper intention or it can be bluntly released.

The suppleness of his thoughts may show his integrity and decency. The end effect of his manner may stimulate, provoke, mock or irritate, revealing a tangible understanding piece of his personality.

His hidden enmity and animosity may be immensely dyed in tints of virtue but they shall never remain veiled. They will in time bare themselves for which he must unbound his selfishness and face his fears. Such is man in his relationship with himself, his task defining role with society. Man is seen as someone who prompts to persuade or subjects himself to be persuaded. His resolution to pursue his choices is resolved by the thoughts in his mind or by the passion in his heart makes.

Valentine, Proteus and Speed of The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Act 1 Scene 1 portray three differing personalities. Valentine is decided to follow his father's order to pursue formal studies. Proteus is on passionate love while Speed is on maneuvering people for his own personal benefits. There is seriousness, debate, comparisons, mockery, and teasing in their conversations which reveal relevant traits and interesting qualities in human conversations. Each character is obstinately different to reason and to sensibilities. They conceal their search for appreciation in their capacities and acknowledgement in their importance. For without both, they become self-shielding,

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unrealistically vain and brittle. The presence or the lack of self esteem is visibly clear in their interactions, choices, reasons and decisions.

Convictions and Passions

Valentine opens Act 1 Scene 1 with "cease to persuade" while Proteus ends the same act and scene with "heart sick with thought". The conversation is set with both expressing "farewell". The opening and closing lines project the opportunities they have chosen and decisions they want to accomplish at this point in their lives. The elements of persuasion, positions and intentions play a role in the two contrasting personalities. The irony behind their names Proteus (shape changer) and Valentine's high-minded idealism symbolize what both characters will have to learn as men, as friends, on human love and loyalty.

Valentine appears in his musing judges Proteus's choice as either disagreeable or envious. His reasons surfaces as someone who has rightfully made a choice in life while he seemingly thinks his friend has foolishly fancied to follow his heart's desires. He rationalizes that his decision to see the world and to educationally enrich himself befits his age. It is for him unreasonable to imprudently spend his life in a constrained world which he thinks Proteus has evidently chosen.

His remarks demonstrate his finer regard for himself while at the same time discloses what he lacks. However, he admits in his last line that under similar conditions he might to do the same but that occasion has not arrived yet. This he wraps in his iciness and indifference in his disposition.

Valentine:  "Cease to persuade, my loving Proteus:
Home-keeping youth have ever homely wits.
Were't not affection chains thy tender days
To the sweet glances of thy honour'd love,
I rather would entreat the company
To see the wonders of the world abroad
Than (living duly sluggards'd at home)
Wear out thy youth with shapeless idleness,
But since thou lov'st, love still, and thrive therein,
Even as I would, when to love begin."

(I. 1. 1–10)

Proteus addresses Valentine "sweet". He asks Valentine to remember him if by chance he comes across some fortune. Proteus means for Valentine to share whatever happiness he will find. He further intensifies his concern that if by chance Valentine meets difficulties, Proteus offers his prayers.

Proteus:  Wilt thou be gone? Sweet Valentine, adieu;
Think on thy Proteus, when thou (haply) seest
Some rare noteworthy object in thy travel.
Wish me partaker in thy happiness,
When thou dost meet good hap: and in thy danger
(If ever danger do environ thee)
Commend thy grievance to my holy prayers,
For I will be thy beadsman, Valentine.

Valentine:  And on a love-book pray for my success?
Proteus:  Upon some book I love, I'll pray for thee.

(I. 1. 11–20)
What does Valentine answer in return? He does not attach the slightest interest to fathom nor shed a trace of gratitude to Proteus' prayers for his success. He returns instead a tone of mockery. This uncovers the spring of his sad attachment to a haughty self. This conceited self regard only confirms his air of pretension and the doubts on his own moral fiber. The derision he has momentarily gratifies him in his comparisons. "Valentine is a stock figure from Renaissance literature, the scorner of romance soon to fall madly in love. His conventional desire to travel masks superficiality." (Victor L. Cahn)

To zealously compel his point, he dismisses the nature of the book by which Proteus avows his friendship. He further elucidates Proteus superficiality by the dissimilarity found in Leander's fearlessly swimming the Hellespont to meet his love.

Would Proteus swim the obscure and impenetrable for him? If so, in the given situation Valentine expects Proteus to disregard his present choice. Thus, he puns Proteus by prickly remarking on his not being "shoes in love" but rather to being corrosively "boots in love".

Valentine: That's on some shallow story of deep love,
How young Leander cross'd the Hellespont.

Proteus: That's a deep story, of a deeper love,
For he was more than over shoes in love.

Valentine: 'Tis true: for you are over boots in love,
And yet you never swum the Hellespont.

(I. 1. 21–26)

Valentine discerns that love feigns itself. It is a temporal rousing feeling and can be worrying. He then scornfully summarizes his position that when love that is pursued is not given back, it is simply but a pointless and futile act. While Valentine does not call Proteus a fool, he unsparingly states that Proteus is maneuvered by a fool called love. Valentine at this moment defines that love is not for the "wise", an impression he gives himself.

Valentine: To be in love; where scorn is bought with groans:
Coy looks, with heart-sore sighs: one fading moment's mirth,
With twenty watchful, weary, tedious nights:
If haply won, perhaps a hapless gain:
If lost, why then a grievous labour won:
How ever, but a folly bought with wit,
Or else a wit by folly vanguished.

Proteus: So, by your circumstance, you call me fool.

Valentine: So, by your circumstance, I fear you'll prove

Proteus: 'Tis Love you cavil at, I am not Love.

Valentine: Love is your master, for he masters you;
And he that is so yoked by a fool
Methinks should not be chronicled for wise.

(I. 1. 28–41)

Proteus however contends that Valentine is critical of love and not of him. To disprove Valentine's concept, he declares how writers have regarded love's wisdom and charm. His defense and assertion disclose the offense he felt from Valentine's condemnation. He gives reasons and explanations to justify his openness and to be accepted for his worth. He thinks highly of Valentine
and the least thing that he would have wanted was to be rebuked. His desire for approval is unquestionably stated in his declarations. “Family, peer, and romantic relationships are typical situations in which one is accepted or rejected in a way that affects self-esteem”. (Christopher J. Mruk) This unpleasant temper and annoyance are released in his conversation with Speed.

Valentine controverts him that man’s youth is corrupted by this senselessness. He deems that the path toward a better future is blighted by this fixative passion. He therefore does not accept nor does he understand the path of this choice. When he recognizes his advice falling on deaf ears, he pronounces that Proteus choice will ultimately lead to his future's corrosion. He sees the outrageous loss of common sense and reason to absurdity.

Valentine: And writers say: as the most forward bud
   Is eaten by the canker ere it blow,
   Even so by Love the young and tender wit
   Is turn’d to folly, blasting in the bud,
   Losing his verdure, even in the prime,
   And all the fair effects of future hopes.
   But wherefore waste I time to counsel thee
   Thou art a votary to fond desire?

(I. 1. 49–51)

The core of Valentine's derision is the differences in the path he and his friend have chosen. His ultimate desire was to convince Proteus to agree and follow him. He cannot in all honesty accept the truth that his friend has fallen in love and has chosen his heart's desires. The element of jealousy is bared. Proteus can choose what he wants to do while he has to follow his father's order. His friend has madly found love while he has not.

To dissuade Proteus from his priority, Valentine turns cynical and contemptuous of his friend's esteem, admiration and rational. He feigns authority and aloofness to conceal what he exceedingly covets. He piercingly rebukes Proteus' reasons and harshly scoffs at his offers. Valentine is shrewd but not keen. He is painfully penetrating and not compelling. He is self-defeating in his arguments and not self-asserting. In the end, he heartrendingly concedes. He does not achieve what his real intentions are and his pretensions do not serve his selfishness.

Insecure persons disguise their fragility or feebleness by emerging to be assertively uncompromising and forcefully insistent. This is acted to prove their gender potency, social rank, intellectual status and maturity. They can appear to be callous and unbending in a façade they perfectly play. The most difficult for them to acknowledge is when they are unable to persuade nor to dissuade, to be accepted nor to accept, to respect nor to be respected and to believe nor to be believed. There is a constant stream of denial in themselves and in their relationships. It is difficult for them to accept the better lives and conditions of other people so they feel abandoned and inferior. They are bound by an endless sense of comparisons to others which breed self-bitterness.

Pretenses and Maneuver

Proteus' soliloquy uncovers his full realization that his friend has a better regard of himself and plan for his future. He believes his position will be seen by others from a lower esteem. He gives up self-importance, the friendship he nurtures, the learning demanded by his youth and the value of time for passionate love has dominated his entire being. He knows his condition yet does not maturely decide to alter it. He does not struggle against his emotion but instead yokes his sensibilities. He obstinately disregards the good intentions of his friend's encouragement. He has fallen deaf to reason
and slave to an obsession. He is hurt by Valentine's statements which prove him wrong. He is apologetic to himself and enervated by his flimsiness.

Proteus: He after honour hunts, I after love;
He leaves his friends, to dignify them more:
I leave myself my friends, and all, for love
Thou, Julia, thou hast metamorphos’d me;
Made me neglect my studies, lose my time,
War with good counsel, set the world at nought;
Made wit with musing weak, heart sick with thought.

(I. 1. 63–69)

The condition of Proteus' mind and heart after Valentine leaves dejectedly affects his banter with Speed. His tetchy and crabby disposition creates in him a deepening a sense of loss in his last conversation. Proteus now stands dauntingly mocking and goading with Speed, whom he calls a “sheep” with offending connotations.

Speed: And I have play'd the sheep in losing him.
Proteus: Indeed a sheep doth very often stray, And if the shepherd be awhile away.
Speed: You conclude that my master is shepherd, then I a sheep?
Proteus: I do.
Speed: Why, then my horns are his horns, whether I wake or sleep.
Proteus: A silly answer, and fitting well a sheep.
Speed: This proves me still a sheep.
Proteus: True; and thy master a shepherd.
Speed: Nay, that I can deny by a circumstance.
Proteus: It shall go hard but I'll prove it by another.
Speed: The shepherd seeks not the sheep, and the sheep not the shepherd: but I seek my master, and my master seeks not me: therefore I am no sheep.
Proteus: The sheep for fodder follow the shepherd, the shepherd for food follows not the sheep: thou for wages follows not thee: therefore thou art a sheep.
Speed: Such another proof will make me cry "baa".

(I. 1. 75–93)

Proteus smears and denigrates Speed's sense of duty, who is distressed by Valentine's departure without any information. Instead of appeasing Speed, Proteus flays him with arguments and descriptions which mercilessly disdain Speed's individuality. Speed defends his logic by explaining the differences of the situation in shepherds seeking their flock and the flock not seeking their shepherd. Proteus' further disputation however construes the sole purpose of Speed's search for his master is built on filling his stomach just like sheep. Speed is seen as one who is easily controlled, directed and without a mind of his own.

Proteus has conceded that Julia has imprisoned the essence of his good judgment and common sense. However, he does not have the audacity to play against this amorous passion. This weakness reveals his incapacity to face and manage an infatuation that has so sickly confined him. To this gain, he hires Speed to deliver a letter to Julia. Proteus feels his willful strength to use him for his own personal advantage.

When Proteus asks if his letter was delivered to Julia and to find what her reaction was,
Speed's reply was quite unclear. This further makes him boorish and harsh. He calls Speed "noddy".

"Certainly it is not the sighs, moans, and inertia of Proteus at the beginning of the play that has led him to falsehood and failure to pursue honor. Proteus's moral instability increases throughout the play. Like the later Romeo with Rosaline, he speedily falls out of love; but unlike Romeo, he commits further folly. There seems to be no limits to the perfidy of Proteus as he violates sworn vows of love, the priorities of friendship, resorts to treachery, and finally attempts rape." (Ranald)

Speed knows Proteus's debility and maneuvers him for his own profit. While Speed presents himself as being forgotten and left behind, he has other perfectly schemed intentions. This is clearly visible on the way he plays and prods with Proteus feelings and anxiety. Speed fruitfully gains his intent to get Proteus's impassioned behavior under his manipulation by his knotty negations and seemingly obtuse counter replies. This effectively made him win over the simple-minded Proteus. This is likewise revealed in the provoking manner in which he comments Proteus chances for Julia's love. He intentionally gives vague answers and teasingly explains his replies which were meant to drive Proteus's eagerness for answers. "Professions of love and concern for another when the communicator actually appears to harbor no such tender emotions and is merely maneuvering for financial or status advantage is likely to be viewed as Machiavellian manipulation. (Gerald Miller)"
The conversations of the three men portray various dashes of personalities with differing hues of intentions and decisions. While there are differences in their motives and aspirations, one can glean the need for them to have a strong self esteem to define the meaning of their own being. Their individual moral choices and social connections are maintained by a strong or weak sense of self worthiness and social acceptance.

Their mode of communication can be directed or arranged for their own intentions and decisions in life. Their persuasions, encouragements and duplicities are meant to either fill the deficiency of their own selves or another person’s self. Their resolve is expressions or pronouncements of a deeper concern for themselves.

Bibliography


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