

## David Chandler: “The Challenge of *The Battle of Life*”

### 1) Main literary works referred to (in chronological order)

Code: *comp* = composed, *perf* = performed, *pub* = published

Date	Author	Work
c.1350	Giovanni Boccaccio	“Titus and Gisippus,” <i>The Decameron</i> 10:8.
c.1592 (comp)	William Shakespeare	<i>The Two Gentlemen of Verona</i>
1611 (pub)	unknown	“Amico Fedele” (“The Faithful Friend”) in Flaminio Scala, <i>Il Teatro delle Favole Rappresentative</i>
c.1619 (comp)	John Fletcher	<i>Monsieur Thomas</i>
1750	Carlo Goldoni	<i>Il Vero Amico</i> (“The True Friend”)
1759	Oliver Goldsmith (after Boccaccio)	“The Story of Alcander and Septimius”
1842 (perf)	Gerald Griffin	<i>Gisippus</i>
1846	Charles Dickens	<i>The Battle of Life</i>

### 2) Summary of *The Battle of Life*

In “Part the First” we are introduced to Dr Jeddler and his daughters, Grace the elder, Marion the younger. Alfred is engaged to Marion, but is going away to study on the continent for three years. “Part the Second” is set nearly three years later. We are introduced to Michael Warden, a reckless young squire, who has to leave the country, but who has fallen in love with Marion and aims to steal her from Alfred. We learn that Grace and Alfred had been childhood sweethearts. There is a mysterious, nocturnal interview between Marion and Michael Warden. On the night of Alfred’s return, Marion runs away, as does Warden. “Part the Third” is then set six years later. Grace is now married to Alfred. Michael Warden returns from the continent. We learn that he had not, as all have supposed, eloped with Marion. Marion had simply gone away, possibly with Warden’s assistance, to stay at her Aunt’s house. She returns and explains everything. She had known that Grace loved Alfred, and assumed that, if she was away, Alfred’s love would be “transferred” to Grace, as it has been. There is a final hint that Marion will, at some future date, marry Michael Warden.

3) [Boccaccio used a] strategic historico-social distance (and, consequently, a human and psychological one) to make acceptable a case that he felt anachronistic and abnormal.

(Salvatore Battaglia on Boccaccio, *Decameron* 10:8, 1965)

4) It would but delay the narrative to describe the conflict between love and friendship in the breast of Alcander ... it is enough to say, that the Athenians were at that time arrived at such refinement in morals, that every virtue was carried to excess.

(Oliver Goldsmith, “The Story of Alcander and Septimius”; my italics)

5) And that my love may appear plain and free,  
All that was mine in Silvia I give thee.

(Shakespeare, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* 5:4:82-3)

6) In the fifth Act, unquestionably, the outlines are “loosely sketched in.” [Hazlitt] ... If the text be correct which makes Valentine offer to give up Silvia to Proteus, there cannot be a doubt that the poet intended to have worked out this idea, and to have exhibited a struggle of self-denial, and a sacrifice to friendship, which very young persons are inclined to consider possible. Friendship has its romance as well as love.

(Charles Knight, commentary on above in *Pictorial Edition I*, 1838)

7) This sudden renunciation of his mistress by Valentine is certainly startling, and perhaps unnatural. But ... Such romantic generosity is not uncommon in fiction, and probably not altogether unknown in actual life. One of Goldsmith’s best serious essays, called “ALCANDER AND SEPTIMIUS,” is founded on a similar incident: whether derived from fact, we are not prepared to say.

(“J. O.” (J. Ogden), commentary on above in *The Works of Shakspeare*, 1843)

8) John Leech, illustration for *The Battle of Life*, “Part the Second”

