

Framing the Sounds of Laughter in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*

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Abstract: *This essay explores the jokes and moments of laughter represented in Shakespeare's early comedy *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* from the perspective of frame theory, informed by rhetoric, semantics, and cognitive mapping and developed by critics such as George Lakoff and Erving Goffman. By explaining some of the methods that Shakespeare employs to prompt laughter in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, I identify the main frames of laughter that articulate humour in this comedy, represented by sounds of laughter. Focusing on the keys used to elicit laughter—title, character types, and character names—I argue that the Shakespearean comedy frames the sounds of laughter as responses to several distinctive units of incongruity in the construction of the self. Laughter, therefore, is elicited from the audience through the medium of various jokes framed in the context of word-play, character names, and the oddness of the rape scene, accessed by means of culturally or universally understood keys. These aspects of the comedy confirm the humanness of laughter through the introduction of the “character” of Crab the dog. In addition, the ambivalent use of the metaphoric spaces of the Italian cities (Verona, Mantua, and Milan) in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* generates laughter; the city-space suggesting civility is framed in contrast to the greenwood world populated by bizarre outlaws evolving in the oblique settings of comedy. Sounds of laughter, therefore, are the result of comedic moments that have an impact on theatre audiences and create a particular aural environment.*

Keywords: *cognitive mapping, comedy, frame theory, laughter, *Two Gentlemen of Verona**