A CRITICAL STUDY OF ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

A Survey of the Criticism
and
A Study of the Theme of Ambition

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of the requirements for

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by

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INTRODUCTION

> Shakespeare is a figure so colossal that he forms a kind of touchstone to any particular period, and we could almost write a history of English thought from 1623 to 1921 by studying alone the attitude displayed towards him by succeeding poets and critics.[1]

Allardyce Nicoll's magnificent tribute to England's greatest genius and the power of his far-reaching influence provokes in the reader a tantalizing train of thought. Implicit in his statement is the assumption that critics of a certain period will reflect in their writing on Shakespeare the predilections and prejudices of their age. Like many fine-sounding but too sweeping generalizations, this one, although telling the truth, does not tell the whole truth. Shakespearian scholarship has perhaps been too prone to place Shakespearian criticism into rigid categories. It is an oversimplification to classify seventeenth century criticism as insensitive to Shakespeare because of its neo-classic insistence on the unities and decorum, eighteenth century criticism as obsessed with character study, nineteenth century criticism as sentimental and preoccupied with the view of Shakespeare as a moralist, and twentieth century

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[1] Allardyce Nicoll, Dryden as an Adapter of Shakespeare, The Shakespeare Association (London, 1922), p.6.

criticism as primarily interested in Shakespeare as a poet and artist. All these statements are so, but they neglect much significant intellectual work. As a matter of course, a writer or scholar will represent the taste of his times, but the exceptional man will, whether frequently or only occasionally, rise above the predominating influences with which he is surrounded and assert his individuality and independence in at least some of his critical judgments.

John Dryden, regarded as a representative figure of his age, provides an excellent illustration for this argument. As a man of his own times he was a neo-classicist, as a man with intuitive tastes and appreciation, he was an independent thinker. This conflict within the man, and inconsistency within the critic, is evident in his writing on Shakespeare. Theoretically and intellectually it was obvious to him that his predecessor had broken all the rules and therefore was at fault; practically and instinctively he recognized that what Shakespeare had created was in a class by itself. Throughout his critical writings he vacillated between condemning his irregularities and praising his unorthodox success, occasionally doing both in the same essay. Dryden breaks free from the contemporary influence of French neo-classicism when he praises Shakespeare; his fault-finding is in line with the critical thought of his age.

By taking a relatively obscure and neglected play upon which little concentrated work has been done, and

tracing the judgments pronounced upon it by succeeding critics, we shall have an opportunity to see whether the criticism of All's Well That Ends Well, the play under consideration, follows a pattern that coincides with the popular conception of the neat classifications of Shakespearian scholarship, or whether certain critics upset the labelling process by their independent opinions. T.S. Eliot maintains that the justification for interpretive criticism would take the form of a book on the history of Shakespearian criticism, exhibiting that criticism as a history, in one aspect, of the English and the European mind. We all know, he says, that Shakespeare has presented a different appearance to every age. But he qualifies this assertion when he continues, "In the work of any Shakespeare critic of the past we can see, when we have made the deduction of individual genius and individual limitations, the outlines of the consciousness of the critic's age"[2] (underlining my own). I shall attempt to show that although the critical opinions on All's Well of the eighteenth and nineteenth century critics (who, incidentally, devoted little work to this play and none of whom dealt with it in a comprehensive manner) conform in the main to the usual critical approaches of their ages, namely, the analysis of character, and the moralistic interpretation, even they did not all agree, either on the success of the play or the

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[2]T.S. Eliot, Intro. Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition by S.L. Bethell (Duke, 1944), p.VII.

interpretation of the characters. In the case of the twentieth century critics, their approach to the play cannot be so rigidly classified. The twentieth century critics are not all concerned with All's Well in terms of Shakespeare's art and poetry; their approach is, on the contrary, eclectic. It is most significant to find not only so many diverse opinions on and approaches to All's Well in this century, but also so many ideas on the play that are continued studies and further explorations of ideas first mentioned or revealed in the eighteenth or the nineteenth centuries. Although at first glance this may not be apparent, most of the so-called new approaches to the study of Shakespeare are strongly reminiscent of the work of earlier critics.

In the book entitled The Genesis of Shakespeare Idolatry by Robert W. Babcock we find an interesting example of an analogous situation. Babcock's purpose in this book is to prove that the genesis of Shakespeare idolatry lay in the late eighteenth century, and that this period provided the background of the criticism of Coleridge, Hazlitt, and Lamb.[3] Indeed, his thesis is that their eulogies, and those of other critics of the early nineteenth century, were merely culminating echoes of late eighteenth century idolatry of Shakespeare and that point for point they imitated very closely the criticism of the preceding period. By giving an exhaustive review of the

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[3]R.W. Babcock, The Genesis of Shakespeare Idolatry (Chapel Hill, 1931),p.xxvii.

forgotten critics of 1766 to 1799, he shows that they had anticipated almost every possible approach to Shakespeare. They had discussed Shakespeare as a poet and Shakespeare as a moral philosopher, they had written character appreciations, they had used the psychological method and the historical method. Examination of his copiously annotated study proves the futility, in terms of painstaking scholarship, of disposing of problems by means of all-inclusive labels.

In the case of All's Well, we shall see that a number of the most recent studies of the play have rather strong links with earlier criticism. Some of our most outstanding and independent critics discuss this play in terms of the values of some of the eighteenth and nineteenth century critics. The former are not only not in agreement in their respective analyses of this controversial drama, they also differ in their respective approaches to the study of the play. Many of their varying approaches are modifications or expansions or elucidations of ideas first touched upon in the two preceding centuries. In nearly every case the contemporary critic has improved upon and further developed the study of his predecessor. T.S. Eliot says that on the whole we must assume that we are in a better position to understand Shakespeare than any of our predecessors; the assumption implicit in all historical study is that we understand the past better than previous generations did, simply because there is more of it. We assume, and we must assume, a progressive development of

consciousness.[4] Our recent critics who deal with All's Well illustrate this more comprehensive grasp of the problems presented by the play than did former critics; but many of them develop insights that were tentatively, and sometimes even distortedly, first mentioned many years before. They have examined, exploited, and, by means of detailed and scholarly study, carried these earlier insights to more illuminating and provocative conclusions.

All's Well That Ends Well has meant many things to many men. Although modern criticism has not evinced the kind of reawakened interest in it that has been the lot of what is frequently regarded as its companion piece, Measure for Measure, and although detailed studies of this play are few when compared to the great bulk of Shakespearian scholarship, many of our most eminent critics and scholars have not resisted at least passing comment. Most critics agree that All's Well is a failure, but they do not agree either as to the extent and degree of its failure or the reasons for it.

In the first section of this thesis, I propose to present a survey of the criticism written about All's Well, with an attempt to include as many of the diverse judgments pronounced upon it by representative critics as is feasible. It would be both impractical and futile to indicate every mention of the play made by Shakespearian scholars and

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[4] T.S. Eliot, p.viii.

commentators; my aim is to review the opinions of any major critic who wrote about All's Well in whatever form, as well as to summarize the arguments of any commentator who ventured a thesis that diverged from the orthodox view. I shall attempt to show that although most of the work of the eighteenth and nineteenth century critics can be classified, even these critics are not unanimous in their judgments, and a few of them divert from the mainstream. I hope to indicate that the approach to the play of the twentieth century critics is eclectic, and that, in a number of instances, they are indebted to the pioneering work of earlier critics.

I have not found a single book entirely devoted to this play; the longest and most comprehensive studies have been written in this century and are contained in a few books devoted to the three "problem comedies." The majority of critical comments were usually found in books dealing with each of the plays in turn.

There will be little concentration upon work devoted to textual problems or the problem of dating the play, except where conjecture concerning the latter problem forms the basis of a critic's aesthetic theory. For example, to the nineteenth century editors of Shakespeare's plays the most interesting question in connection with All's Well was the acceptance or rejection of the theory that the play was the Love's Labour's Won mentioned by Meres. The majority agreed with Dr. Farmer who, in 1767 in his

Essay on the Learning of Shakespeare, had contended that the Love's Labour's Won of Meres and All's Well were the same. The arguments of Rev. Joseph Hunter in his Disquisition on the Tempest of 1839 that Love's Labour's Won referred to the Tempest won little support from editors like Charles Knight, Samuel Phelps, and J. Payne Collier. In our century, E.K. Chambers believes that Love's Labour's Won has been most plausibly identified with The Taming of the Shrew. Material on All's Well of this sort will not be examined.

In the second section of this thesis, I shall deal with some of the questions about the problem of ambition in Elizabethan England that are posed by this play. I shall attempt to analyze the heroine's controversial and complex character, basing my interpretation on a close reading of the text, and to establish that, despite her charm and sensitivity, there is an element of ambition in her. I shall then offer examples, from a number of his plays, of Shakespeare's attitude toward his other characters who aspire above their positions in the hierarchy, and attempt to offer reasons for the reconciliation of his condemnation of ambition with a sympathetic portrayal of Helena.

CHAPTER I

Survey of Criticism

Dryden made no mention of All's Well That Ends Well; the first significant criticism of the play was made by the venerable Dr. Johnson, who, in commenting on the play as a whole, said that it "has many delightful scenes, though not sufficiently probable, and some happy characters, though not new, nor produced by any deep knowledge of human nature."[5] He offered explanations of and comments on several passages, as well as noting that Parolles had "many of the lineaments of Falstaff" (p.101). His harsh condemnation of Bertram has been so frequently quoted and commented upon by succeeding critics that it shall not be omitted here. He saw Bertram as "a man noble without generosity, and young without truth; who marries Helena as a coward, and leaves her as a profligate; when she is dead by his unkindness, sneaks home to a second marriage, is accused by a woman whom he has wronged, defends himself by falsehood, and is dismissed to happiness" (p.103).

By the second half of the eighteenth century the intensive study of characters was fully developed, and character study had become one of the main objects of

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[5] S. Johnson, Johnson on Shakespeare, ed. W. Raleigh (Oxford, 1940), p.103.

Shakespeare criticism. L.C. Knights offers as an explanation of this preoccupation among writers on Shakespeare their "inability to appreciate the Elizabethan idiom and a consequent inability to discuss Shakespeare's plays as poetry," as well as their ignorance of the Elizabethan stage.[6] By the nineteenth century, Knights continues, there was a marked tendency to abstract a character and treat him as a human being. The Romantic approach to literature with its emphasis on individualistic qualities, and the growth of the popular novel are offered as reasons for the encouragement of the emotional identification of the reader with the hero. We shall see this "real as life" attitude toward the interpretation of character reflected again and again in the work of a number of the following critics.

After presenting a few textual opinions, Coleridge confined his comments on All's Well to a brief character analysis of Helena and Bertram. Although he called Helena Shakespeare's "loveliest character",[7] in attempting to rationalize Bertram's treatment of her he admitted that her character is not very delicate and that it required all Shakespeare's skill to interest us for her. The fundamental principle of Coleridge's Shakespeare criticism was that

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[6]L.C. Knights, "How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?" Explorations (London, 1946), p.13. The scathing condemnation of the "new critics" for character study will be discussed in the appropriate place.

[7]S.T. Coleridge, Lectures and Notes on Shakespeare (London, 1902), p.298.

Shakespeare's work is completely coherent and harmonious, and he held that his touch in the creation of women was inimitable and unerring, but, as Middleton Murry points out, even Coleridge was forced to confess that he found Helena rather indelicate.[8] We like her, Coleridge says, as a result of the attitudes toward her of the other characters-we like her from their praise. He disagreed with the abuse heaped upon Bertram, explaining his behaviour as natural for a young feudal nobleman in his position (p.536).

The neo-classic insistence upon the moral function of art, traceable in English criticism from Sir Philip Sidney to the present day, appears with frightening regularity in the work of the nineteenth century critics.

The German scholar, Schlegel, saw fit to regard All's Well, in common with Much Ado About Nothing, Measure for Measure and The Merchant of Venice, as having a main plot calculated to make a powerful impression on the moral feeling.[9] To him this story was intended "to prove that female truth and resignation will at last overcome the violence of men ..." (p.164). Helena, he says, who by "faithful perseverence and innocence of behaviour" fulfils the conditions, affects us by her patient

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[8] John Middleton Murry, Shakespeare (London, 1936), pp.297-298.

[9] Augustus William Schlegel, Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature, trans. J. Black (London, 1815), II, 162.

suffering (p.163). In his delineation of Bertram Shakespeare has given him the qualities of a soldier with no attempt to mitigate the impression of his unfeeling pride and giddy dissipation (p.164). In contrast to later critics who were to see the Parolles subplot as an integral part of the structure of the play, Schlegel regarded it merely in terms of wonderful comic relief when Helena's situation became too painful. In a brief mention of the style he stated that it was "more conspicuous for sententiousness than imagery" (p.165).

Hazlitt's view of All's Well as "one of the most pleasing of our author's comedies"[10] was to remain an isolated and lonely opinion. He presents a blindly romantic description of Helena, seeing in her neither the womanly will, nor the ruthless ambition of her later critics. To Hazlitt she is sweet and delicate, fond and innocent. He sees the situation simply as that of "the romantic attachment of a beautiful and virtuous girl to one placed above her hopes by the circumstances of birth and fortune." He maintains that though placed in critical circumstances "the most scrupulous nicety of female modesty is not once violated" (p.220). He adds brief but flattering comments on the other important characters, the "persevering gratitude" of the French king, the "indulgent kindness" of

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[10] W. Hazlitt, Characters of Shakespeare's Plays (London, 1912), p.220.

the Countess, the "honesty and uprightness" of Lafeu. Even Bertram's actions and character are described as "youthful petulance." To Hazlitt Parolles was amusing rather than vicious (p.221).

Skottowe, in pointing out Shakespeare's deviations from Boccaccio, admitted that although sometimes his departures were advantageous, in several instances they were "capricious." The proposition of a second marriage for Bertram and his eager acceptance provide nothing but obstacles to his reconciliation with Helena, he finds, and Diana's appearance and complaints cause unnecessary perplexity. Skottowe found the comic scenes not very ingeniously contrived, and Parolles, although entertaining, "a character entirely unconnected with the fable."[11] In commenting on the other characters he says, "Collectively, the characters of this drama cannot be described as forcible." He departs from many of the nineteenth century critics who eulogized Helena without reservation when he states that "her pursuit of a man who hated her is an inherent indelicacy in her conduct, and not all the estimable qualities she possesses can wash her pure of that stain" (p.141). He is a man of his times when he sees a value in the play beyond its dramatic merit and praises it for "its being the repository of much sententious wisdom,

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[11] Augustine Skottowe, The Life of Shakespeare (London, 1824), II, 140.

and numerous passages of remarkable elegance" (p.142).

For unabashed sentimentality it would be difficult to surpass H.N. Hudson's discussion of Helena's character and actions. "...for depth, sweetness, solidity, and efficiency of character, she is not surpassed by any of the poet's heroines...she almost realizes the ideal combination of intelligence, sensibility, and moral energy...."[12] He feels that, having made a conquest over Bertram, she goes to work, more for his own sake than her own, to make a conquest within him (p.264). Attributing to her the motives of the supreme altruist, he maintains that although she "treads the very abysses of humiliation" Shakespeare manages the representation with such skill "that she loses not a whit of our confidence or respect" because she does it all for another, not for herself (p.261). Her behaviour is an example of "the triumph of the inward and essential over the outward and accidental" (p.265). He sees Helena as the reformer of Bertram; she understands his character perfectly, and sees through his faults into a worth which they conceal from others (p.266). Hudson argues that the fact "that she finally opens his pride-bound heart to confess her worth, and thereby <u>makes</u> a road to her wishes, is plainly due to her wisdom and virtue" (p.269). He explains away the differences among critics on

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[12] H.N. Hudson, <u>Lectures on Shakespeare</u> (New York, 1848), I, 262.

Bertram by stating that some measure him by her judgment, some by their own. The Countess, "full of matronlike dignity,...full of childlike gentleness," (p.270) was, in a later essay spoken of as "a charming instance of youth carried on into age."[13] In Lectures on Shakespeare, Hudson speaks of the didactic aspect of the play, praising it for "its comparative freedom from merely poetical attractions," and seeing in this an indication that Shakespeare really "felt the intrinsic beauty of his materials," and realized that it must not be hidden by "the graces and adornings of imagination." Continuing in this vein, he says that Shakespeare makes us feel that "the quiet sagelike wisdom, and the sweet sad spirit of humanity, which pervade it, are far more precious than all the riches which even his transcendent imagination could display" (p.274).

Although in Shakespeare: His Life, Art, and Characters Hudson continues to enshrine Helena, repeating several of his previous judgments and adding new laurels, his comments on the play as a whole seem to be considerably harsher. "...in respect of plot and action the piece is of a somewhat forbidding, not to say repulsive nature" despite its wisdom, poetry, and character. "...even when it wins our approval, it seems to do so rather through our sense of

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[13] H.N. Hudson, Shakespeare: His Life, Art, and Characters, 4th ed. (Boston, 1902), p.392.

right than through our sense of pleasure," and it is now apt to inspire "an apologetic than an enthusiastic tone of mind" (p.374). He devotes more time to a discussion of Bertram, explaining his actions and behavior much in the same terms as had Coleridge. He feels that Bertram was represented as a very mixed character in whom evil for a time gains the upper hand (pp.393-395).

The much maligned Mrs. Jameson, writing from a point of view very similar to that of Hudson, makes many of the same points in her discussion of the characters of Helena and Bertram. She sees in Helena "the union of strength of passion with strength of character."[14] As a woman, Helena is more passionate than imaginative, and, Mrs. Jameson continues, it is "passion developed under its most profound and serious aspect," it is the "serious and the thoughtful, not the brilliant side of intellect." Although distinguished by high mental powers, the serious and energetic part of her character is founded in deep passion (p.208). Mrs. Jameson, in extravagant phrases, speaks of the beautiful picture of her love, which, deriving no dignity from place or circumstance, triumphs over all the painful and degrading circumstances with which she is surrounded. "The faith of her affection, combining with the natural energy of her character, believing all

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[14] Anna Jameson, Characteristics of Shakespeare's Women (London, 1858), I, 207.

things possible makes them so." She finds in Helena's deep devotion to the arrogant Bertram a part of the wonderful beauty of her character, a part of its womanly truth, for, she asks, does it not happen in real life that a remarkable woman loves a man unworthy of her? "We are not to look into Bertram's character for the spring and source of Helena's love, but into her own" (p.213). Dr. Johnson's censure of the young noble, she maintains, is much too severe. Although not the pattern hero of romance, his actions are natural to a young man of his age and class up to and including his desertion of Helena (p.227). He leaves her "like a wilful, haughty, angry boy, but not like a profligate." Later he is not easily defended and Shakespeare, she says, has not defended but corrected him. "The latter part of the play is more perplexing than pleasing." Notwithstanding his defence, Bertram has our pardon rather than our sympathy; Helena's love for him is his best excuse (p.231).

Two foreign critics, writing on Shakespeare after the turn of the half-century, have made comment on All's Well. Kreyssig says that this play "makes us aware of Shakespeare's hatred for affectations, and brings us near the pith of Shakespeare's perception of life."[15] He feels

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[15] F. Kreyssig, Lectures on Shakespeare, as quoted by Augustus Ralli, A History of Shakespearian Criticism (Oxford, 1932), I, 406.

that the problem of Helena's part was successfully solved even though Bertram's conversion was too sudden to make the happy ending acceptable. Shakespeare, stressing her character and intelligence more than her beauty, develops her into a perfect woman, among the best of his creations. Kreyssig adds that her severe trials were necessary "to efface the lingering prejudice against a woman who pursues a man" (p.407).

In Emile Montegut's prefaces to his translations of Shakespeare's plays (as found in Ralli), he says that Shakespeare transformed Bertram and Helena so that they are as truly of "our" time as of the Middle Ages, and we see them in the light of eternal human nature. Bertram's faults were due, not to nature, but to circumstances (p.468), and both his character and Helena's were subtly drawn. Helena's love was both ambitious and timid, she mingles respect and boldness, discretion and decision, and her final triumph she owes to her education. Montegut notes and remarks on the distinctly French characteristics of the paternal King, the cowardly buffoon, and the old-world Lafeu (p.469).

In <u>All's Well</u>, as in the other plays, Gervinus treats Shakespeare from an ethical point of view, studying his work as a moralist, concentrating on his thought and his characters. To him Helena is a modest womanly being

"who has all possible reasons within and without her for repressing and renouncing her passion."[16] Stressing her womanliness throughout his discussion, Gervinus is completely oblivious to any suggestion of ambition or drive or will. He attributes altruistic motives to her every action, maintaining that she never devises a scheme, she is merely capable of seizing it. Both her trip to the court and her journey to Florence are explained away as a "weakness" to see Bertram and protect him (p.179). In his own words, "The picture is drawn of an innocent and strong love perpetually meeting with fresh hindrances, and only excited by these to fresh and greater efforts" (p.180). In his analysis of Bertram, who suffers from the "vanity of seeming merit", Gervinus points out the moral centre of the piece, stating that the idea that merit goes before rank is the soul of the play, and of the relation between Bertram and Helena (p.182). (Almost a century later, Muriel Bradbrook was to explore the same idea.) To Gervinus Bertram is "haughty, rash, unbridled," but innately noble. He suggests, as few critics do, that Bertram disdains Helena partly because the emotion of female love is as yet altogether foreign to him (p.180). He is a straightforward, open youth whose unsuspicious nature does not

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[16] G.G. Gervinus, Shakespeare Commentaries, trans. F.E. Bunnett (London, 1883), p.175.

discern what Parolles is (p.184). Maintaining that he begins to love Helena when he learns of her death, he argues that at the end, scorned by all, Helena's humility "wholly softens in him all that was yet unmelted in his inflexible nature." He is able to see in Bertram's four words, "Both, both; O pardon!" a compression of all repentance, contrition, gratitude and love, maintaining that it only needs a good actor to reassure the audience as to their future (p.185).

In an article in Shakespeare Survey entitled "Fifty Years of Shakespearian Criticism", Kenneth Muir indirectly, and without adequate justification, brushes aside the judgments of several of the preceding critics with his statement that after the death of Coleridge there was a barrenness in Shakespeare criticism. It was not until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, he says, that signs appeared of a revival. The Victorian period settled the chronology of the plays, produced a textual orthodoxy which remained undisturbed for many years, and started many lines of investigation, but it produced no major Shakespearian critic. He lists Dowden, Swinburne, Moulton, Lee and Brandes as the only critics likely to be consulted today.[17]

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[17]Kenneth Muir, "Fifty Years of Shakespearian Criticism," Shakespeare Survey, IV (1951), 1.

To Swinburne the subject of All's Well was less fit for dramatic than for narrative treatment. Although he concedes that Shakespeare shows "delicacy of instinct" in handling indelicate matter, he agrees with Johnson about not reconciling his heart to Bertram and adds that he cannot reconcile his instincts to Helena. For him the whole charm and beauty of the play is found in the picture of "adorable old age." Lafeu is "one of the very best old men in all the ranges of comic art", and the Countess is an "incomparable figure", whom Fletcher would have married to Lafeu or even possibly to the King.[18]

This sentimentality appears as well in Dowden's criticism, which was still the standard work a generation later. Realizing the difficulty of making a woman who does what Helena does to Bertram attractive, Dowden maintained that Helena possessed one quality which Shakespeare so admired that he made her entire character and action beautiful and noble.[19] "This one thing is the energy, the leap-up, the direct advance of the will of Helena, her prompt, unerroneous tendency toward the right and efficient deed." He goes on to interpret both her actions and her character in a light completely favorable to her, seeing as

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[18] A.C. Swinburne, A Study of Shakespeare, 4th ed. (London, 1902), p.147.

[19] Edward Dowden, Shakespeare: His Mind and Art (New York, 1881), p.75.

a motto for the play the clown's words - "That man should be at woman's command, and yet no hurt done" (p.76). W.W. Lawrence, in his significant study of the play, feels that this is a grave misinterpretation of what is actually, in context, a cynical view of women. Far from being the motto for the play, Lawrence maintains that the clown's words are a motto, in the sense in which they are uttered, only in that the whole play contradicts them.[20] Echoing Jameson, Hudson, and Gervinus, Dowden argues that Bertram's good is Helena's sole aim. He maintains that despite her courage and intrepidity, "Shakespeare intends that she shall at no moment appear unwomanly" (p.78). He sees the title as "an utterance of the heart of Helena." Bertram is now safe in her hands; "she will fashion him as he should be fashioned" (p.80).

As early as Dowden we find All's Well, Measure for Measure, and Troilus and Cressida classified as serious, dark, ironical, and Shakespeare described as "in the depths" during the period of their writing. Dowden believed that Shakespeare's works were in some measure a reflection of his state of mind. Sidney Lee, at the end of the century, took the position that there was a separation between the Man and the Artist. In the nineteenth century critical opinion was divided between the view that Shakespeare's life was reflected in the plays

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[20] W.W. Lawrence, Shakespeare's Problem Comedies (New York, 1931), pp.65-66.

and the view that his art was absolutely impersonal. We shall find the problem still being discussed by critics in the 1940's, with both sides finding supporters.

To the earnest student, in the opinion of Richard Grant White, All's Well is one of Shakespeare's most interesting plays, not only because it contains some of his best and most thoughtful work, but because of its two distinct styles, the product of his earliest and latest periods.[21] This makes the play of peculiar value to the student of Shakespeare's style and of his mental development, says White. In the succeeding pages he expands on the differences in style, pointing out specific examples of Shakespeare's youthful and mature styles. In the first chapter of this book, "On Reading Shakespeare," White advises one to study Shakespeare as a poet and to observe his use of language (p.4). This approach to Shakespeare, using language as its focus, was not too prevalent at this time; not until the "new critics" of the 1930's shall we find such strong emphasis placed on the intensive study of Shakespeare's language that the advocates of this approach regard it as the only worthwhile study. And we must note that a number of these "new critics" refer to their work as if it were something that had never previously been thought of or attempted. White, although he does not go into the question of imagery and symbol, nevertheless evinces an awareness and appreciation of Shakespeare's poetry.

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[21] Richard Grant White, Studies in Shakespeare, 2nd ed. (Boston, 1886), p.46.

William Watkiss Lloyd reverts to the critical approach of his times when he devotes much of his criticism of the play to a discussion of the character and behaviour of Bertram and its influence on the action. A double weakness of character appears, he says, when Bertram yields, not to the lecture on the nobility of merit, but to the king's threat, and then offers a glib recantation "betraying a deep deficiency of innate truthfulness and hardy self-respect."[22] The play so darkens his character that his only asset is his gallantry as a soldier. Beyond this, excuses may be made because of the affection he inspired in Helena, and on the grounds of his position, the temptations of which Lloyd discusses (p.138). He brings out an interesting point when he sees Parolles as the counterfoil of Helena - both are ambitious of consorting with higher rank, although one has no claims to honor, and both are wrongly estimated by Bertram. But Parolles is also a counterfoil, or even a counterpart of Bertram - handsome but false, with a prepossessing outside not indicative of his "moral parts" (p.139). Lloyd points out the moral in the play - Bertram is blind to true merit, which the Countess and the King can see.

After giving illustrations of incongruity of style and pointing out familiar matter in the invention and plotting of All's Well, Barrett Wendell offers his analysis of

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[22] William Watkiss Lloyd, Critical Essays on the Plays of Shakespeare (London, 1904), p.137.

Shakespeare's mood and outlook at this period. Previously, he says, Shakespeare has always been romantic when dealing with love, despite a few rather worthless lovers. But "none is more volatile and less fascinating, none more pitifully free from romantic heroism, than Bertram." Despite Helena's romantic fidelity to Bertram, he feels that Shakespeare is "treating the fact of love with a cynical irony almost worthy of a modern Frenchman."[23] Of the opinion that we are asked to fully sympathize with Bertram, he contends that this makes the work most corrupt in conception and temper and shows Shakespeare's mood to be restless, unserene, unbeautiful. He maintains that All's Well reveals a sense which characterizes his coming work - a sense of the miserable mystery of earthly love. In strong language he gives his judgment of the play - "There are other works of Shakespeare which are more painful; there are none less pleasing, none on which one cares less to dwell" (p.250).

In Sidney Lee's short remarks on All's Well he speaks of the "touching story of Helena's love for the unworthy Bertram." He feels that the "pathetic element predominates" and that Helena ranks with the greatest of Shakespeare's female creations. He gives brief descriptions of some of the characters, mentioning "pompous

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[23] Barrett Wendell, William Shakespeare (New York, 1902), p.249.

Lafeu," and Lavache as "less witty than his compeers." The Countess is a "charming portrait of old age."[24]

In 1895 the Irving Dramatic Club gave a performance of All's Well which was reviewed by George Bernard Shaw. Confiding that the play was rooted in his deeper affections, he warmly admired the women in it, saying that the Countess, with her wonderfully pleasant good sense, humanity and originality, is the most beautiful old woman's part ever written. Helena's role, he felt, requires a "sustained transport of exquisite tenderness and impulsive courage" which makes poetry her natural speech.[25] Placing All's Well among Shakespeare's earlier plays, he said it "stands out artistically by the sovereign charm of the young Helena and the old Countess of Rousillon, and intellectually by the experiment, repeated nearly three hundred years later in A Doll's House, of making the hero a perfectly ordinary young man, whose unimaginative prejudices and selfish conventionality made him cut a very fine mean figure in the atmosphere created by the nobler nature of his wife" (p.12). Shaw's rather interesting if forced view of Shakespeare as a forerunner of Ibsen on this point was repeated on a later occasion in a review of

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[24] Sidney Lee, A Life of William Shakespeare, 2nd ed. (London, 1898), p.163.

[25] George Bernard Shaw, Plays and Players: Theatre Essays, The World's Classics (Oxford, 1952), p.15.

The Pilgrim's Progress entitled "Better than Shakespeare", when he said that he scented in All's Well "an anticipation of the crudest side of Ibsen's polemics on the Woman Question...where the man cuts as meanly selfish a figure beside his enlightened lady doctor wife as Helmar beside Nora..." (p.153).

With the turn of the century the chorus of uninhibited adoration of Helena was interrupted by a few dissenting voices. To Lounsbury no excellence in her character can counterbalance "the fundamental fact that she has been untrue to her sex." Despite all the tributes paid her, the fact is "she takes advantage of the favor of the king to do an essentially unwomanly act."[26] Although he makes no attempt to uphold Bertram as an estimable personage, either morally or intellectually, he feels that Dr. Johnson's hostile estimate was too severe, because as far as his relations with Helena are concerned, there is much to be said on the side of the unwilling victim (p.389). Lounsbury's comment that he disagrees with Dr. Johnson that Bertram is dismissed to happiness, for under ordinary circumstances misery would be the fate of such a couple (p.390) exemplifies the sort of "real as life" criticism that critics such as L.C. Knights find so objectionable. For Lounsbury little interest is inspired by the story or

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[26] Thomas R. Lounsbury, Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist (New York, 1902), p.390.

its chief characters. "Not even the genius of Shakespeare has been equal to making men accept with pleasure the plot of this comedy, or to respond very warmly to the eulogiums passed upon the heroine, worthy of admiration as she is in many ways" (p.389).

In Walter Raleigh's critical opinion, although "the principal characters...are designed for their parts in the intrigue, ...not even Shakespeare's skill can unite the incompatible, and teach them how to do their dramatic work without weakening their claim on our sympathies." He then quotes Johnson's condemnation of Bertram.[27] But Helena, although her practical energy and resourcefulness have caused her to forfeit the esteem of some critics, "gains, in the end, the love of her husband, and the admiration of her maker" (p.175). It is in his analysis of Parolles that Raleigh is most illuminating. Of the braggart's speech when his treachery and cowardice are exposed he says, "Shakespeare dared to follow his characters into those dim recesses of personality where the hunted soul stands at bay, and proclaims itself, naked as it is, for a greater thing than law and opinion" (p.173). Lafeu's response to Parolles' plea for help is an example of Shakespeare's sympathy which answers at once to any human

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[27] Walter Raleigh, Shakespeare, English Men of Letters (London, 1907), p.138.

appeal and "which, more than any other of his qualities, is the secret of Shakespeare's greatness" (p.173).

John Masefield's interpretation of All's Well is interesting if unorthodox, provocative if bitter. He sees the play as one of Shakespeare's views of human obsessions where he treats the removal of an obsession "by making plain to the obsessed, by pitiless, judicial logic, the ugliness of the treachery it causes."[28] He explains the reasons for Bertram's reaction to the forced marriage, saying he is as one who "sees himself brought into bondage with all the plumes of his youth clipped close." His rage, burning inward, becomes an obsession that blinds him not only to the good in Helena, but to his own faults and those of Parolles as well. "Willfully, as the sullen do, he thinks himself justified in doing evil because evil has been done to him" (p.146). Masefield feels that Shakespeare is just to Bertram. "The treachery of a woman is often the cause of a man's treachery to womanhood." Helena, obsessed by love, is blind to the results of her actions (p.147). In one of the harshest indictments ever levelled against the much praised heroine, which incidentally reveals a measure of misogyny on his own part, he maintains that Shakespeare saw her more clearly than any man. "He saw

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[28] John Masefield, William Shakespeare (London, 1911), p.145.

her as a woman who practises a borrowed art, not for art's sake, nor for charity, but, woman fashion, for a selfish end. He saw her put a man into a position of ignominy quite unbearable, and then plot with other women to keep him in that position. Lastly, he saw her beloved all the time by the conventionally minded of both sexes" (p.148). It is amusing to note that Gervinus, some fifty years earlier, had expressed a diametrically opposite view when he said that the conventional would not like her who is herself so unconventional. Masefield concludes his comments by saying that All's Well is full of effective theatrical situations, and contains both much fine poetry and startling moments of insight.

In the discussion of All's Well by T. Seccombe and J.W. Allen several analogies to Much Ado are drawn. "The way in which a painful theme is circumvented reminds one most decisively of Much Ado. The gaiety outdoes the gloom. Tragic issues are suggested, but are slurred over."[29] They regard All's Well as a great triumph of composition. "Shakespeare takes an intrigue of fantastic and semi-oriental type, furnishes it with European characters, and decorates it with European clownage and courtly wit; yet the result is not an incongruous patchwork, but a fascinating scenic spectacle" (p.81). Circumventing the problems

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[29] T. Seccombe and J.W. Allen, The Age of Shakespeare (London, 1911), II, 84.

inherent in this play they say that the situations have "no more reality than arabesques"; the characters, not to be taken too seriously, are beautifully finished stage parts (p.82). Bertram, like Claudio, they suggest, was drawn ad vivum, and was not intended to appear odious. Like Quiller-Couch later, but sharply opposed to the opinion of Harold Goddard (who believes that Shakespeare viewed the young "gentleman" with irony), these critics claim that Shakespeare was lenient to gallant young men.[30] Helena, although in part at least a failure, is "a very woman:

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[30] Harold Goddard, in his subjective book, The Meaning of Shakespeare (1951), interprets The Two Gentlemen of Verona as hitting at the education of the young Renaissance gentleman. He takes the view that Shakespeare did this throughout the rest of his works. From The Two Gentlemen to The Tempest "he drew one portrait after another of the fashionable gentleman, either Italian or after the Italian model", and Goddard contends that there is no mistaking his contempt. He mentions Bertram and Parolles among a number of others as a few of the more striking examples. He maintains that if one traces the word "gentleman" in Shakespeare's works he will be amazed at how often the situation or context shows it to be used with ironical intent (p.47). Goddard feels that in Parolles Shakespeare's wrath against the gentleman seems to culminate. His answer for the extreme aversion he finds in Shakespeare's attitude is that in the "gentleman" Shakespeare sensed the everlasting enemy of man. Goddard then moralizes on the point that the imitativeness of the gentleman is opposed to all that Shakespeare loved - freedom, growth, individuality (pp.432-433). See pp. 137-143 of this thesis for discussion of the criterion of the ideal Renaissance gentleman.

the skill with which Shakespeare precludes any doubt as to the essential purity of her nature, despite the ugly situations in which she is placed, is one of the miracles of his art" (p.82). They go on to make textual comments and speculate as to the date of composition, theorizing, as had most of the critics before them, that it is an early work retouched.

The critics of the second decade of the twentieth century who mention All's Well in their books on Shakespeare are inclined to regard the characters and situations as implying a tragic outcome, and the white-washing of Bertram a patched-up resolution as of a comic plot. R.M. Alden says that the result is morally honest, "but without either dramatic logic or intelligible unity of sympathetic appeal."[32] On the other hand, Joseph Quincy Adams, published a year later, attempts to explain All's Well's lack of popularity on the grounds that "something in the moral quality of the story repels the reader." Despite this, the Folger Library Research Supervisor feels that Helena, who loves not wisely but too well, is rendered pure and true.[33] Parolles, seen through the eyes of Alden

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[32] R.M. Alden, Shakespeare (London, 1922), p.302.

[33] Joseph Quincy Adams, A Life of William Shakespeare (Cambridge, 1923), p.302.

is treated satirically rather than sympathetically. Reminiscent of Barrett Wendell, he says that in the underplot Shakespeare "ministers less to a sense of good humor than to the conviction that the world is made up chiefly of rascals." This mood clashes with his romantic plot and romantic modes of interpretation (p.303).

The German scholar Schucking finds in Shakespeare the same lack of psychological consistency as does the American Stoll. In All's Well he is perturbed by the disagreement between character and action, complaining that Shakespeare failed to work out Boccaccio's story happily in every point. When Diana lays claims to Bertram, Schucking is surprised to see the "noble Count defending himself with the most villainous calumnies."[34] The pertinent question is whether the critic is entirely justified in his use of the adjective describing Bertram. Schucking contends that not only his lies, but the whole problem of winning Bertram's love is taken lightly. He finds a lack of agreement between the character of Helena and the action of the play. "A woman who has energy enough to win a man twice in the way indicated ought to possess more will-power and not show the sentimental traits which come out, particularly in her conversations with the Countess." He goes on to remark that such a woman would hardly go about weeping, attracting the notice of even

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[34]Levin L. Schucking, Character Problems in Shakespeare's Plays (London, 1922), p.196.

the steward.

One of the most deprecating critical analyses of both the play and the heroine is that of Agnes Mackenzie. Calling All's Well "probably the worst of his plays", she says that it shows Shakespeare wrestling with a plot that from the dramatic standpoint is inherently a bad one, unless treated farcically, because neither of the leading characters inspire sympathy.[35] Discussing the little use of the seventeenth century for the play as contrasted with the delight in Helena of the eighteenth century, and most of the nineteenth, she sardonically comments that this was presumably because she forgives so much (p.36). She then goes painstakingly through the play, scene by scene, analyzing the action and the behaviour of the characters, occasionally using a Freudian approach. Although in Act I, despite some fault-finding, she finds Helena gracious and attractive, touched with real pathos, in the second act, she says, the uncertainty of the drawing becomes disconcertingly manifest. She feels that it takes a great deal of good will to forget that the ultimate forcing of the marriage was done, not by the King, but by Helena herself. In Helena's submissiveness she sees the sleekness of one, who, having gained her point, can afford to wait for what

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[35]Agnes Mure Mackenzie, The Women in Shakespeare's Plays (London, 1924), p.35.

she considers less essential (p.46). Yet she still feels that if the play were to end when Helena resolves to leave Rousillon we could still pity her and even Bertram. But from then on she finds Helena less pleasant than Ann Whitefield, taking her chance as ruthlessly as Tarquin. Of her victory she says, "Helena has won declared possession of her cad of a husband, and we can only feel that the fact will probably be adequate requital for her method of achieving it" (p.52). She agrees with Masefield's summation of Helena and quotes it, adding that Masefield was wrong on one point - that Shakespeare saw her so. Of this there is no evidence. "She is simply a gross blunder..." (p.53). The most serious dramatic blunder of the play, she says, is "the fogging of the emotional values through an uncertain fumbling with the point of view" (p.81).

Although its influence has no doubt indirectly affected most contemporary literary criticism, the full impact of what is called "the new criticism" was not exerted on All's Well to a conspicuous degree. There has been an increased interest in the language of Shakespeare's plays as a result, but the leading figures of the anti-Bradleian revolt did not choose All's Well to illustrate their arguments. Although there are interesting new insights in the "new criticism" and some of the objections levelled against the excesses of "character study" are valid enough, the exclusive preoccupation of these critics with

imagery and symbols can lead to excesses as ridiculous as those they despise. Dissecting a line of Shakespeare for three pages can lead to neglect of the whole as much as can the type of literary criticism they are so opposed to. Treating Shakespeare's plays solely as poetry, and forgetting that they are drama, can lead to an abstraction from the total response as surely as can exclusive concentration on sources, analogues, influences, or the conventions of the Elizabethan stage. Although in his Preface to Explorations L.C. Knights recognizes this danger, in the famous essay "How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth" he maintains that character, like plot, rhythm, or construction is "merely an abstraction from the total response in the mind of the reader or spectator, brought into being by written or spoken words." The critic, he argues, must begin with the words.[36] In his sharply critical examination of the historical development of Shakespeare criticism, he affirms that "... the total response to a Shakespeare play can only be obtained by an exact and sensitive study of the quality of the verse, of the rhythm and imagery, of the controlled associations of the words and their emotional and intellectual force, in short by an exact and sensitive study of Shakespeare's handling of language..." (p.10). Knights' argument can easily be turned against him;

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[36] L.C. Knights, "How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?" Explorations (London, 1946), p.4.

excessive attention to the words can lead to exactly what he deplores - an abstraction from the total response. In an article in Shakespeare Survey, S.L. Bethell sums up the situation admirably when he says, "The study of poetic imagery is without doubt one of the most important innovations in Shakespearean criticism, but, unless a method is followed which brings imagery into due subordination to other aspects of dramatic expression, it can lead only to the construction of individual fantasies."[37] B. Ifor Evans, in his recent book, The Language of Shakespeare's Plays, also recognizes the dangers involved when the critics interested in Shakespeare's imagery think of Shakespeare's language as something "detached from the theatre, and separate from the problems of the dramatist."[38] His study will be more fully discussed at the end of this section.

To return to our survey after a necessary digression, we note that the leading exponents of the "new criticism" have ignored direct reference to All's Well. The work of Leavis, Wilson Knight, L.C. Knights, and F.W. Bateson contain no direct mention of the play. Caroline Spurgeon and Edward Armstrong deal with All's Well from the point of view of a systematic study of imagery and symbolism and will be examined in due course. But, anticipating the revolt of the thirties, George Rylands in

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[37] S.L. Bethell, "Shakespeare's Imagery," Shakespeare Survey, V (1952), 62.

[38] B. Ifor Evans, The Language of Shakespeare's Plays (London, 1952), p.XI.

his Words and Poetry discussed Shakespeare's work with complete emphasis on his language and the characteristics and development of his style, and in doing so made considerable use of All's Well for purposes of illustration. Calling All's Well a "crippled unrewarding play", he nevertheless speaks of the important part played in it by Shakespeare's prose and the Latinizing of his vocabulary; he offers interesting examples of links with Hamlet; and he shows his fascination with Shakespeare's method of combining concrete and abstract words.[39] In analyzing the imagery, and commenting on the phrase "the inaudible and noiseless foot of time" he says that he spoke of the pairing of epithets in Shakespeare; he emphasized the significance of his experiments in verbal contrasts, particularly those in which the abstract and the concrete are yoked together, and noted the invasion of Latin words. He says that in this phrase we have another Shakespearean trick which has an affinity with all these three (p.189). Finding the question of date puzzling, he speculates, with linguistic evidence, that it may be the work of three different periods. It is to him one of the mixed, baffling plays in which the extremities of good and bad excel themselves. Many of the characteristics of Hamlet appear in Measure for Measure, Troilus and Cressida, and All's Well and "all these

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[39]George Rylands, Words and Poetry (London, 1928), pp.187-198.

four experiment in diction, in the new use of metaphor and amplification, in Latinizing the vocabulary" (p.198).

In line with Barrett Wendell and R.W. Alden, Ashley Thorndike, in his book on English comedy, regards the three "dark" comedies as to some degree under the influence of the prevailing fashion for realism and satire.[40] "All exhibit the baser side of sexual passion, all look upon life in a satirical rather than a merry humour, and all are confused in structure, uneven in style, and constrained rather than spontaneous in manner" (p.128). Hardin Craig too says that the three mirthless comedies present a world in which sex relations are awry, although in All's Well virtue wins a decided victory.[41] He finds that to some extent it shows a faith in womanly purity equal to that which appears in King Lear and Othello. What makes it seem out of harmony is the happy ending resolving situations which call for tragedy (p.701). It is the domestic atmosphere of Rousillon, and the characters, which "serve to keep alive a badly mixed-up and patched-up play" (p.702). J.W. Mackail has not the patience with All's Well to concede it even that much credit. The plot is so hopeless, he finds, that even Shakespeare's scenic instinct fails except occasionally to make it either pathetic or amusing

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[40]Ashley H. Thorndike, English Comedy (New York, 1929), p.120.

[41]Hardin Craig, Shakespeare (New York, 1931), p.700.

or even particularly interesting. The vitality is low, and, with the exception of the Countess, the characters are "stock-figures not quite humanized."[42]

The comprehensive and scholarly work of W.W. Lawrence in Shakespeare's Problem Comedies was a landmark in the criticism of the three plays. Almost any succeeding critic who discusses All's Well at any length has referred with varying degrees of deference and acceptance to Lawrence's approach to the problems presented by the play. Lawrence's emphasis is almost entirely on the historical and social groundwork of the plays, and his major thesis is that the significant parts of their plots are drawn from medieval tales, from the common stock of narrative tradition. After giving a short review of some of the critical divergences All's Well has provoked, he offers a brief summary of his view. Helena, he says, is meant to be noble and heroic, justified in her actions; Bertram's sudden conversion is a convention of medieval and Elizabethan story. The blackening of Bertram's character and the disagreeable qualities of the Clown and Parolles are explainable for reasons of dramatic contrast and dramatic motivation (p.38). The unpleasantnesses of the play were not so regarded by the Elizabethans, and the improbabilities must be judged in

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[42] J.W. Mackail, The Approach to Shakespeare, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1933), p.28.

the light of early traditions. He expands his argument by presenting evidence to show that All's Well is a composite of archaic and illogical folk-tale situations that would be understood and accepted by an Elizabethan audience. Lawrence traces the sources of All's Well in European and Oriental folk literature, recognizing in them the Virtue Story which exalts the devotion of a woman to a man who so far forgets his duty as to treat her cruelly (p.49). In the light of the early analogues, Helena is not guilty of indelicate persistence, the bed-trick is not immodest, and the happy ending is not unbelievable. All these would be accepted as conventions of drama because they were also conventions of story-telling (p.54). There are two other themes in All's Well that are variations of popular tales - the Clever Wench, and the Fulfilment of the Tasks. Lawrence dismisses all the problems of the plot raised by other critics with the argument of his thesis, namely, that they were conventions of the popular story that would be familiar to and accepted by the Elizabethans. Lawrence is so intent on proving that his argument answers all the objections as to the play's plausibility that he sometimes implies that Shakespeare was the slave rather than the master of the conventions he employs. Although he refutes Schucking's complaints with his historical argument, he does concede that Shakespeare sometimes deliberately sacrificed psychological consistency to purely theatrical effect (p.74). The closing scene, he says, may be good

drama but it is bad psychology. Lawrence has not remained unchallenged on this evaluation of the last scene as good drama. He concludes his analysis with the point that Shakespeare has been less successful in All's Well in suffusing formal and traditional plot-elements with naturalness and human sympathy than in other plays based on folk-themes, and because the dramatist relied, not on emotion or truth to life, but on the familiarity of the story, the play is puzzling to modern readers (p.67).

Although her method has been attacked by other critics, and the validity of her conclusions questioned by Rosamund Tuve in Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery (1947),[43] the monumental scholarship in Caroline Spurgeon's Shakespeare's Imagery is most impressive. We need not enter the controversy as to whether or not her thesis that the imagery a poet uses instinctively is a largely unconscious revelation of himself and his mind is valid at this point, as her remarks on the imagery in All's Well are both interesting and significant in themselves. She points out that the favorite Elizabethan convention of using war-like similes for love appears seldom in Shakespeare. Except for the love-war similes in his two poems and in All's Well, Shakespeare has surprisingly little of this particular

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[43] Rosamund Tuve speaks of the "scientific unreliability and aesthetic helplessness" of the approach to imagery used by Miss Spurgeon (p.254n). See also Appendix, Note R.

Elizabethan imagery.[44] Imagery of hate also appears relatively seldom in Shakespeare, and only twice does she find hate in an image definitely contrasted with love. One of these times is in the last act of All's Well, when the King reproves Bertram for his too tardy avowal of love. "The truth is that the real opposite of love in the Shakespearean vision is not hate, but fear" (p.154). In line with her thesis, she uses images from All's Well as examples of Shakespeare's attitude to stillness and silence (p.74); his discriminating palate (pp.118,123, 124); his disgust at surfeit and its remedy (p.133); his individual conception of love (pp.151,152); his consciousness of the strange mixture of good and evil in our life and being (p.168); his view of time with its two characteristics--its variable speed, dependent on the emotional state of those experiencing it (p.175), and its destroying power (p.176). Dr. Spurgeon maintains that "...the most striking function of the imagery as background and undertone in Shakespeare's art is the part played by recurrent images in raising and sustaining emotion, in providing atmosphere or in emphasising a theme." By recurrent imagery she says that she means the repetition of an idea or picture in the images used in any one play (p.213). In the comedies she finds that the function of this running symbolic imagery is chiefly to give atmosphere (p.259). Besides providing

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[44] Caroline Spurgeon, Shakespeare's Imagery (Cambridge, 1935), p.3.

this atmosphere and background, in only three of the comedies does she find slight traces of the running symbolical imagery used in the tragedies--that is, to illustrate or underline a leading "motive" in the action or plot of the play. All's Well is one of the three; the other two are Love's Labour's Lost and Much Ado (p.271). In All's Well there is a touch of symbolical thought to be found, though it is not expressed continuously in imagery. Shakespeare's imagination was held by the old Ptolemaic system, which corresponds to the testimony of our senses, and he has many references to and images of the movement of stars in their sphere (p.21). Polonius reminds Ophelia that "Lord Hamlet is a prince, out of thy star", and Dr. Spurgeon points out that this same idea forms a "running" image throughout All's Well, to illustrate the insurmountable difference of position of Helena and Bertram (p.23). It is summed up in the first scene by Helena herself when she refers to her position in an astronomical image. "And the idea--not of being stars--but of being born under good or evil stars, and so being subject to their influence, and to that extent the plaything of fortune, runs through a great part of the play." She then goes on to quote examples of the recurrence of astronomical images. She says that it may be pure chance, "but many of Helena's sayings and images increase and carry on the suggestion or idea of stars and heavenly bodies moving in the

firmament...(p.274). In studying Chart VII, I found it interesting to note that despite the "gloomy" atmosphere so often attributed to All's Well, there were only four plays, out of thirty-seven as she lists them, with fewer sickness images.

In Middleton Murry's chapter on the problem comedies in his book entitled Shakespeare there is provided a useful corrective to Professor Lawrence's attempt to explain away all the difficulties presented by All's Well. Although he agrees in the main with Lawrence, Murry does not see why Bertram must be made a cad, and he feels that Lawrence's argument is not always completely satisfying. Although Murry believes in historical criticism, he maintains that we must not regard Shakespeare as in complete subjection to the thought of his age. The total impression of Shakespeare's work, he says, is of a mind not completely subdued to the contemporary, and of a nature more delicately humane than any of his fellows.[45] To Murry the whole dramatic action of the play hinges on the bed-trick. This is the only place where there is a discrepancy in Helena's character; as for the virginity repartee, other Shakespearian women offend in this way against later canons of feminine propriety, and to him she is all the better for it. It is the bed-trick where the character and the actions

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[45] John Middleton Murry, Shakespeare (London, 1936), pp.301-302.

seem to be at odds (p.298). He accepts Lawrence's explanation that it belonged to medieval folklore and that Shakespeare was bound to follow the tradition, but the estrangement of Bertram from any sympathy on our part seems to be deliberate on Shakespeare's part. "He represents him as having a streak of what can only be called real viciousness" (p.299). Murry's comments on the huddled ending are interesting. To him the ending suggests Shakespeare's consciousness of his inability to deal further with the situation and a consequent throwing in of his hand with a laugh. It is not quite the cynical title for which he once argued, he admits, "but it is cynical, in a good-humoured way." The object of the good-natured cynicism is not humanity, but his own impossible job as a playwright. "He cannot help making his creatures free, yet tradition keeps them in chains" (p.304).

M.R. Ridley feels a sense of dissatisfaction with the whole temper of the play, and particularly with its conclusion. He sees the play as written in two different moods, and the portrayal of Helena as both inconsistent and distorted by a cynical twist. She alternates between a most winning heroine and a grasping, scheming opportunist. Ridley seems of the same mind as Agnes Mackenzie when he says that she does not want Bertram's love, since he makes it brutally clear she will

not have it, but just Bertram.[46] Unless the inconsistency can be resolved, which he thinks impossible, Helena is a failure, but a failure resulting not from laziness, but from a temper of mind. This kind of inconsistency was found before in heroes like Valentine and Bassanio, but now "the ideal of womanhood has crumbled with other ideals into dust" (p.151). The comic parts, too, he feels, have something of the same sour taste. "Not even here can Shakespeare recapture any of the old joy in living." Lavache is the dreariest of his fools, and although Parolles is brilliantly drawn, the drum business is sorry stuff (p.152).

The object of H.B. Charlton's intriguing and erudite book, Shakespearian Comedy, is to trace in Shakespeare's comedies the growth of his "comic idea." He shows Shakespeare's progress in effecting a compromise between Renaissance romance and classical comedy, but in the process he plays fast and loose with chronology. Because his aim is to give an account of how Shakespeare eventually achieved the creation of the three masterpieces of comedy, he assumes that the three "dark" comedies were written before Much Ado About Nothing, Twelfth Night, and As You Like It. He points out the gradual emergence of the heroine in Shakespeare's plays, until she develops into the very incarnation of the spirit of his comedy.[47] Charlton,

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[46] M.R. Ridley, Shakespeare's Plays (London, 1937), p.150.

[47] H.B. Charlton, Shakespearian Comedy (London, 1938), p.76.

standing firmly in defence of the interpretation of Shakespeare's art in terms of human experience, human morals, and human wisdom[48] sees Shakespeare using comedy for its proper function, i.e. "to show real man encountering the real problem of the world in which he was really living" (p.103). Comedy is concerned with life as a thing to be lived here and now, and its heroes, to triumph, must take it as it is, and seek a way to turn it to their purpose. Their primary object is to attain a mastery of circumstance (p.176). It is this infinite capacity for extricating himself from predicaments, this mastery of circumstances, that is Sir John Falstaff's supreme qualification to be a hero of comedy (p.179). But Shakespeare is to seek an escape from Falstaff, for Falstaff's success is a hollow one. He succeeded in a world not worth conquest, and only there through the denial of the things in life which make life worthwhile. In the three "dark" comedies Shakespeare escapes from Falstaff by finding characters with qualities which take the ideal phases of living into account (p.230). Falstaff triumphed by asserting intellect and denying emotion; in these three plays characters exhibit the relative values of reason and of intuition in the search for human happiness (p.231).

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[48]Una Ellis Fermor, "The Year's Contribution to Shakespeare Study," Shakespeare Survey, III (1950), 131.

In All's Well That Ends Well, Shakespeare most positively emerges from his doubt. In this play, the issue of the action depends exclusively on the action of the heroine, the maker of happiness. Helena, defying all the schemes of human reason, relies entirely on the "prompture of the heart", and with this as her guide she achieves her goodness (p.258). In doing so, she is the instrument by which the good of others is attained (p.259). She is the embodiment of sheer natural goodness, and her career is a demonstration of the effectiveness of mere natural goodness in dispensing happiness to mankind (p.260). Despite one's awareness of Charlton's critical heritage, that of the great traditionalists, from Dryden to Bradley, it is amazing to realize that his analysis of Helena follows that of Mrs. Jameson and her ilk almost point for point, although it is mercifully free of the excesses of nineteenth century sentimentality. Continuing his approach through characterization, Charlton sees Parolles as a coherent refutation of Falstaffianism. He is Falstaff viewed with other eyes, and his final acceptance of mere existence is a re-assessment of Falstaff's ideal that the preservation of the body is the major end of life (pp.261-262). All's Well That Ends Well, Shakespeare's escape from the tyranny of Falstaff and his rapturous denial of the spiritual life, can hardly be regarded as a play with an underlying mood of bitter cynicism. On the contrary, he finds that the

spiritual and intellectual temper of the so-called "dark" comedies is not contempt for life, but rather an intense impulse to discover the true sources of nobility in man and of joy in life (p.211). The imperfections in these plays are the result of Shakespeare's failure to hold his imagination in intense activity (p.208). Intellect rather than imagination is forcing the issue(p.209). These three comedies show the intrusion of intellect in frustrating the effort of the imagination (p.210). Although at first glance the story of All's Well That Ends Well appears to be pessimistic, there are many things in the play that are incompatible with this apparent cynicism. In the nobler natures there is a conviction of the difference between rank and worth, appearance and reality. The old people that Shakespeare added to the source story bring to All's Well That Ends Well a sense of tolerance, forbearance and love. Charlton discusses the characters of the Countess, Lafeu and the King, showing their knowledge of the wonderful variety of life. This presentation of the benignity of time and the grace of old age is remarkable in a comedy, he says, and these old people could never have existed in the mind of a cynic (pp.217-222). Although dramatically unconvincing, the nominally happy ending is surely a mark of Shakespeare's opinion that love and human charity are what make living worthwhile (p.264). Despite his urbanity and plausibility, and his ingenious and refreshing theory,

Charlton's critical view of All's Well That Ends Well depends, not upon the work of his contemporaries, but almost directly upon that of his nineteenth century predecessors.

Peter Alexander, writing briefly about All's Well That Ends Well in Shakespeare's Life and Art, uses the historical approach, reiterating the explanations so ably presented by Lawrence and offering nothing new.[49] But in the same year Mark Van Doren's Shakespeare was first published and, in both his ideas and style, we are again treated to the workings of an original and vigorous mind, whether we agree with its conclusions or not. The three comedies written at the outset of Shakespeare's great career in tragedy are in any final view unsuccessful, he feels; in All's Well That Ends Well, "the poet cannot locate his atmosphere"[50] but it is one of his most interesting failures. He sees the play as "an anecdote in five acts" (p.178). "All's Well That Ends Well has attempted to make drama out of anecdote, to pack a dry skeleton with living flesh, to force upon the imagination what only wit can credit." The atmosphere he had conceived for Helena and Bertram was a meager one, and his story breaks down at "the huddled and perfunctory finish." It is in his indictment

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[49] Peter Alexander, Shakespeare's Life and Art (London, 1939), pp.191-192.

[50] Mark Van Doren, Shakespeare, Doubleday Anchor Books (New York, 1953), p.172.

of the household at Rousillon, which he calls "unique among Shakespeare's households for its poverty of spirit" (p.179), that Van Doren stands almost completely alone, unsupported by any critic before and only one since. In his eyes, the clown, "a barren unpleasant jester", is "as bleak and bitter as the air that blows through his old mistress's rooms", and the Countess herself, although just and kind, has blood that is "half frozen in her veins." "The atmosphere at Rousillon is one of darkness, old age, disease, sadness, and death; and of superannuated people who nevertheless hold on to the chill edges of their former styles" (p.180). Almost all other critics see graciousness and warmth in the old people. Van Doren continues his evaluation of the play by discussing the major characters. Bertram is very ordinary, "his manners are as poor as his imagination", he was never cut out to be the hero of the play. Parolles too is dull; his contribution to Shakespearian comedy is chiefly the contrast he offers Falstaff - he shows in himself the minimum of a comic convention which reminds us of its maximum in Falstaff (p.182). As the plot wears on, Bertram thins into a mere figure of fable, and if Helena too thins out, this does not mean that she was any sort of failure at the start. Up until she disguises herself as a pilgrim she is one of Shakespeare's most interesting women (p.183). She speaks often of stars, "and the fact that she does

symbolizes her solitary blazing brightness in the play." Van Doren is more observant than most when he also notices her regular references to herself as an animal mating. One of her favorite words is "nature"; "she has body as well as mind." There is nothing frail about her, and because "her body is real her mind is gifted with a rank, a sometimes masculine fertility" (p.184). But after her pity for the young man she has driven out of France is once expressed, her pursuit becomes mechanical, like the play. "Helena has ceased to be one of the most remarkable among those women of Shakespeare whose loves are their lives. Her life has been manoeuvered into nothingness" (p.185).

In 1932 in his book entitled The Essential Shakespeare, Dover Wilson had restated the traditional view (which we have noted turning up from time to time since Dowden and which had been propagated for many years by Stopford Brooke), that the bitter comedies were interesting as illustrations of Shakespeare's moods at the beginning of the Jacobean period.[51] Of the opinion that most of the greatest artists have not been able to keep their lives and creations in different compartments, Wilson's conclusion is that Shakespeare's dramatic work from 1601 to 1608 shows that Shakespeare was subject at this time to a dominant mood of gloom and dejection (p.114). T.S. Eliot (in line

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[51] J. Dover Wilson, The Essential Shakespeare (Cambridge, 1932), p.119.

with Coleridge), enunciating an aesthetic conviction antithetical to that of Wilson's on the relationship between the artist and the artist's creation, has maintained that "the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material." Many critics have been interested in exploring this problem; those who see in the problem comedies manifestations of Shakespeare's despair and pessimism, must as a matter of course, side with the views reiterated by Dover Wilson. Evaluating the tone of the three comedies as one of disillusionment and cynicism, Wilson says that "the air is cheerless and often unwholesome, the wit mirthless, the bad characters contemptible or detestable, the good ones unattractive." Although he finds Helena an admirable and noble lady, "yet everything she does sets our teeth on edge" (p.116). He makes the point that these plays should be the easiest for our own day to understand, maintaining that Measure for Measure is in much the same key as Point Counter Point. The tremendous revival of interest in the former in recent years would indicate that Wilson's point is well taken. Twentieth century hatred of sentimentalism and romance; our savage determination to tear aside all veils, to expose reality in all its crudity and hideousness, combined with the discord and disgust of the modern

"literature of negation" all belong to the Shakespeare of about 1603, says Wilson. He feels that Shakespeare's mood sprang from circumstances similar to those of 1932 (p.117). Shakespeare, elated after the defeat of the Armada, became disillusioned at the crash of Essex and the squalid peace of James (p.118).

This view was refuted by R.W. Chambers, who acknowledges his debt to Professor Sisson's The Mythical Sorrows of Shakespeare, in Chapter VIII, "The Elizabethan and the Jacobean Shakespeare," of his book Man's Unconquerable Mind.[52] Arguing that the formula of categorizing Shakespeare's works into four periods is misleading, he points out the ties between the historical tragedies and the Jacobean masterpieces, showing that Shakespeare's sense of the evil of the world is continuous from Richard Crookback to Antonio and Sebastian in The Tempest. If in the Jacobean Shakespeare there is a deepening apprehension of evil, there is also a courage, patience, faith, and love that the evil cannot touch. Not until Jacobean days does Shakespeare show a love which remains steadfast though repulsed and repudiated. How, Chambers asks, can Shakespeare be called disillusioned and cynical? (p.260). The historical, political and intellectual conditions at the time of the new reign are presented to show that the

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[52]R.W. Chambers, Man's Unconquerable Mind (London, 1939), pp.250-276.

spirit in England was not one of gloom, and that Shakespeare's mood was rather one of optimism. All's Well That Ends Well, Shakespeare's first bow to the new courts (he paraphrases Dover Wilson), ends in reconciliation. Chambers rejects the cynical interpretations of Shakespeare's intentions. Because critics look for irony and cynicism, he says, they find cynicism by interpreting everything ironically (pp.275-276).

Despite the opposition to the traditional view, E.K. Chambers, in his article on Shakespeare in the Encyclopaedia Britannica (1944) refers to All's Well as one of the three bitter and cynical pseudo-comedies "in which the creator of Portia, Beatrice, Rosalind and Viola drags the honour of womanhood in the dust." He says that the evidence of Shakespeare's profound disillusion and discouragement of spirit is plain enough in the years between Hamlet, through these plays, and on to the tragedies.

In George Gordon's urbane and amusing little volume Shakesperian Comedy he discusses the discordance between the orthodox satiric or corrective theory of Comedy and the practice of Shakespeare, indicating the ways in which Shakespeare's comedy defies the theories of Meredith and Bergson. All lectures on Shakespeare's comedies tend to become lectures on Shakespeare's women, he says, for in the comedies they have the forefront of

the stage.[53] In the world of the comedies, a world made safe for woman, Man lays down his arms, Woman unquestionably rules. And, says Gordon, they deserve to win - these charming, witty, rebellious and level-headed women (p.27). The distinguishing marks of these women (of whom Helena is obviously one), are clear-headedness, frankness in facing facts, and the power of decision. They have knowledge, shrewdness, wit, and courage, without ceasing to be wholly feminine and the objects of desire (p.52). Gordon feels that it is Shakespeare's sentimental, clinging women who cannot keep their lovers or command success, and who are victims of inexpressiveness. The conventional heroines of the tragedies are tragic not because they are too good for this world, but from defect - they lack what a heroine such as Helena has: a clear head and a ready tongue as well as a loving heart. Shakespeare admired the women who carried their destinies with them, Gordon maintains (pp.55-57). Although he does not single out Helena for specific illustration, the reader inevitably feels that Gordon includes her among these heroines and accords her both respect and support. George Gordon is flagrantly guilty of just the sort of approach to Shakespeare that the exponents of the "new criticism" take such delight in mocking.

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[53] George Gordon, Shakespearian Comedy (Oxford, 1944), p.25.

He praises the few women who have chatted about Shakespeare's heroines as they would about their own acquaintances, and deplores the fact that we have so few such feminine appraisals of Shakespeare's women. He singles out Mary Coleridge's comments for appreciation - she told him things that no man could tell him. He quotes her verdict on Helena: "She may be reckoned as one of the few women who have ever proposed for men and yet kept their charm" (p.30). Indulging in the excesses of the "real as life" school of criticism, Gordon's approach, anachronistic in the 1940's, seems to indicate a nostalgic yearning for the sentimentality and the character - study that played so predominant a role in nineteenth century criticism.

Continuing to explore the field investigated by Miss Spurgeon and W.H. Clemen, Edward Armstrong's Shakespeare's Imagination deals more fully with the psychology of association as exemplified in Shakespeare's imagery. Armstrong is doubtful as to whether All's Well That Ends Well is all Shakespeare's work, because of the lack of the presence of typical image clusters. No examples from the play are offered in the book. He says that the possibility of Chapman's collaboration might be revealed by detailed analysis of clusters, but that Sir E.K. Chamber's suggestion that the play's peculiarities were

due to Shakespeare's abnormal mood is unconvincing.[54] Armstrong's views on the problem of the revelation of the artist's personality in his work are similar to those of T.S. Eliot, and unlike those of Dover Wilson. "Lesser men in their poetry and plays often reveal much more of their personalities, but Shakespeare dwelt - so far as his imagination was concerned - in a more universal realm. His imagination achieved a high degree of autonomy. Of no poet may it be more truly said that he did not wear his heart upon his sleeve for daws to peck at" (p.171).

Edith Sitwell, in A Notebook on William Shakespeare, devotes several pages to comments on All's Well That Ends Well, a comedy, she feels, "in which the strong force of life fights against a thin and meagre living death." She sees Helena as "a strong, bright, rank flower," forcing "her powerful roots, her living strength, her passion for life, through the bleak air by which she is surrounded, towards her sun, Bertram."[55] It is interesting to note the similarity of point of view toward the atmosphere of the play between Miss Sitwell and Mark Van Doren; both, poets themselves, speak of the bleak atmosphere surrounding Helena, an impression not shared by other critics. To Miss Sitwell the clown is "thin and white like Winter," and

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[54] Edward Armstrong, Shakespeare's Imagination (London, 1946), p.188.

[55] Edith Sitwell, A Notebook on William Shakespeare (London, 1948), p.183.

Lafeu is an "aged bore" pleased with his platitudes. She makes the almost unique observation that Helena feels an affinity to Parolles, because he too has a strong will to live (p.183).[56] In the case of Parolles, she maintains, we have a character pardoned, because of his force of life. He attains a kind of grandeur at the end. But Helena's strength of life is greater still (p.184). "She is irresistible with the force of Spring, the ferment, the mounting sap" (p.185).

In Donald Stauffer's Shakespeare's World of Images the emphasis is on Shakespeare as a moral writer. We find here an approach that goes back to Sidney appearing in 1949. His book compartmentalizes Shakespeare's moral growth into seven stages: All's Well That Ends Well is included in "The Unweeded Garden." Of the school of thought that asserts that all great works of art reflect the convictions of their creators, Stauffer maintains that we can answer with confidence the question of how Shakespeare thought human life should be led. In All's Well That Ends Well, says Stauffer, Shakespeare had not been up to weeding the tares of moral uncertainty from true ethical seed; he was at odds with himself and therefore faltering.

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[56] This remark recalls William Lloyd's view, expressed a half century earlier, of Parolles as a counterfoil of Helena. See p.24.

In the three problem comedies and Hamlet, Shakespeare, he feels, has radically changed his general estimate of human nature. He is not only temporarily neglecting his skill as a dramatist, he also abandons "his suspended or multiple moral observations on any subject - in favor of intense, personal, lyrical opinions, unbalanced or uncompensated."[57] This view is the direct antithesis of that of other critics concerned with the moral aspect in Shakespeare, from Gervinus to Muriel Bradbrook. Stauffer condemns the sarcastic laughter and the "happy" endings, adding that the problem comedies are problems, but he does not see how they can be called comedies (p.117). All's Well That Ends Well is "the most dejected and pathetic" of the group. Its low characters, Parolles and Lavache, expound a philosophy of debased vitalism, and the tolerating of the vicious, boastful, lying Parolles, he feels, indicates a philosophy of debased vitalism that accepts sordid life as an end in itself (p.118). Helena he sees as "an odd and not altogether attractive combination of patient Griselda and the ruthless self-made woman." He feels that Shakespeare is not too sure of her as a person - "In snaring her husband she alternates between the roles of aggressive huntress and passive martyr" (p.119). As a play, Stauffer evaluates All's Well That Ends Well as the poorest since Two Gentlemen,

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[57] Donald A. Stauffer, Shakespeare's World of Images (New York, 1949), p.116.

although Shakespeare has much to say here on virtue, nature, honor, and the death of fathers. It is a play of ambiguous wisdom and mingled judgments. "But the principal counterpoising in the play is love set against lust and virginity." The idea of lust is framed in the action and speeches; on virginity there is a sort of formal essay. Stauffer's theory is that Shakespeare or Parolles, with Helena not averse, will have none of it. According to him, Shakespeare's opinion of virginity "squares with the larger pattern of Shakespeare's thought. The purity of any idea or ideals inhibits that idea, lacking relationships and 'respect', no idea, not even the finest is worthy of this complex world." He links up this rather ingenious reasoning with his own conclusion as to the cause for the failure of the play. "All's Well That Ends Well fails as a play because its central idea of misprized love possibly rewarded is itself too virginal, too lyrical" (p.122).

Thomas Marc Parrott's vigorous and copious Shakespearian Comedy, although mainly concerned with the plays indicated by the title, discusses all thirty-six in turn. He feels that the problem plays are all by-products of the tragic vein in which Shakespeare was then working and that "Shakespeare's heart was not deeply engaged in this effort to handle a psychological problem in the form of comedy."[58] All's Well That Ends Well, one of the least

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[58]Thomas Marc Parrott, Shakespearian Comedy (New York, 1949), p.337.

read, is one of the least pleasing both because of the unsatisfactory state of the text, and the action of the plot, which is offensive to modern sensibilities. As a good historical critic, Parrott naturally points out that the sensibilities of an Elizabethan audience, though quick and responsive, were far less nice than ours (p.348). He feels that some of what Shakespeare added to his source imparts a flavor of rather bitter comedy, and he is not convinced that the elaborate intrigue of the last scene improves upon the old story (p.349). He offers an interesting theory when he conjectures that a half-conscious reason for Shakespeare's alteration of the denouement was his desire to spare Helena the scene of humble and tearful petition with which the source closes (p.350). Parrott maintains that Shakespeare's main interest is in the character of the heroine with whose passion he sympathizes, but that after she steals away, leaving the sonnet letter, we see the end of Shakespeare's Helena. "...it is hard to imagine the Helena of the earlier acts stage-managing the complicated business of intrigue and deception which ends the play" (p.307). What Parrott and more than a few other modern critics ignore in their attempts to see Helena as a consistently noble heroine, is that we must take her character as a whole. Just because her actions in the latter part of the play mar one's conception of her as formed from the first part does not justify an arbitrary dismissal.

As soon as Helena begins to do things which some critics feel are inconsistent with the appropriate behaviour of a beautiful and well-bred young woman, they explain away the discrepancy by saying that Shakespeare lost interest in her or in the play. Parrott feels that Shakespeare is indifferent to all but the heroine and Lavache and Parolles in this play (p.355). Parolles, who the critic says was probably recognized by the audience, has, unlike the domestic Fool, a definite part to play in the action. His dominance over Bertram is designed to show the latter's blindness to real worth in Helena (p.353). It takes the exposure of Parolles to open Bertram's eyes, and Parrott says that it seems a pity that this recognition of his error was not somehow causally connected with Bertram's final reunion with his wife. Parrott's verdict that this is one of the least pleasing of Shakespeare's works is reiterated - "There is less true Shakespearian humor in All's Well That Ends Well than in any other of his comedies..." (p.354). It is interesting to note that, in a different context, Parrott expresses the view that almost the only characters in his comedies for whom Shakespeare seems to have a certain aversion are complacent young gentlemen of rank and fashion - like Bertram in All's Well That Ends Well (p.406).

Mr. E.M.W. Tillyard's very interesting and compact little book on Shakespeare's Problem Plays (so-called

because of the inclusion of Hamlet) is the result of the Alexander Lectures at the University of Toronto 1948-49. In his Introduction he establishes his approach to certain fundamental issues underlying any discussion of the plays and states some of the common characteristics of the group.[60] He finds personal explanations of the supposed gloom in the Problem Plays superfluous; Shakespeare was in a mood of speculation and abstraction, but he was not pessimistic. All's Well That Ends Well, the most melancholy of the four plays, is not cynical; the protagonists are realistic, and Shakespeare's interest in the detailed working of their minds exemplifies a quality common to the Problem Plays: Shakespeare's acute interest in observing and recording the details of human nature. Tillyard points out three details the plays have in common - in each a young man gets a shock, in at least three the business that most promotes the growth of these young men is transacted at night, and in Troilus and Cressida and All's Well That Ends Well Shakespeare's interest in the old and new generations and in old and new habits of thought is strikingly apparent. To Tillyard's mind All's Well That Ends Well, like Measure for Measure, abounds in moral statement, with the two French Lords forming the "punctum

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[60] E.M.W. Tillyard, Shakespeare's Problem Plays (Toronto, 1949), pp.3-13.

indifferens." In his chapter specifically devoted to an analysis of All's Well That Ends Well (pp.94-123), Tillyard tries to get at the reasons for its failure. He finds the play very well plotted, but feebly executed. Shakespeare's imagination, he says, is not sustained, and this lack of imaginative warmth shows in a defective poetical style. Shakespeare had also to cope with the problem of how to fit a highly realistic set of principal characters into a plot belonging to folk-lore, and he was not successful in resolving his difficulty. It is quite possible, asserts Tillyard, that this difficulty explains his imaginative failure; when the crises came, Shakespeare evaded the attempt and resorted to the conventional and sententious. Tillyard speaks plausibly and reasonably of some of the subsidiary problems of the play: the character of Helena, the bed-trick, the virginity repartee, and the immature couplets. He goes on to discuss some of the positive qualities of the play. He sees All's Well That Ends Well as full of suffering, and the antithesis between the new and old generations discouraging but interesting. Although the characters are realistically presented, the world they inhabit he finds cold and forbidding. Tillyard points out a number of places where he finds a pious and theological tone and he discusses the possibility of a Morality motive in All's Well That Ends Well. He deals finally with the

characters, and maintains that it is in the delineation of the main characters and the solid merit of the plot that the play's virtue most consists. He concludes the chapter with some very worthwhile analyses of Parolles, Helena (whom he regards as no more interesting than Bertram), and Bertram. In the ending he sees psychological truth and fairy-tale conventions at one. In the Epilogue, Tillyard, showing where the Problem Plays take their place in Shakespeare's general progress as a dramatist, advances the theory that All's Well That Ends Well and Measure for Measure are united with Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, and The Tempest by way of the genuine and prominent themes of mercy and forgiveness which are contained in all five plays. Tillyard traces briefly Shakespeare's growing skill in treating these themes, until from the early artistic failures, he achieves the success of The Winter's Tale (pp.146-150).

Although Virgil K. Whitaker in his essay "Philosophy and Romance in Shakespeare's Problem Comedies" deals with Measure for Measure and Troilus and Cressida, his ideas apply to All's Well That Ends Well as well. They are relevant even in an analysis of the criticism of the latter play because his views and trend of thought follow that of Tillyard so closely. Whitaker develops the hypothesis that Shakespeare wrote the problem comedies because he wanted to apply to comedy the same fund of ideas

and the same philosophic analysis of human action that he employed in writing the mature tragedies, but the romance material, formerly adequate for his romantic comedies, was unable to support close intellectual analysis.[61] A number of the recent critics seem to be bent on the investigation of the problem comedies in terms of the philosophic systems there embodied, and they explain the failure of or the confusion in the plays by saying that Shakespeare could not integrate the serious and mature thought with the simple source plots which he patched up in the easy-going fashion of the romantic comedies. This emphasis on the philosophic thought in the problem comedies leads these critics back, in the case of All's Well That Ends Well, to the same conclusions as those reached by the moralistic commentators of the nineteenth century - namely, that the philosophic idea, or the moral of All's Well That Ends Well is that merit goes before rank.

Muriel Bradbrook, in an article in the Review of English Studies entitled "Virtue is the True Nobility"[62] and in her summary of the article in her discussion of All's Well That Ends Well in her book Shakespeare and Elizabethan Poetry,[63] also sees this drama as a moral play

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[61] Virgil K. Whitaker, "Philosophy and Romance in Shakespeare's Problem Comedies," The Seventeenth Century: Studies in the History of English Thought and Literature from Bacon to Pope (Stanford, 1951), pp.339-354.

[62] Muriel Bradbrook, "Virtue Is The True Nobility," Review of English Studies, New Series, I (1950), 289-301.

[63] M. Bradbrook, Shakespeare and Elizabethan Poetry (London, 1951), pp.162-170.

which depends upon a central theme of ethical significance. But her explanation for its neglect and failure is more penetrating than that of those critics who feel that the play fails because of the lack of integration of the philosophic thought with the simple source plots. She maintains that in All's Well That Ends Well we have a personal and an impersonal theme in conflict. "It began by being a 'moral play', a grave discussion of the question of what constituted true nobility, and the relation of birth to merit." But this "social problem", she says, is here bisected by the human problem of unrequited love. "The structural centre of the play is the King's speech on nobility, by which he justifies Hellen's marriage: the poetic centre is Hellen's confession of her love to the Countess" (p.162). Bertram, whom Miss Bradbrook finds magnificently drawn, dislikes Hellen on social, not personal grounds and his rejection of her must be seen, not in isolation, but as linked with his choice of Parolles. This critic says that the first dialogue of Hellen and Parolles, the Liar and Vertue (as she designates them), must be regarded as the encounter of Bertram's good and evil angels, who, if this were a morality play, would contend for his soul in open debate. It is probably because of her special view of the play in this light that she is one of the very few critics who feels that the last scene is an improvement on the

source. This is because she sees the last scene as a "judgment", in which stratagems are practised by Diana and Hellen in order to extract Truth from the Accused and in which the ingenuities of Hellen (though not to modern taste), have as their purpose conversion. Miss Bradbrook maintains that in the case of All's Well That Ends Well, we find that for once the poet and the dramatist are pulling different ways. "Two incompatible 'species' are mingled because the personal aspect awakened to life. The play is a genuine hybrid, one of the few examples of Shakespeare's failure to master and control his form" (p.169).

The approach of Harold C. Goddard to the study of Shakespeare is highly subjective, and he believes that there are as many interpretations of Shakespeare's plays as there are readers. Many of his own interpretations are not only radically individualistic, they are at times diametrically opposed to all the established and traditional views as well. In his book, The Meaning of Shakespeare, he maintains, for example, that Shylock is better than Antonio, that Katherine is the real victor in The Taming of The Shrew, and that Henry V is full of irony.[64] In a review of this

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[64] It is interesting to note that in the interpretation of The Taming of The Shrew presented at the Canadian Stratford Shakespearian Festival in 1954 many critics felt that Katherine was portrayed as triumphant over Petruchio. Publicity releases indicate that Shylock is to be portrayed as the noble victim of Antonio's arrogance in their forthcoming production of The Merchant of Venice this summer.

book, Robert A. Law says, "The reader removed from Goddard's personal charm will scarcely accept his standard of values."[65] Goddard looks for the informing core of a play within the play itself and firmly refuses to be concerned with historical background. In his discussion of All's Well That Ends Well (pp.424-35) he refuses to accept Helena's behaviour in Florence on the grounds that she acted as had a long line of folklore heroines and so would have her actions accepted by an Elizabethan audience. His contention is that a work of art must be judged by the impression it makes on us, not on somebody in the past; otherwise we are taking it not as a work of art, but as an historical document. For this reason he maintains that if we regard the play as a sort of folk - tale with a certain kinship with the Patient Griselda story, as a drama that portrays the struggle between Helena and Parolles for possession of Bertram, then we must concede that Shakespeare managed it rather badly. The play is not saturated with romantic atmosphere: Bertram is blackened too much and Helena is a romantic heroine only until her marriage. Goddard refuses to accept Helena's actions in Florence on the basis of traditional acceptance and so says, "The question is, then, whether Helena is psychologically all of a piece or whether she is two incompatible women made so by a contradiction between

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[65] R.A. Law, Shakespeare Quarterly, III (1952), 85.

the way Shakespeare originally conceived her and the exigencies of his plot" (p.428). There is another way in which the play can be interpreted; "as a second and less clandestinely ironical Two Gentlemen of Verona" (p.430). In this interpretation, Parolles, the seducer of Bertram, becomes centrally important and the incident of the drum (frequently held to be mere theatrical padding) is significant as an elucidation of the main theme. Goddard believes that throughout Shakespeare's work we see evidence of his belief in the radical identity of offensive war and sexual lust, and that in All's Well That Ends Well we see Bertram turn from love and peace to adultery and mercenary war. He explains how the drum incident opens Bertram's eyes to the character of Parolles and our eyes to the character of the man Parolles corrupted. Goddard offers an ingenious analogy between the tricking of Parolles by his companions and the consequence, and the tricking of Bertram by his wife and the result. He maintains that the drum incident once and for all identifies Bertram's moral conduct with that of Parolles. Worth noting too is Goddard's view of the King, whom he sees as a radical democrat in theory but a feudal monarch who insists on his royal prerogatives in practice. Shakespeare was not in the habit of expressing himself in long moral harangues, and when one of his characters does, says Goddard, he can almost always be counted on to contradict his words by his action very

shortly after. The King's speech on equality in All's Well That Ends Well is radical in sentiment in the view of this anti-historical American critic. Apparently oblivious to the Renaissance conception of true nobility, Goddard mistakenly argues that the King, after proving with the eloquence of a French Revolutionist that birth and place as such are nothing, immediately turns to invoke the power of his place to compel Bertram to marry against his wishes (p.399).[66] This highly individualistic and original critic believes that the meaning of the abrupt conclusion of the play is left to the interpretation of the reader. Those who accept the folklore precedents will accept the miracle; those who scent irony will italicize the two words "seem" and "if" of the King's closing couplet. Goddard goes on further to speculate that perhaps Shakespeare himself intended the play to be an interrogation; perhaps a hesitation between possibilities was the very effect at which he was aiming.

Although W.H. Clemen's book about Shakespeare's imagery, Shakespeare's Bilder, was first published in 1936, the English version, revised and augmented, entitled The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery, was not published until 1951. In his Preface to the English work Dover Wilson,

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[66] See Chap. IV pp.137-145 of this Thesis.

although he acknowledges the interest of Miss Spurgeon's work, states his objection to her statistical method which he finds ill-suited if not at times misleading when applied to a work of art. He points out the distinction between her method, which was statistical, and her aim, which was to throw light upon the mind of Shakespeare the man and Professor Clemen's method, which was organic, and his aim, which was to elucidate the art of Shakespeare the poet - dramatist. In his own introduction to the book, Professor Clemen states that his aim is to describe Shakespeare's imagery in its separate phases and forms and show its connection with Shakespeare's general development. His purpose is to trace the development of Shakespeare's imagery throughout his work and to consider it as an integral part of the more complex evolution of his dramatic art. In Clemen's chapter, "Imagery in the History of Shakespeare Criticism," he draws attention to the work of a neglected eighteenth century writer, Walter Whiter, whose book, A Specimen of A Commentary on Shakespeare (1794), shows that he was one of the first to grasp the mystery of Shakespeare's imagery (p.13). The rediscovery of Whiter proves that he had shown an interest in Shakespeare's use of language that was not taken up again until the twentieth century by Msgr. F.C. Kolbe, Mr. E.E. Kellet, Miss Spurgeon, and Mr. Edward Armstrong. Whiter, under the influence of Locke's doctrine of the association of ideas,

inquired into the process of the formation of imagery through association; he gave examples of Shakespeare's use of imagery and showed his repeated use of the same cluster of images. After indicating the long period of neglect of Shakespeare's style and language, Clemen pays tribute to the work of Caroline Spurgeon, and at the same time sets forth the basic difference between the conception underlying her study and his own. Miss Spurgeon, he says, holds that the fact that Shakespeare preferred certain groups of images reveals his sympathies and dislikes. His own conviction is that Shakespeare's choice of an image at a given moment in a play is determined far more by the dramatic issues arising out of that moment than by his individual sympathies (p.15). The only direct mention of All's Well That Ends Well in this book is the use of a quotation from the play as an example of the image which is merely suggested and is a sign of the intensive penetration of the language by the "imagery-consciousness." Often, says Clemen, we have no concrete basis for the metaphor of a passage but merely verbs of action which are connected with an abstract content. He then quotes four lines, II, iv, 45-48, to serve as an illustration (pp.77,78). Clemen mentions All's Well That Ends Well indirectly on one other occasion, in discussing the growing connection between imagery and character in Shakespeare's "middle period." He qualifies his remarks by

saying that the differentiations among the language of the various characters is as yet restricted to certain outstanding types of whom Parolles is one (p.119).

B. Ifor Evans, whose interest in Shakespeare's language has already been mentioned, has one of the most sensible approaches to the whole problem of verse in the theatre. In his Introduction to his book, The Language of Shakespeare's Plays, he emphasizes that "imagery, however brilliant and original, is only one part of Shakespeare's language." He believes that too often critics interested in the question of Shakespeare's imagery think of Shakespeare's language as something "detached from the theatre, and separate from the problems of the dramatist." His view is that the poetry must be adjusted to the dramatic action, that the playwright must be not only a poet but a dramatist as well. Evans' view, besides being opposed to that of the critics who regard Shakespeare's language only as poetry, is also antithetical to that of F.W. Bateson who says that he holds that "drama, including poetic drama, is essentially a form of prose because its media are not words but ideas - especially, of course, those ideas that come under the heading of 'character in action'."[67] Evans feels that verse has been welcomed back into drama on the stage and that the

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[67] F.W. Bateson, English Poetry and the English Language (Oxford, 1934), p.24n.

problem of the writer of poetic drama is to adjust his dramatic verse to narrative action. He surveys Shakespeare's plays to show how the dramatist struggled with and worked out the problem of the function of poetry in drama, and the relation of the language to the plot. Language delighted Shakespeare and he had to learn gradually that words must be the servants of drama. In Evans' discussion of the "dark comedies" (pp.107-122) he treats Measure for Measure first because he finds that its language has the strongest links with the preceding plays. This play, with the other dark comedies, marks a profound stage in the development of Shakespeare's language. There is in this play a compression of the sense, "a closely packed argument... . Verse is now more closely, or possibly even more aridly conditioned to an argument from which gracious similitudes and an easy flow of language are eliminated" (p.108). There is a change to argument and analysis from a balanced rhetoric. "Delight in the patterns of speech for their own sake has gone ... . Instead there is argument, analysis, compression....an over-curious searching....a questioning, with a sterner use of words to explore the enigma" (p.113). Evans' feels that similar problems are aroused by All's Well That Ends Well, although the language falls far short of that in Measure for Measure. He speaks of the mixture of the earlier and later visions in All's Well That Ends Well; a number of passages belong to the mood of the earlier

romantic comedies while others show evidence of the later, more inquiring spirit of Measure for Measure. There is some ill-balance between the two moods; the earlier is now inappropriate and the later not fully considered, "as if the vision had not fully conceived the new way which the creative power was leading it" (p.114). Evans offers several interesting examples of the earlier manner and points out parallels with earlier plays. He says that the strength of Measure for Measure is in the argument, and in the fresh mobilization of language for that end, but that "in All's Well That Ends Well the argument fails to develop, so that we are left with some incidents of the newer style without its fundamental purpose" (p.115). He maintains that if the argument had been expanded, it would have been a variation on the same theme: the strange deception that there is in life. He finds that in All's Well That Ends Well "what clearly asserts itself is the anti-romantic element of which Parolles is the main spokesman" (p.116). His speeches and actions are different from the comic bawdiness of the earlier plays, which was lighthearted. Now the comedy is more savage, almost cruel. Evans points out the difference in the handling of the theme of the undesirable self-restraint of virginity in the sonnets and by Parolles. He sums up his analysis of the language of the dark comedies with the adjectives "abrupt and strident";

the diction is hot and distempered with the violence of the questing (p.178).

From this survey of the criticism written on a relatively neglected play we have seen that the neat classification of Shakespearian scholarship not only over-simplifies and too easily disposes of the whole problem of the relationship between the critic and his age, it also ignores much significant work. This survey has also pointed out the eclecticism of the approach to the play of the twentieth century critics, and the strong links that a number of recent studies have with earlier criticism. The critics of the twentieth century cannot only not be labelled as exclusively preoccupied with the art and poetry of Shakespeare, but the approach of many of them to All's Well is reminiscent of the work of earlier critics. Many of them explore and develop ideas or adopt approaches first mentioned in previous centuries. The sort of romanticized character study exemplified in the writing of Mrs. Jameson turns up again in George Gordon, the view of All's Well as a moral play expounded by Gervinus is further developed by Muriel Bradbrook, the study of Shakespeare's imagery begun by Whiter and long neglected is newly investigated by Miss Spurgeon, Dr. Clemen, and Edward Armstrong, the theory of the disillusioned period in Shakespeare's life mentioned by Dowden is repeated by E.K. Chambers. If we

were to insist on categorizing Shakespearian scholarship, we would have to admit that many of the most interesting and penetrating critical studies presented in our century are anachronistic.

CHAPTER II

Interpretation of Helena's Character

The previous survey of the critical comments on and evaluations of All's Well That Ends Well has brought to the fore not only the vast divergences of opinion which this play provokes, but also many of the problems which this neglected drama poses. Much of the lack of agreement seems to center around the controversial central figure of the heroine Helena. For this reason, I have gradually come to the conclusion that a discussion of this controversial central figure, with an attempt to understand her position in relation to Shakespeare's Elizabethan philosophy, would be both a worthwhile and interesting study.

We have seen opinion on Helena range from regarding her as a noble altruist to a ruthless opportunist. She has been praised for being "radiant of a moral and spiritual grace", and castigated for being as ruthless as Tarquin and less pleasant than Ann Whitefield. Nor has either the eulogy or the condemnation been consistent in terms of time, or characteristic of one period, although praise of Helena was more common in the nineteenth century

and the criticism is closer to our own day.

A number of the critics who see a discrepancy and inconsistency in Helena's character, and feel that they must acknowledge this, account for this upset of their idealized portrait with the theory that Shakespeare lost interest in the second half of the play. This loss of interest in the actions and characterization of the central figure of the play serves a two-fold purpose - it explains not only the conflicting aspects of Helena's characterization but also accounts for the failure of the play. I feel that this explanation is too simple. It evades the issue. It reminds me of what the semanticists call the "two-valued orientation", the tendency to see things in terms of two values only, affirmative and negative, good and bad. This tendency to think in opposites, to feel that what is not "good" must be "bad" and vice-versa, does not do justice to Shakespeare's portrayal of the heroine of All's Well That Ends Well. Helena does not have to be either a noble martyr or a calculating schemer. She has a complex, many-faceted character, and does not have to be reduced either to a movie heroine or villainess.

Our historical critics have been unanimous in their contention that the Elizabethans would have approved of Helena. Critics like Lawrence base their arguments on

the fact that the plot consists of familiar folk-tale material that would be unquestionably accepted, and critics like Bradbrook see the play in terms of a moral allegory on the theme of true merit going before rank. But there is a problem, if we take the historical point of view, that these critics have neglected to discuss. Was not ambition condemned by the Elizabethans? Did not rising above one's station disrupt the chain of being and violate the laws of hierarchy? What was Shakespeare's attitude toward ambition? How did he treat the problem of ambition in his other plays? How did he reconcile his belief in the order theory with a sympathetic portrayal of Helena? These are some of the questions that a study of All's Well That Ends Well aroused in my mind; these are some of the problems that I shall attempt to discuss in this section of my thesis.

At the outset, I must establish my interpretation of the character of Helena. I see her as a complex and intriguing woman, as are the other heroines of Shakespeare's comedies. But she is more difficult to analyze than they, because of the plot of this play. She has many of the qualities of Rosalind and Beatrice, courage and wit, decisiveness and intelligence, but she is placed in an even less pleasant situation than they by the exigencies of the plot. She is never the passive martyr, not even in the beginning. She wants Bertram, and she

will work and even scheme to achieve her goal. She is capable not only of taking advantage of every opportunity, but also of creating opportunity if need be. But this single-minded young woman does not become a monster. She combines force and womanliness, resolution and dignity. That this balance can be achieved, and conveyed to a live audience, was admirably demonstrated by the magnetic performance of Irene Worth at the first Canadian Stratford Shakespearian Festival in 1953. I now propose to support my contention that Helena is an ambitious and at the same time charming and attractive heroine by the method of taking my evidence directly from the text of the play. I shall attempt to justify my interpretation of her character by tracing through her speeches and actions the proof that she is an aspiring and ambitious young woman. This aspect of her character must be established before I can go on to discuss the other questions posed above.

In the first scene of All's Well That Ends Well, Helena stands silently on the sidelines while the Countess speaks of her late father, the skilled physician, Gerard de Narbon, whom she is certain would have been able to cure the king. In answer to Lafeu's question, she describes the position of Helena in the household, at the same time as she praises the young gentlewoman's inherited disposition and acquired accomplishments. The only line

which Helena utters while the Countess, Bertram, and Lafeu are present is in response to the Countess's reproach at her tears. She defends herself by saying, simply and quietly, "I do affect a sorrow indeed, but I have it too."[68]

After Bertram's brief reminder that she look after his mother, her mistress, in his absence, and with the departure of her social superiors, we get Helena's first soliloquy. Now she confesses that she does not think of or weep for her dead father; her tears are all for Bertram. She speaks of loving "a bright particular star", who is "so above me." As early as her first real speech in the play, Helena mentions the "ambition in my love." Her position as of the upper-middle class has already been subtly indicated, and she herself is aware from the beginning of her hopeless position vis à vis Bertram; it is not merely a matter of winning someone indifferent to her charms, it is also a matter of aspiring toward one above her social station. In his Introduction Quiller-Couch is disturbed about this contradiction between the dedicated, loyal, medieval woman who wins her love and the strain of the modern, pushing, calculating young woman which he detects in the heroine. We recall Shaw's admiration for her as a feminist. Although I embrace neither of these gentlemen's interpretations, I must concede that even in

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[68] William Shakespeare, All's Well That Ends Well, ed. A. Quiller-Couch and J.D. Wilson (Cambridge, 1929), I. i.55. Subsequent references will be to this edition.

this first soliloquy we are given an indication of the ambition involved in Helena's love for Bertram, although the picture here is of a love-lorn maiden, hopeless in her desire for one so removed.

With the entrance of Parolles and her comment that she loves him for Bertram's sake although she knows him to be a liar, a fool, and a coward, we see evidence of Helena's perception, intelligence, and discrimination. The discussion between the two on virginity is regarded by most editors and critics as a blot on the play, and as degrading to Helena, and they are quick to assign it to an interpolator or collaborator. But Shakespeare's other heroines in the comedies are not squeamish when it comes to a repartee on matters of sex. Helena's frank and free talk is not inconsistent with the characterization of a witty and unprudish young woman. That this ability to engage in repartee on virginity is a reflection on her personal behaviour is a non sequitur. The virtuous girl, armoured by her innocence, who can listen to and exchange risqué remarks, without this being any indication as to her personal morals, is a tantalizing figure, interesting audiences down to our own day - witness the heroine of The Moon is Blue. Even Richard Steele, for all his morals, defended Wycherley's lewd Restoration play, The Country Wife, because it taught the moral that innocence does not lie in ignorance. It was not the unspoiled oafish Margery Pinchwife who was able to withstand the temptations of the loose living around her, but rather the wise, all-

knowing Alithea. Her knowledge and awareness were her protection. As far as the virginity discussion showing an alteration in the text, I am perfectly willing to bow to the superior knowledge of the textual critics like Dover Wilson (p.104), who find it so, But with the opinion of Quiller-Couch as offered in the Introduction of the text I am using I cannot agree. He deplores the "bawdy" conversation because "as we wish Helena to be, ...she would have dismissed Parolles by a turn of the back. Shakespeare degrades her for us by allowing her to remain in the room with this impertinent." Mr. Quiller-Couch sounds like those male critics who like to see Shakespeare's heroines as their ideal bride; he betrays himself with the words "as we wish Helena to be." How he wishes Helena to be is quite beside the point; the point is whether or not this conversation is consistent with the characterization. I see no degradation involved.

As Parolles takes his leave of Helena to answer Bertram's call, her nimble wit betters him in their parting repartee on his courage. The soliloquy which closes Act I scene i is significant.

> Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie,
> Which we ascribe to heaven: the fated sky
> Gives us free scope; only doth backward pull
> Our slow designs when we ourselves are dull.
> What power is it which mounts my love so high?
> That makes me see, and cannot feed mine eye?
> The mightiest space in fortune nature brings
> To join like likes, and kiss like native things.
> Impossible be strange attempts to those
> That weigh their pains in sense and do suppose
> What hath been cannot be: who ever strove
> To show her merit that did miss her love?
> The king's disease - my project may deceive me,
> But my intents are fixed, and will not leave me.
> (I.i.215-228).

She says "Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie"; for the first time she realizes and believes that she has the power to remedy her situation, that the sky gives her "free scope." She voices the self-determination of the woman who will make her own destiny. She asks what woman ever showed her merit who missed her love. And then, suddenly, she speaks of "the king's disease", and sharply breaks off, saying only that her project may deceive her, but her intention is fixed. Helena is thinking of going to Paris to cure the king as early as the end of the first scene, and it is of significance that her plan is mentioned immediately after she speaks of her love. It is difficult, after a close reading of the first scene, to regard her plan to cure the king (although not explicitly stated as such yet), and her obsession to win Bertram as unrelated.

Helena's next appearance in the play is in the third scene of the first act; she enters immediately after Rinaldo, the steward, has made known to the Countess his discovery of her love for Bertram. She addresses the Countess deferentially as her mistress and weeps when that kindly lady affectionately speaks of herself as Helena's mother. Helena, crying that the Count must not be her brother, speaks of his noble and her humble birth and declares herself his servant. Under the Countess's

gentle insistence, the young girl confesses that she wishes the former were her mother as long as that would not make the Count her brother. The Countess gradually extracts from her a confession of her love. Helena humbly speaks of her poor but honest love which does not hurt the Count; she does not follow him, nor will she have him until she deserves him. She says that she knows she loves in vain, but is powerless to prevent her love. This outpouring of her heart closes with a plea for pity:

> To her, whose state is such, that cannot choose
> But lend and give where she is sure to lose;
> That seeks not to find that her search implies,
> But, riddle-like, lives sweetly where she dies.
> (I.iii.211-214).

We should note this speech as it is related to her future actions. Helena, who hardly languishes at home, is quick enough to ask the king for her choice of a husband as her reward. There is another point in this speech which we must remember in the light of her future actions. Helena speaks of loving chastely, and wishing dearly that "Dian was both herself and Love," which Dover Wilson explains as meaning that Diana and Venus were not two but one goddess. She thus makes clear that physical love means little to her (p.133). If this is so, the bed-trick in which she involves herself, although acceptable to the Elizabethans (as the historical critics invariably hasten to assure us), takes on the connotations of a hypocritical and

calculating act. It would seem to make Helena not so much self-sacrificing and faithful as capable of using any weapon to attain her end.

Immediately after Helena asks the Countess's pity for her hopeless state that keen and perceptive lady asks her to admit truthfully if she had the intention of going to Paris. Helena answers forthrightly and simply in the affirmative. Her father had left her prescriptions for a remedy to cure the disease from which the king was suffering. But the persistent and penetrating questioning of the Countess continues; she asks if this was Helena's motive for going to Paris. Helena confesses that it was Bertram who made her think of it; she admits that otherwise Paris and medicine and the king would never have entered her thoughts. It is thus made clear that there is no altruism involved in the cure of the king. The practical Countess asks if Helena thinks the king will receive her aid. The young heroine feels that luck and heaven, even more than her father's great skill, will make her mission successful. She is willing to venture her life on the king's cure. The Countess, surprised at Helena's certainty, offers the girl her permission and blessing, as well as attendants, promising to pray for her and help her all she can.

Lafeu's good-natured bantering with the King in the first scene of the second act leads up to the courtier's recommendation of a wonderful woman physician. The King

lightly agrees to receive her. Helena, entering the royal presence timidly, has to be urged to speak by Lafeu, who bids her say her mind to the King, commenting "A traitor you do look like." This is evidence neither of Helena's essential timidity nor of the failure of her resolution. Her hesitancy is natural on the part of one unaccustomed to officialdom. Her initial behavior brings to mind that of Isabella in Measure for Measure, upon her first audience with Angelo. She too begins her plea hesitantly, and has to be prodded by Lucio. But her hesitancy is not indicative of an indifferent state of mind, it is rather the result of her unfamiliarity with officialdom.[69] Even more than Isabella, Helena must feel strange when ushered into the presence of her King. But his kind and courteous greeting encourages her, and she proceeds to tell him of the cure bequeathed to her by her father which she wishes to tender him. After the King's refusal, she modestly and simply appears to accept his decision, only asking humbly for assurance that her attempt be understood in the spirit in which it was offered. The gracious King, moved by her pretty speech, feels obliged to thank her, adding that he feels that she could not possibly have the art to cure so hopeless a case. This emboldens the girl to return to the persuasion, arguing that the greatest miracles have

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[69] Taken from G.I. Duthie's lecture on Measure for Measure, McGill University, 1953.

often been performed through the weakest ministers. The King, feeling himself weakening, dismisses her. But Helena, although dismissed, has the courage and the tenacity to continue to press her suit, asking him to make an experiment of heaven. She here implies that she is the instrument of God. She hints, says Dover Wilson, that the king turns her away as the kings of old rejected prophets and apostles (p.141). And yet, so confident is she of her own powers, that she doesn't rely on heaven. She says that she knows most surely that her art can cure him:

> Dear sir, to my endeavors give consent,
> Of heaven, not me, make an experiment.
> I am not an imposter, that proclaim
> Myself against the level of mine aim,
> But know I think, and think I know most sure,
> My art is not past power, nor you past cure. (II.i.153-158).

Impressed by her confidence and certainty, the King asks her within what space of time she plans to cure him. And her answer, forty-eight hours, is hidden in that tortured and ridiculous passage on time which Quiller-Couch calls "mere bombast" (p.XII), and Dover Wilson refers to as "mechanical fustian" (p.107). Asked what she will risk, Helena ventures the dishonor of her name or her death by torture. The King feels that one who, with everything to live for, is prepared to risk her life on the outcome, must be divinely inspired. He will try her remedy. After the King's acceptance, Helena reiterates her willingness to die if she fails, but in the same breath, with nary a pause,

she is shrewd and quick enough to ask for a reward if she is successful. Without a second's hesitation, but rather with every indication that such had been her plan all along, Helena demands her choice of a husband from among his vassals:

> Then shalt thou give me with thy kingly hand
> What husband in thy power I will command: (194-195).

She assures him her choice will not be from the royal family. The King offers her his hand, agreeing to her terms and announcing his complete trust in her:

> If thou proceed
> As high as word, my deed shall match thy deed (209-210).

The lengthy and pivotal third scene of the second act is significant not only from the point of view of the advancement of the plot and the King's oft-quoted discourse on merit, but also because of the further revelation of intriguing facets of Helena's character and personality. Dover Wilson says that, despite her blushes, she thoroughly enjoys the interview of the candidates for her hand (p.148). Told by the King to look over the assembled lords, she makes a modest little statement about being a simple maid, and then pauses charmingly, and tells the King she blushes to choose and perhaps be refused. The King reassures her. Then, the cynosure of all eyes (although Lafeu, unable to hear what is transpiring, misunderstands what is going on), she passes down the line, making gay and charming speeches to the four young

noblemen. This is unnecessary if she were not enjoying the whole situation. The three lords who speak are more than willing to accept her, and she thoroughly enjoys, in a very feminine way, both her feeling of mastery of the situation, and of refusing them. The little episode is light and delicate, made so by Helena's poise and grace. And then she comes to Bertram. Her hitherto rather flippant and airy mood seems to change as she addresses him with these words:

> I dare not say I take you, but I give
> Me and my service, ever whilst I live,
> Into your guiding power ... (II.iii.105-107).

After offering herself to him, she pauses, and then announces, "This is the man." Then comes public humiliation of the most personal kind, which she must listen to, while Bertram openly and belligerently refuses her, first on the grounds of her inferior birth, and then, after the King's speech on true merit and virtue and his promise to bestow on her wealth and honour, on the grounds that he does not love her and will not try to. After suffering through this embarrassing and humiliating exchange, Helena's self-respect belatedly returns to her to make her say that she is glad the King is well again, let the rest go. It is then that the King realizes that his honour is at stake and he must force the issue. In this scene we see that Helena is not simply a cold and determined woman stalking her prey; her humble speech when she chooses

Bertram shows she is no ruthless monster. She is courageous and decisive, and yes, ambitious, but through it all she manages to retain her femininity. She can be gay and poised, and she can be humble and embarrassed. Her actions and reactions in this scene are very human and credible, and they gain for her the reader's sympathy despite the nagging thought that it is as a result of her machinations that the King is virtually blackmailing a young man into marriage. She disappoints us, perhaps, when she says nothing at Bertram's ungracious submission to the threats of the King - the young noble does not, after all, admit a change of heart, he merely says that if Helena is "the praised of the king" it is as if she were born so. But the lack of pride exhibited on her part can be regarded as evidence of her desperate desire to marry Bertram, on any conditions.

We learn of the performance of the marriage ceremony indirectly, in the same scene, when Lafeu returns to further expose and abuse Parolles. Lafeu tells the braggart that his lord is married; that he has a new mistress. Almost immediately after the courtier's departure, Bertram enters to tell Parolles that he is resolved not to consummate the marriage. He will leave for the Tuscan wars. It is interesting to note that Parolles merely echoes in bombastic language what Bertram has already resolved. He urges the young nobleman to go to war, it is true, saying that France is a"dog-hole,"

and a "stable," but Bertram himself has already stated that he will go to war to avoid living with Helena. It seems to me that those critics who argue that it is Parolles' influence that leads Bertram astray have not studied the text closely enough. It is true that in Act II, scene i, when Bertram complained bitterly at being kept at court, it was Parolles who initially advised him to steal away, but his suggestion was instantly approved by both the first and second lords. Parolles' direct influence on the headstrong young noble has thus far been almost nil. He merely agrees eagerly with Bertram's own decision to rid himself of Helena. Bertram tells his companion of his plans to send Helena home, to inform his mother of his feelings towards his wife and the reasons for his flight, and later, when he is gone, to write the king. For him

> war is no strife
> To the dark house and the detested wife.(II.iii.295-296).

Helena reappears in the short scene four of the second Act. She speaks with the Clown, asking after the Countess's health. The Clown quibbles. Parolles enters and is outwitted by the Clown, who knows him for a knave and a fool. Unable to answer the Clown's speeches in kind, Parolles suddenly addresses Helena to inform her that Bertram must leave that night before the consummation of their marriage, but that the delay will make it more joyous when it comes. And Helena is here the submissive,

meek, patient heroine whose only response to this news is, "What's his will else?" Parolles' answer is that she immediately leave the king after a suitable apology. She replies with no more than, "What more commands he?" To Parolles' presumptuous answer that she then await Bertram's further pleasure, she merely repeats, "In every thing I wait upon his will." She wishes this reported to Bertram. Gone for the moment is the wilful and ambitious Helena of earlier scenes; she is here as humble and self-effacing as she was when she chose Bertram from among the assembled nobles.

Her manner is still subservient in the next scene when she enters to tell Bertram that she has spoken to the king as commanded. Her manner, in point of fact, is always self-effacing, on the very few occasions that she actually speaks to Bertram. Bertram, on his part, tells her not to marvel at his actions, nor to question them. He gives her a letter to deliver to his mother and adds that he will see her in two days. Although the young noble is obviously lying to her with his reassurances, I see in his behavior no deliberate desire or attempt to hurt her. He has, thus far, displayed no deliberate sadism or cruelty. He is, on the contrary, telling her the sort of lies one occasionally tells another in order to avoid being more cruel. I concede that we do this for our own sakes, too, in order to avoid the discomfort of a scene; and, in this case, because Bertram's main thought is to

get away, his motive is probably primarily selfish. But, notwithstanding this point, I think we can safely say that so far Bertram's actions have not been unnecessarily cruel and reprehensible. When Helena responds so docilely to his reassurances:

> Sir, I can nothing say,
> But that I am your most obedient servant (II.v.74-75).

he has the grace to be embarrassed. No one that was enjoying the situation would react so. His continuing abruptness and curtness are a result of his intense embarrassment at Helena's further supplicatory and obsequious words. And then comes that tense moment when Helena humbly and brokenly begs him for a kiss. Although the way in which this entreaty is made is dependent upon the actress playing the part (there seems to be nothing in the text to indicate how it should be made), it seems to me, from Helena's previous behaviour in this scene, and the last, to be made, not "prettily", as one critic suggests, nor coyly, but rather pathetically. In her few direct dealings with Bertram, this otherwise courageous and intelligent young woman seems to lose all vestiges of pride and self-respect and play the part of a pathetic petitioner. It is also significant that her behavior here belies her earlier assertion to the Countess that she is not interested in the physical side of love. For even after Bertram's obvious and rude dismissal, she stays to plead for a kiss from him. Bertram ignores her request

and after she leaves he vows never to return home while he can stay at war.

In the second scene of the third Act we find Helena back at the palace of Rousillon. The Countess, already informed by a letter from Bertram that the marriage has not been consummated and that he has run away, is displeased with her "rash and unbridled" son both for acting against the desires of his good king and for disdaining a girl so virtuous that the king himself had sponsored her. When Helena enters, sobbing that her lord is gone forever, the kind and calm Countess takes her in her arms and tries to comfort her. Helena shows her Bertram's letter, referring to it as "my passport." Dover Wilson points out that the allusion is to a beggar's permit; an indication of Helena's bitterness (p.160). The miserable young girl reads the letter aloud, which contains the conditions that she cannot call him husband until she obtains the ring from his finger and conceives a child of which he is father. While the Countess is questioning the two gentlemen as to Bertram's whereabouts and intentions, Helena breaks in to read the cruel last line of Bertram's letter, "'Till I have no wife, I have nothing in France'." The Countess, angered at these words, says that only Helena is too good for him. Upon learning that Parolles accompanied Bertram, her reaction shows that she sees through that "tainted fellow", but it also is typically maternal (despite her previous

disavowal of her son) in that she blames him for her son's actions:

> My son corrupts a well-derived nature
> With his inducement. (III.ii.86-87).

The Countess goes out with the two gentlemen and Helena, left alone, gives expression to her misery and guilt in the soliloquy which closes this scene. She repeats the last line of Bertram's letter and immediately resolves that he will have no wife in France. She is overcome with guilt for having chased him from his country and exposed him to war. She invokes the "leaden messengers" not to touch her lord. She feels that if Bertram is shot, she is responsible for it; if he is killed, she is the cause of his death. In this soliloquy we are witness to the human reaction of a basically fine and responsible person who suddenly realizes what a combination of her ambition and desire has driven her loved one to. Helena is not simply a ruthless opportunist out to attain her own ends without regard to the consequences. She has suddenly realized what her actions have resulted in, and she is overcome with remorse. She continues, "come thou home, Rousillon... I will be gone:" and Dover Wilson regards these words as confuting the notion of some critics that Helena pursues Bertram to Italy (p.160). The whole problem of whether or not Helena deliberately follows Bertram to Italy is a difficult one to decide; the text seems to be devoid of clues. The coincidence, however, is a little hard to

swallow, for, once there, Helena is again the decisive and enterprising young woman of the earlier scenes. At the moment of this soliloquy, however, for the first time fully cognizant of the situation into which she has forced Bertram, she is resolved to leave Rousillon since it is her presence, she thinks, that keeps him away. She plans to steal away during the night. At this point I believe that Helena is completely sincere in her self-condemnation and in her hastily improvised plan to leave surreptitiously; her state of mind is confused and unclear and she is incapable of thinking beyond the moment.

We see further evidence of her self-condemnation in the fourth scene, when the Steward reads to the Countess the letter Helena has left behind. Humble and penitential in tone, the letter says that she has become a pilgrim in order to amend her faults. Helena herself says, "Ambitious love hath so in me offended." She is conscious throughout the play of the element of ambition in her desire for Bertram. She begs the Countess to write her that Bertram has returned from war, and again blames herself for sending him to battle. The letter closes with:

> 'He is too good and fair for death and me,
> Whom I myself embrace to set him free.' (III.iv.16-17).

The repetition in the letter of the self-castigation and consequent self-sacrifice results in a mitigation of the impact conveyed by the soliloquy. There we could feel the

sudden realization of responsibility and guilt Helena experienced immediately after reading Bertram's letter. But when she repeats in writing, which is a deliberate act, that she sent him forth

> From courtly friends with camping foes to live,
> Where death and danger dogs the heels of worth (14-15).

we cannot refrain from wondering if she was completely unaware of the fact that Bertram was a very restless courtier who was itching to prove his honor in war before his forced marriage. His was not the case of the young man who bitterly exposes himself to death to escape an intolerable situation at home. His forced marriage only provided the immediate impetus to a plan of action already resolved on. After living in the same house with him, it is difficult to believe that Helena was completely ignorant of his soldierly ambitions. The only explanation that can be offered is that after acting so quickly and decisively to achieve a long-cherished dream, Helena is so wracked by self-condemnation when she realizes the damage wrought by her actions that she loses her sense of perspective and assumes the guilt for something that was not completely of her doing.

The next time we see Helena, in the fifth scene of the third act, she is disguised as a pilgrim. When she is asked by the Widow of Florence who, with her daughter Diana and other citizens, is waiting to watch the soldiers march by, if she knows the Count Rousillon,

she replies that she has heard of him, but has not seen him. Her response to the Widow's questions leave me with the uneasy suspicion that Helena is not as innocent of Bertram's whereabouts as Dover Wilson would have us believe. Her initial impulse to disappear and not to plague him again was undoubtedly sincere, but in this scene she is in such complete possession of herself that I get the impression that she is once more master of her situation. If she were in complete ignorance of Bertram's whereabouts (and she was present when the two gentlemen told the Countess that Bertram was on his way to Florence to join the Duke's army), and was not following him, it is an amazing exhibition of self-control for her to answer the Widow's questions so unhesitatingly, with no break or pause in her speech. When the Widow tells her of a countryman of hers who has done worthy service, Helena quickly asks, "His name I pray you." At the Widow's answer, "The Count Rousillon: know you such a one?" she immediately replies:

> But by the ear, that hears most nobly of him:
> His face I know not. (III.v.49-50).

Her only motive in lying can be to see what information she can get about him while her own relationship to him is as yet unknown. Both her lack of surprise at hearing that he is nearby, and her concealment of her identity from these citizens of Florence lead me to suspect that she has not stumbled here by chance, but rather that she

is once again in command of her fate. Told by Diana that Parolles speaks badly of Bertram's unwanted wife, she agrees that the lady is not worthy of the Count. In her own words:

> In argument of praise, or to the worth
> Of the great count himself, she is too mean
> To have her name repeated - all her deserving
> Is a reserved honesty, and that
> I have not heard examined. (58-62).

Now Helena has been present when the King himself extolled her merit and she has been present when Bertram's own mother praised her worth. Surely she cannot be so unconscious of her own value? Why then this debasement of herself? The only answer seems to be her own intense awareness of the difference between their classes, her own deep consciousness of the separation between their social positions. She mentions "the great count himself" and speaks of herself as "too mean." She never loses sight of the disparity between their stations and as a result she never loses sight of the ambition in her dream. When the Widow gossips that Diana might do Bertram's wife "a shrewd turn", Helena catches her up immediately:

> How do you mean?
> May be the amorous count solicits her
> In the unlawful purpose. (67-69).

Helena's mind is razor-sharp, and we can probably date the germination of her plan known as the "bed-trick" from this moment. And this moment is only a few speeches after her first encounter with these people. As the

Florentine army draws near, Helena asks Diana to point out the Frenchman and his rascally companion. The only reason for this seems to be that she is still playing the part of the disinterested pilgrim. When the troop has passed, the Widow offers to lead her to her home. Helena invites Mariana and Diana to dine with her. She seems already to have her plan in mind and so is intent upon ingratiating herself with these people. All Helena's actions in this scene indicate a completely different state of mind from that of scene two and of the letter in scene four. She is once again in control of her destiny.

At the opening of the last scene of the third act (scene seven) we find that Helena has already informed the Widow of her identity; she is now engaged in convincing the Florentine that she is indeed the Count's deserted wife. This she accomplishes with the aid of her forceful personality and a purse of gold. She then tells the Widow of her plan. Diana is to consent to Bertram's wooing and is to demand of him the ring he wears, a family heirloom. Helena understands that his lust will not deny Diana even the precious ring. Diana will then arrange a meeting with him at which Helena will take her place. Helena's manner is efficient, capable, and confident as she tells the Widow how they will direct Diana. Far from accepting the "impossible" conditions laid down by Bertram as proof of his resolution that he will never accept her as his wife she decisively sets about arranging the means by which

she may fulfil the conditions to the letter. The Widow consents to her plan and tells her to instruct Diana as to how she should act. Helena, neither a dilatory nor a procrastinating woman, decides to attempt the plot that very night.

Before we meet with Helena again, much of the "business" of the plot has transpired, all during one night. Parolles has been "captured", Diana has obtained Bertram's ring and made the midnight appointment with him, Bertram has made his preparations to return to France, has received news that his wife is dead, and has seduced Diana, as he supposes. He has also been present at the exposure of Parolles. In the fourth scene of the fourth Act Helena tells the Widow and Diana that the King himself "shall be my surety"; she must go to him "ere I can perfect mine intents." The King is at Marseilles; they three will go there to see him. She mentions that she is supposed dead, and this recalls to us the conversation between the two lords at the beginning of Act Four, scene three. At that time the second Lord informed the First that two months previously Bertram's wife had left Rousillon to go on a pilgrimage to S. Jacques le Grand. She had accomplished her holy undertaking and there, finally succumbing to her grief, she had died. In reply to the first Lord's, "How is this justified?" he stated that most of the information came from her own letters:

> 2 Lord. The stronger part of it by her own letters, which makes her story true, even to the point of her death: her death itself, which could not be her office to say is come, was faithfully confirmed by the rector of the place. (IV.iii.53-57).

When the first Lord asks if the count knows all this, the answer is an emphatic affirmative. This would certainly serve to confirm my theory that after fleeing from Rousillon Helena engaged in a considerable amount of planning, if not actual scheming. Although she told the Widow that she was on her way to St. Jaques, in her letters she had stated she was already there. How the rector had confirmed her death is a mystery never again alluded to in the course of the play. There seems to be a great deal of manoevering on Helena's part; her actions are hardly hastily improvised. Even luck does not seem to play more than a subsidiary role in the accomplishment of her purpose. It is true that Bertram's solicitation of Diana played into her hands, but her previous planning indicates that if such had not been the case, she would have been prepared to fulfil the conditions by some other means. It is this business of her own letters that serves to confirm the impression created by her speeches and actions while in Florence that she is once more in control of the situation, that she is once more capable of creating the opportunities that will lead her to attain her goal. She tells the Widow that her husband is leaving for home, where, with the aid of heaven and the leave of the king,

"We'll be before our welcome." She expresses her devotion and gratitude to the Widow and promises to provide Diana with a dowry because the latter helped her to her own husband. She then marvels at the strange ways of men, "that can such sweet use make of what they hate." After warning Diana that she must still help her, she promises that soon times will be better. Their waggon is ready, they must be off. She closes with:

> 'All's well that ends well,' still the fine's the crown;
> Whate'er the course, the end is the renown. (Iv.iv.35-36).

Her introduction of the title of the play, a proverbial expression, coupled with her last line in this scene, underlines Helena's philosophy that the end justifies the means. This belief is probably what gave a fine and sensitive woman the strength to engage in scheming and plotting. For there is nothing pathetic about Helena in these last few scenes; on the contrary, she has the upper hand all the time.

The significance of Act V scene i lies in the further revelation of Helena's indomitable will. In this scene, which takes place in a street in Marseilles, we learn from Helena's opening speech praising her companions' loyalty that she and the widow and Diana have been travelling day and night. This is further evidence of her perseverance and drive. Upon the entrance of "a gentle astringer", she engages him in conversation and prettily asks him "to give this poor petition to the king"

and help her to come into his presence. When he tells her that the king is not in Marseilles she is momentarily taken aback, but unlike the widow, she is neither discouraged nor defeated. She repeats, "'All's Well that ends well' yet"; although at the moment the situation looks bad. After all her labour and planning, one more little setback cannot throw Helena. She immediately asks the gentleman where the king has gone. His answer is to Rousillon where he too is going. She asks him to give the king the paper; she will follow as quickly as she can. He agrees to do as she wishes. After thanking him, Helena wastes no more time: "We must to horse again." Helena's courage and endurance and will do not fail her now that she is so near the end of her trials.

Helena herself does not re-enter the play until the very end of the last scene after all the theatrics with the rings, Bertram's desperate fabrications and scurrilous lies about Diana, and Diana's equivocal answers to the King's questions about the ring followed by her paradoxical speech and then her riddle, although of course all Diana's actions were master-minded by the absent Helena. Just when Diana's unintelligible speeches have exhausted the patience of the king who is trying to solve the complicated maze of problems, Helena enters in person. To the King's shocked, "Is't real that I see?"

she answers:

> No, my good lord,
> 'Tis but the shadow of a wife you see,
> The name and not the thing. (V.iii.304-306).

To this the bewildered and by now overcome husband responds, "Both, both. O, pardon!" Helena then tells him that his conditions have been fulfilled, and he immediately promises to love her dearly if this is so. She assures him that it is; if it is not, "Deadly divorce step between me and you!" And with the speeches of Lafeu and the King the tangled business of the last scene ends.

With this analysis of Helena's character and behavior I have attempted to show the complexity of her personality. We have seen her ambition and her decisiveness, and we have also been witness to her embarrassment and her humiliation. She has been shown to be capable of deep remorse and guilt as well as clear-sighted efficiency and strategy. She is an intriguing person; ambitious and forceful, sensitive and charming. If we accept this balanced interpretation of her personality, we must, nonetheless, not pass too quickly over the element of ambition inherent in her make-up. We have seen that Helena is ambitious, she has herself described herself thusly. She clearly aspires above her station. How did Shakespeare treat this problem of ambition in his other plays? What was his attitude toward his other characters who aspired above their positions in the hierarchy?

CHAPTER III

Examples of Shakespeare's Attitude toward Ambitious Characters

My purpose in this chapter is of necessity limited. It is neither to examine all of Shakespeare's plays in order to see how he handled the problem of ambition whenever it arose, nor to analyze all the characters who are motivated by ambition in order to determine Shakespeare's attitude toward them. My discussion of Shakespeare's treatment of ambition in his other plays will be restricted to a number of the more outstanding examples. I shall attempt to show that, as regards ambition and aspiration above one's station, Shakespeare's attitude was one of rejection and ridicule and condemnation and my discussion of some of his plays will be of an illustrative nature, slanted toward proving this point.

In The Tragedy of King Richard II, one of the problems with which Shakespeare deals is that of the creation of disorder as a result of the disruption of the laws of order, nature, and God. Richard is the rightful king, both by inheritance and Divine Right. But his abuses of England have produced disorder, and by his theft

of the property of Henry Bolingbroke he has himself denied the laws of succession and disturbed the doctrine of correspondences. Nonetheless, despite Richard's wickedness and his unfitness to rule, Bolingbroke, by usurping the throne, is guilty of creating disorder. Although he usurps the throne in the name of order, he is himself guilty of an act of disorder. Throughout the rest of his life he is dogged by nemesis; he is never able to expiate his guilt. When in The First Part of King Henry IV, Hotspur refers to Richard as a rose and to Bolingbroke as a thorn he is offering us an example of the doctrine of correspondences. The lower plant was placed in the position of the higher plant by the rebels. This theory of the doctrine of correspondences was part of the order scheme; if order is upset in one sphere, there is a corresponding disruption of order in another. It may be argued that Bolingbroke was not necessarily ambitious and that consequently this example is out of order in this context. The issue of Bolingbroke's ambition is not as relevant here as is the illustration of Shakespeare's belief that one must not venture higher than one's place. Even if the usurpation was motivated solely by altruism, even if it was carried out solely for the sake of good government, Shakespeare shows Bolingbroke suffering for the rest of his life for his crime against the order scheme. He has sinned by seeking to rise above his position in the social

hierarchy and he must suffer for it. The defeated Richard in the last act of King Richard II refers to him as "the mounting Bolingbroke" (V.i.56).[70] The Duke of York describes the triumphant new king as:

> Mounted upon a hot and fiery steed
> Which his aspiring rider seem'd to know, (V.ii.9-10).

The case against ambition is more clearly and explicitly set forth in The Famous History of the Life of King Henry VIII. Cardinal Wolsey, driven by his overwhelming ambition, had become very powerful, and his two great speeches after his exposure and fall from favor deal in the first instance with the transience of greatness and the vanity and futility of ambition, and in the second with its criminality. Some critics maintain that these speeches were not written by Shakespeare. This is not the place either to dispute the point or agree to it; even if they were not written by Shakespeare, they certainly express the views that he and the orthodox of his day held as regards ambition. In Cardinal Wolsey's soliloquy after his exposure by the Dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk, and the Earl of Surrey, he says:

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[70] All references in this chapter are to the Globe edition of The Works of William Shakespeare, ed. William George Clark, and William Aldis Wright (London, 1949).

> Farewell! a long farewell, to all my greatness!
> This is the state of man: to-day he puts forth
> The tender leaves of hopes; to-morrow blossoms,
> And bears his blushing honours thick upon him;
> The third day comes a frost, a killing frost,
> And, when he thinks, good easy man, full surely
> His greatness is a-ripening, nips his root,
> And then he falls, as I do. I have ventured,
> Like little wanton boys that swim on bladders,
> This many summers in a sea of glory,
> But far beyond my depth: my high-blown pride
> At length broke under me and now has left me,
> Weary and old with service, to the mercy
> Of a rude stream, that must for ever hide me.
> Vain pomp and glory of this world, I hate ye:
> I feel my heart new open'd. (III.ii.351-366).

In the same mood of self knowledge and repentance, deeply touched by Cromwell's loyalty to him, he bids the young man to learn from his fall. It is in this speech that he calls ambition a sin.

> Cromwell, I charge thee, fling away ambition:
> By that sin fell the angels; how can man, then,
> The image of his Maker, hope to win by it? (III.ii.340-342).

In Coriolanus Shakespeare shows us the tragedy of a brave man doomed as a result of his excessive pride, egotism, and ambition. One of the tribunes, Brutus, says of him:

> Caius Marcius was
> A worthy officer i' the war; but insolent,
> O'ercome with pride, ambitious past all thinking,
> Self-loving, - (Iv.vi.29-32).

Ambition usually results in a disturbance of the positions in the hierarchy and Shakespeare was opposed to this. His philosophic scheme demanded that every creature accept the obligations as well as the privileges of its place. He

was against the individualist, the isolated man. He believed that proper relationships must be maintained and that everything must consider itself in relation to everything else. A man's duty lay in keeping to his own place in relation to his superiors, his equals, and his inferiors. In thinking of himself as an isolated phenomenon, and by regarding himself as superhuman, Coriolanus is sinning against the law of order. It is Brutus who says:

> You speak o' the people,
> As if you were a god to punish, not
> A man of their infirmity. (III.i.80-82).

Coriolanus's great virtue appears to be his intense patriotism, and great benefit accrues to Rome through his military prowess. But his treachery after his banishment reveals that it was the desire for personal glory and private honour that motivated him, rather than love for his country. The concept of patriotism "is essentially consonant with the order scheme." The individual stands in relation to the whole state; he must remain true to the position he has of right within it. He has privileges, but he also has obligations to his fellow-citizens - the warrior must fight for them all, not for himself alone.[71] Coriolanus, with his pride and ambition and egotism and his god-complex, is a disorder figure. His refusal to keep to

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[71] G.I. Duthie, Shakespeare (London, 1951), p.178.

his place in the order scheme is responsible for his failure as a man. Shakespeare shows us the ruin of a man whose pride and ambition and egotism lead him to set himself above the laws of order and nature.

Shakespeare's condemnation of a great military leader whose over-ambition and excessive egoism provide a danger to the state is more explicitly stated in Julius Caesar. There is much to admire in Caesar; he has advanced the power and glory of Rome, and he is capable of ruling Rome, but he regards himself as a supreme being. He is a super-individualist and Shakespeare was always opposed to the man who rated himself above the welfare of his fellow-citizens. Some of the critics of Rome want to crown Caesar king. This conflicts with the republican ideals of Rome. Caesar is, consequently, a potential tyrant, a man who thinks of himself as a god, an Olympian. The conspirators band together against him because he is aspiring to a position above his station. His crime is that he aspires to step above his equals in a republic. He is guilty of a tragic offence against the traditional hierarchy. A man who arrogates god-head is stepping on to a higher place on the ladder of being than that to which he was assigned. In Brutus's soliloquy before the murder, when he wrestles with himself on the problem of the danger of Caesar's ambition, he actually uses the imagery of a ladder:

> Crown him?-
> that;-
> And then, I grant, we put a sting in him,
> That at his will he may do danger with.
> The abuse of greatness is, when it disjoins
> Remorse from power: and, to speak truth of
> Caesar,
> I have not known when his affections sway'd
> More than his reason. But 'tis a common proof,
> That lowliness is young ambition's ladder,
> Whereto the climber-upward turns his face;
> But when he once attains the upmost round,
> He then unto the ladder turns his back,
> Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees
> By which he did ascend. So Caesar may. (II.i.15-27).

Brutus's actions are motivated solely by considerations of justice and morality, more so than some of the other conspirators, who were perhaps activated by an element of self-interest. There is no taint of personal ambition associated with his decision to lead the conspiracy, it is rather the fear of Caesar's personal ambition that convinces him that the potential dictator must be killed. Cassius knows of Brutus's fear, and when he speaks of throwing the letters in at Brutus's window he says that in the letters

> Caesar's ambition shall be glanced at: (I.ii.324)

In Brutus's first speech after the murder he tells the people not to be afraid:

> ambition's debt is paid. (III.i.83).

His motives are completely sincere; he is convinced he has acted in the best interests of the republic. He has killed his friend, because his friend was a man whose ambition

threatened the welfare of his country. He explains his reasons for killing Caesar to the citizens:

> Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more. Had you rather Caesar were living and die all slaves, than that Caesar were dead, to live all free men? As Caesar loved me, I weep for him; as he was fortunate, I rejoice at it; as he was valiant, I honour him: but, as he was ambitious, I slew him. There is tears for his love; joy for his fortune; honour for his valour; and death for his ambition. (III.ii.23-31).

In Mark Antony's brilliant oration Brutus's justification of the assassination on the grounds of Caesar's excessive ambition is twisted with Anthony's reiteration of:

> But Brutus says he was ambitious;
> And Brutus is an honourable man. (III.ii.91-92).

We have in this play an overt example of Shakespeare's condemnation of the man who shows a disposition to climb above the position which is his own.

Shakespeare's penetrating and fascinating study of what happens to a man in the grip of uncontrolled ambition is presented, of course, in Macbeth. In this plan we see what ambition does to a brave and noble man; we follow the course of a great soul's deterioration. With the murder of his king, Macbeth steps into a higher rank than that to which he is entitled. He has sinned against order, degree, and nature. But his crime is even more heinous than that comitted by, for example, Bolingbroke and Brutus, who also killed their rulers. They had reason to murder; in Brutus's case the motive was entirely altruistic, and in Bolingbroke's there was certainly sufficient provocation.

There are no mitigating circumstances in the case of Macbeth. In Macbeth, a good and kindly king is killed by Macbeth's ambition. Now Macbeth's character is a mixture of good and evil. "He has bravery and nobility counter-balanced by ambition."[72] When we first meet him in Act I scene ii he is the heroic defender of his king against invasion and rebellion. He appears to be the epitome of an order-figure. After his encounter with the Witches he is both "rapt" and afraid, and from then on he is a man torn by internal conflict. He is ambitious and he wants to be king, but he knows that the gratification of his ambition will involve him in crime and he is terrified at this. The soliloquy in Act I scene vii is a piece of self-revelation. In it he confesses that his overweening ambition is his only motive for the murder of a good king.

> I have no spur
> To prick the sides of my intent, but only
> Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
> And falls on the other. (I.vii.25-28).

His imagery of ambition jumping too high and falling indicates his fear that his own ambition will fail. Macbeth is fully aware of his driving ambition. He is essentially an order figure, but there is an element of evil ambition which was dormant but is now called forth

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[72] G.B. Harrison, ed., Shakespeare, Major Plays and the Sonnets, Introduction to Macbeth (New York, 1948), p.831.

by the Witches which conflicts with his essential belief in order. And up to the time of the murder he is harassed by this conflict between ambition and order. At one moment one element has the upper hand, at another, the other. When Duncan, in the fourth scene, names his son Malcolm Prince of Cumberland (thus putting forth his candidate for the throne after his death), Macbeth realizes that he must kill the king before the council decides Malcolm is old enough to be elected. He uses the imagery of falling and o'erleaping here too:

> The Prince of Cumberland! that is a step
> On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,
> For in my way it lies. (I.iv.48-50).

But even when the evil is dominant in Macbeth, this deeply tortured soul still believes in the law of order which he is himself destroying. The wonder he expresses, for example, when he tells of how, on his way to murder his king and guest, he was unable to say "Amen" to the exclamation "God bless us", is almost ludicrous. And when he is king he attempts to rule according to the laws of order, although he has been guilty of disrupting that order. His evil ambition draws him further and further into wickedness and depravity with the murders of Banquo, Lady Macduff, and all her children, until at the end he is a cynic for whom life has lost all significance.

Lady Macbeth is inordinately ambitious too, partly for her husband and partly for herself. She admits

her evil ambition, she is the resolute one, and she fears that Macbeth's belief in order is stronger than his ambition.

> Yet do I fear thy nature;
> It is too full o' the milk of human kindness
> To catch the nearest way: thou wouldst be great;
> Art not without ambition, but without
> The illness should attend it: what thou wouldst highly,
> That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,
> And yet wouldst wrongly win: (I.v.17-23).

She persuades her husband to override his belief in order in the interest of his other desire - the ambition to be king. In the first part of the play, she, who is also essentially an order figure, succeeds more than Macbeth in letting evil ambition rule her. In the second part, the evil ambition in Macbeth gets the upper hand, and she is afflicted with subconscious guilt. She dies defeated; he dies lost.

There is a speech made by Ross which refers to unworthy ambition and its unnaturalness which may merit inclusion here. Upon learning of the flight of Duncan's two sons after the discovery of the murder and the consequent suspicion which has fallen on them, he says:

> 'Gainst nature still!
> Thriftless ambition, that wilt ravin up
> Thine own life's means! (II.iv.27-29).

A major part of <u>King Lear</u> deals with disorder on the family level: that is, with an inversion of the

relationship between father and child. Goneril and Regan aspire above their positions; because of their ambition and lust for power they assume the place of their father. Their actions are not only cruel and heartless, they also violate the theory of order and are consequently unnatural in the Elizabethan sense of the term. The two elder daughters, in giving orders to Lear, are taking the place of their father in the relationship. As soon as Lear gives up his crown and his property he becomes the subject of his two elder daughters. Goneril expresses her contempt for the father that gave up his authority:

> Idle old man,
> That still would manage those authorities
> That he hath given away! (I.iii.16-18).

The words of the Fool reiterate again and again the inversion that Lear has brought about. He tells Lear:

> When thou clovest thy crown i' the middle, and gavest away both parts, thou borest thy ass on thy back o'er the dirt: (I.iv.175-177).

Lear has carried an ass over dirt, instead of allowing the ass to carry him. He has absurdly reversed relationships so that his two eldest daughters, who are beneath him in the hierarchy, are able to assume, wrongly, a higher position, over him. Instead of supporting them, he has given them the opportunity to control him.

The Fool also speaks of Lear's making his daughters into his parents by putting the rod into his

children's hands:

> thou madest thy daughters thy mother: for when
> thou gavest them the rod, and put'st down
> thine own breeches,
> (singing) Then they for sudden joy did weep,
> And I for sorrow sung. (I.iv.188-192).

Instead of retaining disciplinary power over his daughters, he inverted the proper relationship between child and parent. These are just a few of many reminders by the Fool that Lear's initial foolishness was the cause of the inversion of the natural relationship whereby the child is subservient to the parent.

We have seen that Goneril and Regan aspire above their rightful station by desiring the place of their father. But this is not the only crime against order of which they are guilty. Throughout the play they are referred to by names of animals or birds of prey. They are bestial and animal in a predatory sense, and are closer to the beasts than to the angels on the scale of being. In this sense they are again unnatural, they offend again against order, by seeking to occupy a lower position in the hierarchy than is right for humans. Their lust for Edmund is the climax of their evil.

Cordelia, the saintly order figure, who is unable to flatter Lear in the first scene, believes in true filial love and the law of order. When Lear accepts Goneril's and Regan's flattering speeches (and rejects Cordelia), he is asking his two elder daughters for more

love than they should give their father, for they are married and should love their husbands too. Cordelia points this out. Her purpose and her actions are always the opposite to those of Goneril and Regan, and when she lands with the French army, her words explicitly state that there is no ambition in her enterprise:

> No blown ambition doth our arms incite,
> But love, dear love, and our aged father's right:
> (Iv.iv.27-28).

But ambition is a prime motive in the career of one of Shakespeare's most interesting and conscienceless disorder figures - Edmund. He is the unscrupulous Machiavelian villain, the perfect individualist and egotist. He is completely selfish and ambitious, and refuses to accept the obligations and responsibilities imposed by the order philosophy. He is the isolated man, and we watch him climb step by step up the ladder. First he turns his father against Edgar, then he betrays his father and becomes himself the Earl of Gloucester. With Goneril and Regan both in love with him, he waits to see which will be most advantageous to him. When Lear and Cordelia are his prisoners he orders them murdered. There now seems to be nothing standing in his way to the crown.

This sub-plot in <u>King Lear</u> of Gloucester and his two sons masterfully underlines the theme of the main plot with its parallel ideas and imagery and situations. Gloucester makes the same error as Lear - he rejects his

son Edger, who is loving and loyal, and accepts his illegitimate son (a sin against order), who is evil. In scene two, immediately after Lear has, as yet unknowingly, put himself into his daughters' hands, we find that Edmund's lies to his father against Edgar deal with the same subject. Edmund claims that Edgar said that when a father is old "the father should be as ward to the son, and the son manage his revenue" (I.ii.77-79). The shocked Gloucester makes a speech about the disorder apparent on all planes, and speaks of "the bond cracked 'twixt son and father" (118-119). In the same scene Edmund tell Edgar of the prediction he read concerning the effects of the eclipses of the sun and the moon, "of unnaturalness between the child and the parent" (157-158). The parallelism of the subplot points forward to the disillusionment of Lear and emphasizes the disruption of normal relationships between parent and child.

The ruthless ambition of Edmund allows him no scruples. He effortlessly betrays his own father to Cornwall in order to acquire the former's position. He ascends from his position up the hierarchy and his imagery in speaking of the betrayal of his father is that of rising:

> This seems a fair deserving, and must draw me
> That which my father loses; no less than all:
> The younger rises when the old doth fall. (III.iii.25-27).

At the end, Goneril, Regan, and Edmund, the ambitious villains who aspire to positions higher than are theirs by right, are rejected by Shakespeare, who is on the side of order.

In comedy as well as in tragedy we find Shakespeare condemning those whose ambition leads them to aspire above their station and thus disrupt the chain of being and the order system. At the beginning of As You Like It we encounter a corrupt court in which order has been set aside. Duke Frederick rules as a result of having usurped by force the position of his elder brother who is now in exile in the forest of Arden. The ambition of Duke Frederick has been responsible for his commission of two sins against the law of nature: he has disturbed the proper political relationship when, as a subject, he rebelled against his legitimate ruler, and he has violated the harmony of the family relationship when, as the younger brother, he proceeded with enmity against his older brother. He is reformed at the end by the purifying atmosphere of Arden. He had been avaricious and ambitious, but in Arden his wickedness is purged and the good in him allowed to come to the fore. This forest of Arden, set in opposition to the corrupt court environment, is physically uncomfortable, but it is a place of spiritual refreshment. In a song that the exiles sing specific

mention is made of the absence of ambition here:

> Who doth ambition shun
> And loves to live i' the sun,
> Seeking the food he eats
> And pleased with what he gets,
> Come hither, come hither, come hither:
> Here shall he see
> No enemy
> But winter and rough weather. (II.v.40-47).

It is in Twelfth Night that we meet with the man whose social aspirations are not condemned or rejected by Shakespeare so much as they are ridiculed. The servant Malvolio who aspires to become a count through marriage with his mistress is portrayed as a foolish and presumptuous figure of fun. He is satirized by Shakespeare as a social climber, a type that was suspect to the class-conscious Elizabethans. The order philosophy of the Elizabethans rejected the idea of a man occupying a position above that to which he was born and Malvolio is shown to be a ludicrous and affected self-deceiver. Even before he sees the letter "planted" by his antagonists he exposes his aspirations. He daydreams: "To be Count Malvolio!" and assures himself of the possibility by reference to a noblewoman who married her servant. He goes on to revel in daydreams of the splendour that will be his when he is Count Malvolio:

> Calling my officers about me, in my branched velvet gown; having come from a day-bed, where I have left Olivia sleeping, - (II.v.53-55).

His ambitions are worldly and voluptuous; Maria used the word 'Puritan' metaphorically, in the sense of kill-joy, in regard to Malvolio. There is an element of the sensuous in Malvolio's ambition: he pictures nimself lying at ease on a sofa, toying with a rich jewel while he asserts his dominance over Sir Toby:

> Seven of my people, with an obedient start, make out for him: I frown the while; and perchance wind up my watch, or play with my - some rich jewel. Toby approaches; courtesies then to me, - (II.v.64-68).
>
> I extend my hand to him thus, quenching my familiar smile with an austere regard of control, - (72-74).

Such pretensions enable him to be easily "gulled" by Maria's letter, and he is persuaded to appear before Olivia in yellow stockings, cross-gartered. Now, yellow stockings appealed to an Elizabethan audience as definitely plebeian and so Malvolio, dressed thus, appears before his mistress in clothing that virtually shouts that he is a commoner and an outsider.

Romantic, and some modern, criticism tends to sympathize with Malvolio and see him as a pathetic and tragic creature unduly tormented by Sir Toby and company. This view is sentimental, a result of the Romantic Revival and the star system. The Romantics tried to find profundity wherever they could, and the actors starring as Malvolio tried to infuse tragic interest in the character for their own self-interest. But Malvolio is only

part of a social convention and as such is to be regarded as a disagreeable and unattractive offender against the hierarchical scheme. Maria describes him as:

> a time pleaser; an affectioned ass, that cons state without book and utters it by great swarths: the best persuaded of himself, so crammed, as he thinks, with excellencies, that it is his grounds of faith that all That look on him love him; (II.iii.160-165).

Malvolio is also a "humor" character, a character conditioned by the excess of one humor - that of choler. In the Elizabethan view, a choleric man was characterized by such things as pride, arrogance, and the personal ambition to elevate himself. The aspiring mind might be proper in a nobleman, an overbalance of the choleric humor might be expected in the courtier, but it was offensive in a servant. Olivia tells Malvolio:

> O, you are sick of self-love, Malvolio, and taste with a distempered appetite. (I.v.99-100).

And Sir Toby must remind Malvolio of his place:

> Art any more than a steward? (II.iii.122-123).

The steward in Twelfth Night has an overbalance of a humor acceptable in a nobleman and this would underline the emphasis on Malvolio as a social climber. He is not, in the end, purged of his humor of self-love. Shakespeare here presents a character whose pride, egocentricity, vanity, and self-deceit cause him to aspire above his station and imagine marriage with the Countess Olivia. He is thus defying the principle of degree and

offending against the hierarchical system, and as such is mercilessly ridiculed.

In this chapter I have dealt briefly with eight Shakespearian plays, history, tragedy, and comedy, in which the problem of ambition is present, either directly or indirectly, and in which there are characters who aspire above their positions in the hierarchy. I have attempted to show that in every case Shakespeare's attitude toward ambition is that it is a sin against order which results in a disruption of the chain of being. His attitude toward all the characters motivated by ambition who attempt to rise above their proper stations is one of rejection, whether by the method of exposure, condemnation, or ridicule.

CHAPTER IV

Reasons for Elizabethan Approval of Helena

Some of the questions about ambition posed at the beginning of the second section of this thesis have been answered. The historical critics seem to agree that the Elizabethans would have approved of Helena, but we have seen that, despite her laudable qualities, Helena is ambitious; she aspires to marry a noble. We have also seen that Shakespeare was opposed to ambition, that he regarded it as a sin against order, and that he believed that to rise above one's station was to disrupt the chain of being and to violate the law of hierarchy. How then, did he reconcile his antipathy toward ambition and his belief in the order theory with a sympathetic portrayal of Helena? Why did he not reject and condemn Helena as he did his other ambitious and aspiring characters? In this chapter I shall be concerned with the attempt to show why, for a number of reasons, Helena's rising was acceptable. Helena's ambition is different from that of any of Shakespeare's other aspiring characters and her qualities of character are different. Her nature and

accomplishments, as well as her action in curing the king, fulfilled the requirements of what most of the Renaissance writers felt to be the criterion of true nobility. Her performance of a deed of public service provided legitimate ground for her ennoblement. A discussion of the economic and social processes at work during Shakespeare's day will show that, although ambition was regarded as a vice and those aspiring above their station were condemned, in practice the changing economic picture gave opportunity for many to rise, and in certain cases circumstances forced even the traditional Elizabethans to accept the phenomenon.

First of all, I think we should distinguish between Helena's ambition and that of the other characters we have dealt with. Her ambition involved no evil to anyone. One might interject that her aspirations made life uncomfortable for Bertram, and she is perhaps selfish to the extent that she will stop at nothing to achieve fulfilment of herself and her desires, but she is also unselfish in that she wants desperately to serve Bertram.

A number of critics, in discussing the callousness and callowness of Bertram, are certain that with Helena to guide him, he will become an exemplary nobleman. We have noted the opinion of H.N. Hudson who saw Helena as the supreme altruist, and who felt that all Helena's actions are performed for another, not for herself. Hudson

regarded her as the reformer of Bertram.[73] Dowden too argued that Bertram's good was Helena's sole aim and that at the end of the play the young nobleman is safe in her hands; "she will fashion him as he should be fashioned."[74] Charlton, writing in 1938, regarded Helena as the maker of happiness, as the instrument by which the good of others is attained.[75]

Modern psychologists, looking at the situation from Bertram's point of view, would probably find a woman like Helena particularly insidious - she is the kind of person who, in devoting herself completely to another (who, incidently, does not want anything to do with her), fulfils herself in the process. Her subconscious motives, they might say, are entirely selfish. Helena is, on the surface, completely giving, self-effacing, and self-sacrificing in her relations with Bertram, but her other actions demonstrate the implacable will and relentless drive that comprise her essential personality. She will rule Bertram despite her former meekness before him.

Muriel Bradbrook expresses both sides of the problem this way: "Hellen's love, as expressed in her

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[73] See p.14

[74] See p.22

[75] See p.49

three great speeches, is a devotion so absolute that all thought of self is obliterated; yet her action cannot but make her appear, however much more modestly to an Elizabethan than to us, a claimant, and a stickler for her bond."[76]

Now I do not believe that, with all Shakespeare's profound knowledge of and penetrating insights into the secrets of human motivation and nature, we can attribute an interpretation of her character to him that exposes her as a selfish and disordered figure. He treats her situation with kindness and sympathy. We can, I think, safely say that her ambition differs from that of the characters we have dealt with in the preceding chapter in that there is no harm to another involved and there is no usurpation of another's place.[77]

Nor can Helena's desire to marry the count of the household in which she is a ward be compared to that of the steward Malvolio to marry the Countess Olivia - her intelligence and education and charm are in marked contrast to the absurd posturing of a Malvolio, and her position as the daughter of a famous physician and a sort of personal companion to the Countess is obviously higher than that of

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[76] M. Bradbrook, Shakespeare and Elizabethan Poetry, p.169.

[77] She can hardly be said to be usurping the place of Lafeu's daughter. The Maud business is more a part of the complicated intrigue of the denouement than a significant clue to Bertram's actions, despite his declaration of his previous love for her.

a servant.

If we reject the notion that Helena's actions may, in a sense, be detrimental to Bertram (and there is no indication in the play that Shakespeare thought they were), we can see the distinction between her aspiration and that of the characters Shakespeare rejected and ridiculed. Shakespeare admired legitimate individualists, he believed man should be allowed to prosper so long as he did not do so at the expense of others. In Shakespeare's philosophy, "There is room in the scheme for evolution upwards: but forcible usurpation of a place in the scale other than one's own is a sin against the law of order...."[78] Helena's ambition did not involve forcible usurpation, and her education and virtues and values were those of the aristocracy to which she aspired to become a member. The Countess, at the very beginning of the play, says of her:

> I have those hopes of her good that her education promises: her dispositions she inherits, which make fair gifts fairer; for where an unclean mind carries virtuous qualities, there commendations go with pity, they are virtues and traitors too; in her they are the better for their simpleness; she derives her honesty and achieves her goodness. (I.i.40-46).

Dover Wilson, in his Notes, explains "virtuous qualities" as qualities of "virtue," or accomplishments,

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[78] G.I. Duthie, Shakespeare, p.42.

and quotes Warburton's "qualities of good breeding and erudition." The contrast, Wilson says, is between inherited disposition, the "honesty" she derives from her birth, and the qualities and accomplishments she has acquired by education (p.118). This brings to mind the varied interpretations given to the word "virtue". Today it has almost solely Christian connotations, implying moral excellence or goodness and the conformity of life and conduct to moral laws. But a quick glance at the etymology and semantics of the word shows that this is a relatively modern concept. Virtus in Roman times meant physical strength and courage. In the Renaissance the meaning conflicted between the pagan interpretation and the new Christian values of charity and humility. A very powerful concept of Machiavelli's was the Italian word virtu, derived from the Latin virtus. Like the Latin, it might have a moral meaning, but in Italian it more usually indicated strength, excellence and capacity and therefore it can hardly be translated by the English word virtue as that word is now employed. Burckhardt, one of the most reliable authorities on the Renaissance, interprets virtu as a combination of force and intellect.[79] Although Shakespeare, as an upholder of the old order-pattern, was

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[79] J. Burckhardt, The Renaissance in Italy, trans. S.C.C. Middlemore (London, 1878), I, 23n.

firmly opposed to the ideas of Machiavelli, he seems in this context to have used the word virtue, as applied to Helena, at least partially in the Italian sense. Helena, the countess says, is good as well as accomplished. That the young heroine has force and intellect her actions during the course of the play bear out. But she must have more than this to distinguish her from a number of Shakespeare's other ambitious characters, for some of Shakespeare's most memorable villains - Edmund, Iago, Richard III - abound in both force and intellect. Because her virtue is composed of goodness, "honesty," breeding, culture and learning, as well as force and intellect, she has many of the qualities desirable in a member of the aristocracy and so is distinguished from most of the aspiring characters that the Elizabethans despised.

This mention of the qualities desirable in a member of the aristocracy necessitates a brief discussion of what was held to be the requirements of true nobility. The concept of the term gentleman in English, says Elbert Thompson, originally embraced noble birth and long-standing social eminence. Almost invariably this meant the possession of a landed estate which carried with it certain public duties and responsibilities. It also made essential, for the safeguarding of social leisure, the acquisition of numerous social graces and intellectual accomplishments. As a consequence, the meaning of the term gentleman was

widened to include not only birth and rank but also manners, education, and culture. Confusion resulted from this extension of the idea, for how do you distinguish between a high-ranking member of the aristocracy who is devoid of manners and education, and a low-born citizen who is equipped with both integrity and culture? Which one is the gentleman? Which one possesses true nobility?[80]

The discussion of this problem of what constituted true nobility can be traced back to the ancient Greek philosophers. During the sixteenth century the whole question assumed new significance in Italy, and the word courtesy has been chosen to designate the ideal of character and conduct that took root in the Italian courts of the time. The Italian humanists became engrossed in the subject and they set forth their patterns for the true courtier and the refined citizen in their many books of courtesy and etiquette. But they had as much difficulty as the ancient philosophers in determining the exact criterion of nobility and they did not come to unanimous agreement. Dante, in the Convito, explains that some believe that nobility depends on ancient riches and gentle breeding; others consider inherited

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[80] Elbert N.S. Thompson, Literary Bypaths of The Renaissance (Yale, 1924), p.127. Much of the following summary is heavily indebted to the chapter entitled "Books of Courtesy," pp.127-171.

wealth alone sufficient; he himself feels that nobility arises from one's spiritual condition. Dante's view did not, however, win universal acceptance. Although almost all the humanists agreed that virtue could not be dispensed with, even by a person nobly born, they nevertheless felt that virtue and quality, without regard to birth, were not enough.

In one of the earliest English courtesy books, The Institucion of a Gentleman (1555, reprinted in 1568), the unknown author says that no man can justly be called a gentleman who has not the gift of virtue. He classifies noble men into three categories - "the gentle gentle," who is born noble; the "gentle ungentle" who is born of noble family but is himself corrupt; and the "ungentle gentle" who is of lowly birth but who "by his virtue, wyt, pollicie, industry, knowledge in lawes, valiency in armes, or such lyke honeste meanes becometh a welbeloued & hygh estemed man."

But even those who regarded nobility in this way still retained the utmost respect for the upper classes. And the newer gentry were commonly treated with some distrust. Even the author of The Institucion of a Gentleman complained that the new men who had risen out of their place and had become gentlemen owed their new status neither to learning nor merit. Men like Sir Thomas Smith disapproved of the new nobles mainly on the ground that a

gentleman is expected to render exceptional service to the state. As far as Helena is concerned, on all the issues of learning, merit, and exceptional service she satisfies the requirements.

Many Italian writers followed the example of Castiglione's Cortegiano in which he discoursed on the nature and accomplishments of the ideal courtier, and some of these works were immediately translated into English. "In all a compound of spiritual force (vertu), learning, accomplishments, and manners is insisted on" (p.137). With all these qualities Shakespeare endowed Helena.

In the first English courtesy book, Sir Thomas Elyot's The Boke named the Gouernour, published in 1531, Castiglione's ideal is reproduced although it is somewhat modified by a later time and a different environment. But Sir Thomas Elyot discussed not only the qualifications of the perfect courtier but also described in detail the process of education whereby that end could be achieved. In the second book of the Gouernour the author ventured beyond the system of education to consider the spiritual qualities that should animate the gentleman. He took the broad outlook characteristic of the Renaissance. He did not regard birth as the essential quality of nobility and

insisted that the nobleman must possess real inward virtue.[81]

So we see that there seemed to be a tendency in the Renaissance to lay more emphasis than had been laid before upon the part that personal worth and virtue plays in acquiring and maintaining nobility. But we should not go overboard in stressing this point. Birth still played the major role in determining a man's status. Ruth Kelso, in her thesis on The Doctrine of the English Gentleman in the Sixteenth Century points out that "much of the insistence on virtue is intended not to comfort the lowly-born but to admonish the well-born who seem generally to have prided themselves on birth to the neglect of virtue." Nevertheless the slight shift in emphasis indicated that noble birth was desirable for its initial advantage rather than for its assured heritage of personal superiority.[82]

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[81] These courtesy books dealing with the ideal of the gentleman became gradually restricted and contracted, emphasizing only one aspect of gentility, and then later, they degenerated into lessons in behavior and expediency and how to get ahead at court, until the old humanistic conception of the perfectly rounded character disappeared.

[82] Ruth Kelso, The Doctrine of the English Gentleman in the Sixteenth Century, Univ. of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature (Urbana, 1929), XIV, 29.

In All's Well that Ends Well, the King of France presents a picture of his idea of a true noble in his speech about Bertram's father. In welcoming the young noble to Paris the wise and kind old king comments on Bertram's physical resemblance to his late father and adds,

> thy father's moral parts
> Mayst thou inherit too! (I,ii.21-22).

He then reminisces about his old friend:

> In his youth
> He had the wit, which I can well observe
> Today in our young lords; but they may jest
> Till their own scorn return to them unnoted
> Ere they can hide their levity in honour:
> So like a courtier, contempt nor bitterness
> Were in his pride or sharpness; if they were,
> His equal had awaked them, and his honour,
> Clock to itself, knew the true minute when
> Exception bid him speak, and at this time
> His tongue obeyed his hand. Who were below him
> He used as creatures of another place,
> And bowed his eminent top to their low ranks,
> Making them proud of his humility,
> In their poor praise he humble...Such a man
> Might be a copy to these younger times;
> Which, followed well, would demonstrate them now
> But goers backward. (I.ii.31-48).

When Bertram indignantly refuses to marry Helena on the grounds of her inferior birth, the King chastizes him in his famous speech on true merit and virtue, in which he makes clear that he considers virtue and goodness of more importance than wealth and station.

> If she be
> All that is virtuous (save what thou dislik'st,
> A poor physician's daughter) thou dislik'st
> Of virtue for a name; but do not so:
> From lowest place when virtuous things proceed,
> The place is dignified by th'doer's deed:

> Where great additions swell's, and virtue none,
> It is a dropsied honour: good alone
> Is good, without a name; vileness is so:
> The property by what it is should go,
> Not by the title... She is young, wise, fair;
> In these to nature she's immediate heir;
> And these breed honour; that is honour's scorn,
> Which challenges itself as honour's born,
> And is not like the sire: honours thrive,
> When rather from our acts we them derive
> Than our foregoers: the mere word's a slave,
> Deboshed on every tomb, on every grave
> A lying trophy, and as oft is dumb
> Where dust and damned oblivion is the tomb
> Of honoured bones indeed. What should be said?
> If thou canst like this creature as a maid,
> I can create the rest: virtue and she
> Is her own dower; honour and wealth, from me.(II,iii. 124-147).

From the King's attitude toward true nobility, as expressed in the above-quoted speech, we can find yet another reason for Shakespearian and Elizabethan approval of Helena.

The King could not only, as Bertram's feudal lord, compel him to marry Helena, he could also endow Helena with nobility. He says to Bertram:

> 'Tis only title thou disdain'st in her, the which
> I can build up...(II.iii.120-121).

In Elizabethan times the crown could dispense favor as regards nobility. Ruth Kelso explains that Tudor policy had resulted in concentrating political power in the sovereign and making the court the real centre of the country. "By Elizabeth's time the court was looked upon as the chief means of rising, and the crown as the chief dispenser of rewards" (p.14). When, even after the King's speech on virtue, Bertram insists that he cannot love

Helena, the King realizes:

> My honour's at the stake, which to defeat,
> I must produce my power. (152-153).

He tells Bertram:

> It is in us to plant thine honour where
> We please to have it grow. (159-160).

After the King threatens him, Bertram suddenly submits:

> When I consider
> What great creation and what dole of honour
> Flies where you bid it, I find that she which late
> Was in my nobler thoughts most base, is now
> The praised of the king - who, so ennobled,
> Is as 'twere born so. (171-176).

In this scene, we see exemplified not only the King's power to force Bertram to do his will and his power to endow Helena with nobility, but also his power to raise Helena to a position where she is the equal of Bertram in rank and fortune, if not his superior. He tells Bertram:

> Take her by the hand,
> And tell her she is thine: to whom I promise
> A counterpoise; if not to thy estate,
> A balance more replete. (177-180).

As legitimate ground for royal action in conferring nobility, states Ruth Kelso, three qualifications were commonly discussed: virtue, learning, and riches. "The chief claim to distinction was admitted to be virtue, that is, conspicuous personal merit and ability shown in actions beneficial to the state" (p.27). That Helena had private virtue we have already noted in the Countess's

speech about her; in curing the king her virtue became public, conferring benefit on the state. Miss Kelso points out that virtue which was profitable to one 's country was sufficient cause for ennoblement; in ridding a beloved king of a near-fatal malady Helena may certainly be regarded as having fulfilled this requirement. She might also be regarded as possessing the second qualification, learning. The Countess mentions her education, and it was by reason of her wisdom and knowledge (received from her father in the true spirit of the order philosophy) that she effected the cure of the King. Even if we reject the validity of the arguments raised up till now as regards Helena's exceptional position in the hierarchy, this brief discussion of the power of the king rightfully to confer nobility in certain cases proves that, after the curing of the king, Helena cannot be accused of illicit ambition. One may condemn her for aspiring above her station only until she has effected the cure of the king. After the cure she has both merit and virtue - she has performed good for the state and is a legitimate candidate for ennoblement.

Even from the discussion thus far of the way in which ambition was regarded in Shakespeare's day we can see that it is dangerous to oversimplify the issues involved. The whole problem of rising out of one's station was emerging from the theoretical to the practical and immediate. A brief survey of the economic and social processes at work at this time will serve to illuminate the rather

complex picture as well as clarify some of the points already touched upon.

In his book, Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson, L.C. Knights explains that during the Middle Ages the ordinary object of ambition was not so much that of rising out of one's grade as of standing well in that grade. From a quotation of Cunningham which Knights uses we learn that "the citizen did not aim at being a knight, but at being warden and master of his gild, or alderman and mayor of his town." Industrial and commercial enterprises were not yet sufficiently developed to become serious disruptive forces despite the occasional opportunity for individual acquisition that would lead to a man's change of status in the few larger towns.[83]

But in the Elizabethan-Jacobean period there were powerful economic forces at work. Knights, in Chapter II of his book, offers a rapid survey to indicate the extent of capitalistic development in English industry up to the first decades of the seventeenth century. He cautions us to remember that these developments existed in a setting that was still medieval or at least traditional. As he reminds us, it was this coexistence of such fundamentally opposed kinds of economic organization that raised such a mass of new problems (p.70).

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[83] L.C. Knights, Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson (London, 1937), p.18.

The order philosophy with its theory of place and its belief in the chain of being (that was mentioned in the previous chapter), inherited from medieval times, conflicted with the rise of capitalism and the beginning of the rise of the middle class. The Elizabethan age still believed that men should stay in their place, but practically speaking, according to the new economic situation that was developing, the theory and the reality did not coincide. It was a propitious time for some ambitious men to become powerful, although the old nobility was understandably opposed to their rise. In theory, the belief in degree was still adhered to, and there were many complaints against the newly made gentlemen. But in practice the rising middle class was usurping the power of the landed gentry. Class lines became blurred during the sixteenth century, says Ruth Kelso. "In practice the line separating plebeian and gentleman was a very thin and moveable line" (p.26).

The capitalist development had a decided effect on the lives of individuals. The most significant consequence of the transfer of land and the other new forms of acquisition was the dislocation of the customary class relationships. As Knights says, to a conservative observer of about 1600 it appeared a chief merit of the preceding ages that every man knew his proper station (p.108). This was of course not completely true.

Miss Kelso points out that although each century pictured the last as happy in well defined classes that never sought to climb above themselves, there was no such time. "The churl was always to be found pushing his way among his betters, and the gentleman degenerating and sinking into the state of the churl." The notorious discontent in the Renaissance, she says, represents at the most an acceleration rather than a new condition (p.37). The complaints directed against the newly made gentlemen and the social confusion were not really new. Sir Thomas Smith's often quoted phrase, "as for gentlemen, they be made good cheape in England" had been made in 1583. But it was the economic expansion of the later part of the sixteenth century that made this disruption of the social scheme so noticeable.

That the nobility felt the necessity to defend its status is evidence of their fear of losing power. In the sixteenth century the ruling class attempted to support its position with long current theories. "The fundamental assumption of the whole ideal of gentility was the aristocratic theory that some are born to rule and some to be ruled; that inequalities must be maintained between men...."[84] Miss Kelso points out that this assumption had been challenged before by the common people, but in the sixteenth century England was rife with discontent as

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[84] Ruth Kelso, p.31.

indicated by the complaints both of those protesting against the injustice of inequality and those denouncing the striving of everyone to climb higher than he found himself. The apologists who defended the necessity for and the divine right of nobility produced innumerable arguments to prove inequality necessary and right. "No fault of the century was more often attacked than this discontent with things as they were, and the word ambition had the connotation of a vice" (p.32). Both the Church and the State were interested in justifying the existing order, for they felt that the stability of society depended upon maintaining the division of men into classes.

The Renaissance apologists for the existence of a nobility based many of their arguments on the medieval conception of a hierarchically arranged universe in which every created thing has its duly appointed place. We saw in the last chapter how this picture of the universe lay behind Shakespeare's plays. In Dr. Duthie's book entitled Shakespeare, he admits that to point out the importance of this order-background in Shakespeare's plays is now a critical commonplace and he acknowledges that in his account of "the Elizabethan world picture" he is summarizing material derived from the work of Professor Lovejoy, Dr. E.M.W. Tillyard, and Professor Theodore Spencer.[85] Without discussing this

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[85] For my brief discussion of the order theory as it pertains to the material of this thesis I have paraphrased information contained in Dr. Duthie's own summary, pp.39-56.

order philosophy in any detail, permit me merely to indicate those concepts which are immediately relevant to the problem at hand - the problem of aspiring above one's allotted station in life. In the ordered universe, according to traditional Elizabethan thought, if any created thing forcibly occupies the position of another created thing, higher or lower in the scale, we are faced with disorder. The Universe, in Shakespeare's day, was thought of in three ways-as a chain, as a set of parallel planes, and as a dance to music. According to the conception of "the great chain of being", the universe contains in ascending order of importance, minerals, plants, animals, men, and angelic beings, all under God. In each of these categories there are gradations. The whole of reality is a great hierarchy in which everything has its duly appointed place and it is the duty of every created thing to occupy that appointed place. Every created thing must also maintain the proper relationship with all other created beings, for the stability of the universe depends on this. Nothing can be regarded as isolated or self-sufficient. Those characters who aspired to occupy by force a higher position in the scale than that to which they were entitled, and those characters who regarded themselves as a law unto themselves and not bound to live within the laws of order and degree and nature, were rejected by Shakespeare.

Because the Elizabethans also thought of reality as a set of parallel planes we encounter for example, the

plane of angels, the plane of human society, the plane of animals, and so on. On each plane we have a corresponding hierarchy. The sun is the overlord of the planetary universe; the rose is the finest of the flowers. In human society we have the king at the top who acts as God's representative on earth. Under him is the nobility, in whom is vested something of the divine authority of the ruler. At the bottom of the pyramid are the common people. A ruling class then, said the writers who supported the existence of the nobility, was established upon as firm a basis as the king, even as God himself, for in this conception of the state as a hierarchy corresponding to the hierarchically constructed universe, the lower part was no less important than the higher for the proper functioning of the state. "Refusal to recognize the necessity of this ruling class, or attempts to push one's way up from the bottom into it, was obviously subversive of the state, and more than that, a flying in the face of God's decree."[86]

We must be careful at this juncture not to over-simplify the matter. As L.C. Knights points out, the complaints of moralists and writers that merchants and other newly enriched members of the middle classes were buying land and becoming gentlemen were not based solely on mere prejudice and the desire to maintain, at all costs, the status of those already in possession. Although this was

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[86] Kelso, p.35.

no doubt true and part of their motivation, there was a more fundamental significance to the transfer of land in the late Tudor period. The possession of land had been associated with certain duties; the Elizabethan aristocracy had traditions of public service and responsibility. That tradition was not easily assimilated by the newer commercial classes, and so their acquisition of land meant much more than a mere change of ownership.[87] The favored class had privileges, but it also had heavy obligations. Although in practice the doctrine of the gentleman was frequently corrupted until it too often meant superiority in terms of dress and it occasionally resulted in arrogance of manner (we find the ultimate corruption of the Renaissance ideal in the letters of the eighteenth century Lord Chesterfield), the theoretical doctrine of the gentleman was still stated in uncynical terms by the Elizabethans. And the tradition of the gentleman was falling down partly as a result of the rise of the newly rich middle class. They had not been bred to the tradition that with power and privilege went heavy responsibility.

"...the heaviest responsibility of the English gentleman lay not in the attainment of personal perfection (and therein he differed from the Italian courtier), but

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[87]L.C. Knights, pp.110-112.

in the performance of public service."[88] The true gentleman should live for others. And so Shakespeare's belief in the order philosophy with its insistence on relationship and mutual interdependence and a hierarchically organized universe is understandable. According to the theory of order, social order depended on the fulfilment of social obligations. The privilege of nobility was not a one-way proposition. The gentleman had obligations. Rank carried with it responsibility. Arthur Sewell points out that we expect trouble at the beginning of King Lear when we learn that Lear intends to continue rank without function.[89] In All's Well That Ends Well, the noble Bertram, as the vassal of the King, is offered as a reward to Helena for her service to the State.

It is the recognition that privilege carried with it responsibility that gives significance to the contemporary complaints of the decay of "housekeeping," says L.C. Knights. He explains, by means of quotation and example, that housekeeping in the sixteenth century had a more than economic significance; it helped to maintain education and general culture. As a result, he insists that the satire directed against the citizen-gentlemen of the reign of

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[88] Kelso, p.39.

[89] Arthur Sewell, Character and Society in Shakespeare (Oxford, 1951), p.110.

James I cannot be fully accounted for by the fact that most writers depended upon the older aristocracy for a large part of their precarious livelihood. We can only understand the satire, he says, in the light of the inherited social theory that keeping to one's place was a virtue. The major cause of complaint was "that those who acquired their position through the wealth obtained in trade or industry had **not** a tradition of responsibility that would justify that position" (pp.113-117).

I have briefly touched upon some of the economic and social changes that took place in the sixteenth century and have indicated the way in which men regarded these changes. In the fourth chapter of L.C. Knights' book Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson, entitled "Social Theory" (pp.140-168), he further explores man's social relationships, his rights and duties, in order to discover more of the beliefs and prejudices, aversions and sympathies, of the relatively "aware" man of this time. I believe it profitable to note some of the material contained in this chapter in view of the questions I am attempting to answer in this thesis.

Although by the end of Elizabeth's reign the growing impersonality of business was already creating a new temper, the old social theories still survived. We have already remarked upon the differences between theory and practice, the discrepancy between the fundamental

assumptions of the old order philosophy and the actual facts. "In formal theory the underlying conception was one of unity, concord and proportion" (p.143). The ideal was of concord, not equality. Differences of rank and status were accepted as a part of the natural order. Both the moralists and the statesmen were agreed that an ordered system of social classes must be preserved, that the preservation of the gradation of estates was the foundation of a well-ordered commonwealth. In a footnote (p.145), Knights explains that this system was not a rigid caste system: side by side with the dislike of the "new men" who rose suddenly out of their proper station was a recognition that social advancement was possible and desirable. Not only did merchants enter the ranks of the gentility, but often the younger sons of landed families engaged in trade. Despite this, he reminds us, behind the whole process there still lay the conception of an ordered system of classes.

The conception of degree was usually formulated in terms of "walking in one's vocation." Knights points out that it is interesting to note the continuity between the Puritan conception of "the calling" and the medieval insistence on degree (p.147). The two conceptions, of a proper status, and of a particular kind of work to be done, were complementary. Rank, it was insisted, did not exempt a man from obligation. The social theory held that

every man had his proper place, and that he was best employed in fulfilling the vocation to which his birth seemed to direct him.

We must always remember that in the sixteenth century the conception of degree formed part of a system of thought which stressed social responsibility as well as acquiescence in one's material fortunes. This theory maintained that it was the duty of each part of the state to serve the purpose of the whole. This belief is the complete anthithesis of the laissez-faire doctrine. "Those who set their own interests before the common welfare were moral offenders, and nothing is more common in the economic writings of the time than the expressed opposition between public good and private profit" (p.149). Men who aimed only at their own profit were condemned by the right thinking. We saw in the preceding chapter that Shakespeare rejected the individualists and the isolationists in his dramas. This insistence on the prior claim of the public good, which survived throughout the sixteenth century, had been inherited from the Middle Ages. This aspect of the social theory that prevailed in Shakespeare's day had been derived from the actual conditions of life in small communities (encouraged by the organization of gilds), and the traditional teaching of the Church. Both combined to foster a sense of responsibility.

Sixteenth century social thought, with its insistence on degree and vocation, and the subordination

of private profit to public good, and its suspicion of, if not hostility toward, riches, suggests what was likely to be the common attitude toward the "new men" who were rising to wealth and social consequence. "These were not content with reasonable gain, they set their own profit before the common good, and they refused to observe the limitations of degree. They were, in short (in practice, if not in theory), individualists, at a time when current opinion set the emphasis on community, order and organization" (p.156). The ambition of these people who aspired above their positions in the hierarchy was condemned, but despite the condemnation men were constantly rising from the lower classes. In practice there were men who acted contrary to the social theory of the times. But as Knights points out, the practice of no century can be estimated from the current social theory. The Elizabethan Jacobean social theory is important not because of what it tells us of economic dealing but because it indicates the attitudes of men toward their work, toward acquisition, and toward their fellowmen.

"In the world of practice the beginnings of modern industry can be traced back to the sixteenth century; in the world of ideas the change is most clearly marked in the seventeenth century. By the reign of James I the social ideas inherited from the Middle Ages were already proving incompatible with the demands of capitalists;

and theory followed practice" (p.163). But for most of the people in the age of Shakespeare the traditional ideas were far from meaningless. At the end of the sixteenth century the theory of the importance of nobility and their function in the state was still intact.

In the plays of many of the other Elizabethan dramatists who wrote during Shakespeare's lifetime and in the early part of the seventeenth century we find reflected an attitude and a background of thought similar to that of Shakespeare and the traditionalists. Knights speaks of Jonson as drawing on the anti-acquisitive tradition inherited from the Middle Ages. This tradition, he says, included more than a mere distrust of riches; it was related to the conception of a natural "Mean" (p.190). This sense of the mean, this acceptance of natural limitations, was part of the inheritance of Jonson and his contemporaries (p.192).

Even Dekker's citizen morality, Knights finds, is neither individualistic nor out of touch with tradition. It makes the point that the honest workman should maintain himself decently in his calling, and if he rises it must be only within the limits of his own order (p.232). Knights argues that even in praising the citizen virtues Dekker is far nearer to the medieval moralists than to the new economic rationalists (p.236), and that his work does reflect, however fragmentarily, a decent traditional morality (p.239). Dekker's conception of the ordered

state is, in general, Knights maintains, the traditional conception that lies behind Ulysses' speech on "Degree" (p.241). "So far as one can piece together a coherent social attitude behind the plays, it is approval of a scheme in which each man has his proper place, the whole being bound together by justice" (p.242).

In Heywood, although citizen advancement to wealth and dignity is frequently represented, "it is almost always shown as advancement within one's order, a result of honest dealing; and it involves corresponding duties" (p.252). Most of his plays fostered the sense of community that was a legacy from the Middle Ages (p.255).

We get constant glimpses, in Middleton's comedies, into a society in the process of rapid reorganization. Most of Middleton's characters assume that social advancement is a major preoccupation of the citizen class (p.267), and at times the dramatist himself betrays something like a positive animus against the citizens (p.289).

Massinger, in A New Way to Pay Old Debts, draws on the traditional attitude toward avarice and worldly ambition. The tradition of social morality is even more potently present in his The City Madam (p.280). His women exhibit a purely material ambition, the worthlessness of which is exposed. His whole treatment of the theme of social ambition is Jonsonian (pp.282-288). His anti-acquisitive attitude is related to religious teaching and his piety is related to the living conception of community,

and neighbourly dealing within that community, that is present in the work of Dekker and Heywood (p.290). Because these two comedies came at the time they did, and from an author who was only too susceptible to new influences, they witness to the strength of the Elizabethan social morality (p.292).

We have seen how the economic changes in Elizabethan England upset the social structure and resulted in a fairly frequent dichotomy between the social theory and the social practice of the times. We have seen that the moralists and the writers, along with the greatest of the writers, were on the side of the traditional social theory. Shakespeare believed in the old order picture, and this order picture underlies all his work. "All Shakespeare's characters seem to have been conceived in terms of some kind of order."[90] That accounts for his condemnation of ambition and of those characters who aspire above their positions in the hierarchy. But Helena, despite her ambition, is an order figure. The vision of All's Well That Ends Well is not ironic; Helena is not a disorder figure. The setting in which the characters in All's Well That Ends Well move is that of an ordered society. The relationship between the Countess and Bertram when she gives him advice upon his departure for

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[90] A. Sewell, p.40.

the court, the manifestation of the King's authority, the evidence of Helena's inheritance of the remedy from her father, - all these are illustrative of the working of an ordered society in which the relationships are natural and proper.

I have offered a number of reasons to indicate why Helena's rising above her station was acceptable. She attempted to rise, but not forcible to usurp. She possessed both virtue and learning. She may perhaps be regarded as representing the best of the new rising middle-class - she was ambitious and aspiring, but she had the qualities and the virtues and the values of the old aristocracy. With the exception of high birth, she had all the qualifications required for true nobility.

CONCLUSION

The survey of the criticism in Section I pointed out the divergences of opinion aroused by All's Well and led me to the conclusion that a study of the problem of ambition as handled by Shakespeare might throw some light on this controversial play. A discussion of the way in which Shakespeare portrayed the central figure of All's Well and of her position, both in relation to that of aspiring characters in his other dramas and in relation to his Elizabethan philosophy, was undertaken. An analysis of the heroine Helena, about whose character and actions the whole play revolves, indicated the element of ambition in her complex and intriguing personality. An examination of eight Shakespearian plays - history, tragedy, and comedy - in which the problem of ambition is present showed that Shakespeare's attitude toward characters who aspired above their stations was one of rejection. In accordance with the traditional Elizabethan philosophy, Shakespeare regarded ambition as a sin against order because it resulted in a disruption of the chain of being and a violation of the laws of hierarchy. But Shakespeare did not condemn the aspiring

Helena. I offered a number of reasons in the last chapter of this thesis for his exceptional, if not unique, treatment of Helena's rising. Because Shakespeare's portrayal of Helena was one of sympathy we are led to the conclusion that All's Well is an atypical example of Shakespeare's handling of the theme of ambition.

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