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The Two Noble Kinsmen (Arkangel Shakespeare - Fully Dramatized) (Arkangel Complete Shakespeare)



Synopsis

[Full-Cast Audio Theater Dramatization. Jonathan Firth plays Palamon, Nigel Cooke is Arcite, and Emilia is played by Helen Schlesinger.] This dark-edged tragicomedy is now widely regarded as having been written by Shakespeare in collaboration with John Fletcher. Composed sometime in 1613-14, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is the final play in Shakespeare's dramatic career. Palamon and Arcite, cousins and bosom friends, are taken prisoner by Duke Theseus of Athens. While in captivity, they spy the beautiful Emilia. Both fall instantly in love with her, and their attachment to each other turns to hate.

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Customer Reviews

The Two Noble Kinsmen was only partially written by Shakespeare. The primary author was John Fletcher, and Shakespeare seems to have been doing a rewrite more than a collaboration. As a result, you get two different styles of narration and development in the same story. The underlying tale follows very closely on the famous Knight's Tale from Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. As a result, you get a three way perspective on Shakespeare that is not available elsewhere -- what his co-author did, what Chaucer did, and how Shakespeare handled similar problems in other plays. Where the Knight's Tale was primarily a story about chivalry, love, and spirituality, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is very much about psychology and human emotions. Like other plays that Shakespeare wrote, this one shows how conflicting emotions create problems when we cannot master ourselves. In this case, the two loving cousins, Palamon and Arcite, fall out over having been

overwhelmed by love for the appearance of Emilia, Duke Theseus's sister. The play explores many ways that their fatal passion for Emilia might be quenched or diverted into more useful paths. The dilemma can only be resolved by the removal of one of them. This places Emilia in an awkward situation where she will wed one, but at the cost of the life of the other. She finds them both attractive, and is deeply uncomfortable with their mutual passion for her. In a parallel subplot, the jailer's daughter similarly falls in love with Palamon, putting her father's life and her own in jeopardy. Overcome with unrequited love, she becomes mad from realizing what she has done. Only by entering into her delusions is she able to reach out to others.

Though not published in the First Folio of 1623, the play, a romance derived from Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale*, has for the past fifty years been included in practically all major editions of the Bard's work. The play was first published in 1634, with a title page stating it was co-written by Mr. John Fletcher and Mr. William Shakespeare. Apparently, Shakespeare wrote Act I, the first scenes of Acts II and III, and most of Act V; Fletcher wrote the rest. The theme of the play is obsessive love. Synopsis: At a wedding celebration for Theseus, Duke of Athens, and his bride Hippolyta, three mourning queens urge Theseus to attack Creon, the King of Thebes, who slew their husbands and won't grant the simple dignity of having their bodies interred. Theseus grants their request and a battle ensues. Fighting for Thebes are two brothers, a.k.a., *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and identical twins at that, named Palamon and Arcite (pronounced *Ar-sight*). Valiant though they are, the brothers are soon captured by Theseus. From their prison window (Act II), they see Emilia, sister of Hippolyta; both are immediately and irrevocably smitten by her beauty. Arcite is released but banished from Athens. Lovesick, he risks death by remaining in Athens. He disguises himself and goes into service for Emilia. Meanwhile, the jailer's daughter has fallen head-over-in-heels in love with Palamon and, risking death to herself and that of her father, helps him escape, only to go mad after losing him (Act III). The two noble kinsmen, driven to obsession over their love of Emilia, fight one another to determine who should have her. Emilia, on the other hand, cannot decide which of the two she truly loves. In fact, she cannot tell them apart.

The Arkangel Shakespeare series being issued by Penguin Audio is now halfway through the plays and the surprise is that it was given preference to the remaining more familiar works. Co-authored by Shakespeare and Fletcher, this play remains an odd man out for several reasons. Based fairly closely on the "Knight's Tale" from Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales," it tells of two cousins, who just after swearing eternal friendship in one of Duke Theseus' prisons immediately fall in love with the

same woman, Emilia, and become bitter rivals for her affections. One of them, Arcite, is exiled but returns in disguise; the other, Palamon, escapes with the help of the Jailer's Daughter, who goes mad for love of him; and...well, see for yourself. Of the play's 23 scenes, 7 and part of an 8th are attributed to Shakespeare, a 9th doubtfully so, and the rest to John Fletcher, who was probably handed over to Shakespeare to learn the ropes as it were. The Shakespeare parts are easy to spot: they are nearly impossible to understand without a heavily annotated copy of the text open before you! Even more so than in his late plays like "Cymbeline" and "Winter's Tale," the syntax is so complex, the thoughts so condensed, that one might (and has) compared his writing with the late Beethoven String Quartets. As one of the scholars quoted in the excellent Signet Classic paperback edition of this play comments, the play is most unShakespearean in that none of the characters change over the course of the play. And I should add the subplot of the Daughter's madness is never integrated into the main plot.

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