

Two-Act Structure of *All's Well That Ends Well* and the Forces of Dramatic Illusions upon the Audience

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In his *Shakespeare's Problem Plays*, E. M. W. Tillyard says "I suspect that it [*All's Well*] acts far better than it reads,"¹⁾ which has unhappily turned to be true in its production, as we know from a recent editor's remarks that "It seems presumptuous to conclude that only in our time has Shakespeare recovered the audience once available to him. But the history of *All's Well* in the theatre appears to support this conclusion."²⁾ Nevertheless, the editor feels unsatisfied with one of the three recent productions of the play saying "Bertram, like Parolles, was clearly 'crushed with a plot', but he was not allowed the same resilient power of recovery. No attempt was made to charge his last words with great feeling and very little of the man was left for Helena to take by the hand and lead away."³⁾ The difficulties of representing Bertram surely lie in the complexity of his character, which Gerard J. Gross analyzes as follows, "Bertram has so many faults that it would be easy to play him at the opposite extreme, not as a comic figure, but as a totally unsympathetic character—an arrogant, conceited, headstrong, lecherous, deceitful, shallow cad. Such a characterization would likewise make Helena's love for Bertram look absurd. There are, however, clear indications in the text that Bertram possesses attractive qualities."⁴⁾

Exactly the same kind of difficulties also occur in representing Helena, whom the history of her character criticism shows to be an opaque and contradictory character: "his loveliest character"⁵⁾ and "deceptive schemer".⁶⁾ How could these opposing views of Helena be synthesized harmoniously into the general impression of the play that it ends well,

although recent criticism of the play has tended to maintain that the opposite is the audience's response. This paper will show that *All's Well* does end well if the change of Helena's character is properly enacted in its production with an interval at the end of Act III, scene iv, and the meaning of "all's well that ends well" is properly understood in a new perspective.

Objecting to the modern audience's ironic understanding of the play, W. W. Lawrence has argued that *All's Well* consists of "the Healing of the King" and "the Fulfilment of the Tasks", which "are ultimately based upon well-known themes of popular story [sic]" so that the Elizabethan audience would be motivated subconsciously to expect a happy ending to *All's Well*.⁷ His view is illuminating in that the subconsciousness of the Elizabethan audience has been analyzed in terms of the fairy-tale tradition, but it rightly receives criticism from James L. Calderwood that "Such a view unfortunately, imposes upon Shakespeare the function less of a transmuter than of a transmitter of his sources, and by emphasizing the idealized fairy-tale qualities of plot ignores the pointed qualifications made upon these qualities by tonal realism and structural ironies."⁸

It cannot be denied, however, that a virtuous and resourceful Helena is promoted by the King of France and the Countess of Rossillion and an immature, proud, and lustful Bertram is brought into relief not only by his words and behaviour but the comments of the other characters throughout the play. As a result, when we see Helena treated contemptuously by Bertram in the first part of the play we cannot help sympathizing with her, and when we see Bertram driven into a tight corner in the last act, we feel his previous behaviour is deservedly being punished at last. This is kind of naive response to the play, and such a response is probably what Shakespeare generally expected from his contemporary audience. But, it should also be noted that his realistic frame of mind could not be satisfied with just evoking the same kind of response as the sources would produce, so that he puts something new to his sources that may allow the audience to understand a more realistic Helena beneath the illusion of a virtuous wife, and consequently to share her attitude of

“all’s well that ends well.”

At the beginning of the play, all the characters appear in black clothes, and Bertram takes his leave of his mother to become the ward of the King owing to his father’s death. Soon after that, we know that Helena’s father has also died and see Helena weep. A beginning more suitable for a tragedy, the audience is nonetheless assured of the possibility of a comedy, ending with marriage by the fact that Helena’s tears are not for her father but for Bertram. But at the same time, we are informed that there is an unsurmountable gap of class between Helena and Bertram, which Helena expresses by cosmic imagery.

I am undone; there is no living, none,
 If Bertram be away; ‘twere all one
 That I should love a bright particular star
 And think to wed it, he is so above me.
 In his bright radiance and collateral light
 Must I be comforted, not in his sphere. (I. i. 82–87)⁹⁾

In this severe situation, she finds a way to claim Bertram as her husband, but in that very process she unwittingly divulges an imperfect understanding of love and some other faults resulting from her youthfulness.¹⁰⁾ This phase of her character has provided *All’s Well* with a realistic tone, which is never found in its sources. From now on, we will see her imperfections and several schokos destined to be inevitably incurred by them.

Her former passive attitude of resignation changes into an active one believing in her “merit” after she has conversed with Parolles on virginity.

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.

.....
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 fix'd, and will not leave me. (I. i. 212–15, 222–25)

Calderwood suggests that this change shows her modification of the idea of evil and is induced by Helena's seeing Parolles' extravagant appearance, saying "Parolles, the man who can change values as easily as he changes clothes, and for the same reasons, has, without knowing it, induced Helena to tailor her own values in the light of newer and more utilitarian fashions."¹¹ But it is also possible to interpret her change as induced by her recognition of the possibility of being accepted by Bertram through her "merit", just as Parolles has been accepted through his merits, although the quality of their merits is quite different.

It is worthy to note that she uses the word "merit", which had been used not only in a secular sense of "The quality of deserving well" (*OED*, 3) but also in a theological sense of "the quality, in actions or in persons, of being entitled to reward from God" (*OED*, 3. b). It is not clear, however, in what sense Helena is using the word "merit". But as far as the context of her second soliloquy suggests, she uses it in a secular sense, and probably means "A commendable quality, excellence" (*OED*, 6) in medicinal science.¹² In the first part of the play, she actually shows her "merit" in having cured the King's disease, but quite ironically, she receives no reward from Bertram, who is God to her.

This is because she has a faulty or immature idea of love. She believes, at first, that her success in curing the King of the fistula will ensure Bertram's love. In other words she naively believes in her "merit" and never reflects upon the relevance of her "merit" to the question of love. However, the important thing for her is not to cure the King's disease but to acquire Bertram's love. She comes to recognize this and to know the actuality of love when Bertram rejects her.

Her second fault, which inseparable from her naivety is suggested in her words when she meets Parolles.

One that goes with him; I love him for his [Bertram's] sake,
And yet I know him a notorious liar,
Think him a great way fool, solely a coward;
Yet these fix'd evils sit so fit in him

That they take place when virtue's steely bones
 Looks bleak i'th'cold wind; withal, full oft we see
 Cold wisdom waiting on superfluous folly. (I. i. 98-103)

It is uncertain what she is referring to by "virtue" or "Cold wisdom". Therefore, it is possible to understand her speech as a kind of choric speech, and in fact her speeches are full of sententious expressions when she converses with the King. But it is dangerous to do so without any consideration of the bearing of the speech on the speaker's character or state of mind in a play which is deeply tinged with realism. Here it is apparent that she knows that Parolles is on the side of evil, but it is also hinted that she thinks she is on the side of the wise and virtuous. This attitude of hers, I think, is treated as blamable or at least as lacking in humility or self-knowledge, that is to be "whipp'd" (IV. iii. 70).

Her third, and not the least, fault is the exploitation of other people's belief in the supernatural for the purpose of persuasion. This should not be confused with "lie" or "deception",¹³⁾ for these words have too biased a connotation to describe what she does in attaining her end. Such an exploitation can be observed in her reply to the Countess, who has successfully heard her sincere feeling towards Bertram and her intention to go to Paris to cure the King's disease, but is doubtful about the possibility of Helena's success. Helena says to the Countess:

There's something in't
 More than my father's skill, which was the great'st
 Of his profession, that his good receipt
 Shall for my legacy be sanctified
 By th'luckiest stars in heaven; and would your honour
 But give me leave to try success, I'd venture
 The well-lost life of mine on his grace's cure
 By such a day, an hour. (I. iii. 237-44)

We know from her second soliloquy (I. i. 212 ff.) quoted above that she does not believe in the supernatural powers so that we cannot help wondering if she has changed her attitude. When we take the context of her speech into consideration, it becomes apparent that Helena is trying

to persuade the Countess to let her try her fortune by having recourse to the popular belief in the supernatural powers such as "th'luckiest stars in heaven". Her speech here should be, therefore, understood as a kind of rhetoric device taking the best advantage of, or we may say, exploiting the popular belief in the supernatural powers to persuade the King.

The same pattern of persuasion can be seen in Helena's speech to the King when he declines her offer of curing his disease.

It is not so with Him that all things knows
As 'tis with us that square our guess by shows;
But most it is presumption in us when
The help of heaven we count the act of men.
Dear sir, to my endeavours give consent;

Of heaven, not me, make an experiment. (II. i. 148-53)

This should also not be understood as a choric speech expressing a general truth, although it apparently seems so and the King himself says "Methinks in thee some blessed spirit doth speak / His powerful sound within an organ weak" (Ibid., 175-5). Here as before, she is quite unconsciously taking advantage of the prevalent belief in heaven to persuade the King to let her try her physic on him. She does not yet have "self-knowledge", which is an important idea in Shakespeare's plays and is decisive in this play. In my opinion, she does not really have it until after she has gone through several shocks.

She feels the first shock when Bertram refuses her proposal, although the audience is not allowed to know how great the shock is. After their marriage has been performed by the King's will, she receives the second shock when Parolles tells her about Bertram's leaving on that very marriage night. After that, when she actually meets Bertram she knows he will be absent for two days and asks for a kiss in a roundabout way. But, she is refused. This is the third shock. The last and the greatest of all is when she receives a letter from Bertram and realizes he has gone for ever, having imposed almost impossible tasks on her. The shock must be unbearable, for she had heard "Twill be two days ere I see you" (II. v. 70) from Bertram, and now she knows that he has left her for ever, and probably

she has realized that Bertram hates her.

What do these shocks mean to Helena? The shocks must be real to her and the last shock drives her to say to the Countess "Madam, my lord is gone, for ever gone." (III. ii. 45) These are the words of sincere sorrow, almost close to despair. To her, these shocks mean the first encounter with the real world and cannot but compell her to reflect upon her former behaviour. It is not until the audience knows her letter that the nature of her reflection is fully understood.

I am Saint Jaques' pilgrim, thither gone.

Ambitious love hath so in me offended

That barefoot plod I the cold ground upon,

With sainted vow my faults to have mended. (III. iv. 4-7)

In this letter Helena has clearly recognized her "faults", and has a sincere intention to mend them. The nature of her "faults" has not been given proper attention by critics, much less the importance of the shocks Helena has gone through. What she means by "faults" is, as we have pointed out, her immature idea of love, or the tendency to justify the means for attaining her end as seen in her exploitation of other people's belief in supernatural powers. Her recognition of her faults here can be understood as almost thorough.¹⁴⁾ This scene in which Helena's letter is read, I believe, is the last scene of the first part of *All's Well* so that there is a great possibility of her recognition being treated symbolically thorough enough for Helena to change in the second part. This characterization of Helena is something new which Shakespeare has created in *All's Well*, and to miss this phase of her character and the subsequent change in her character would lose sight of the full implication of the words, "all's well that ends well".

Little is known about the actual production of Elizabethan performances, and we have no knowledge whether Shakespeare's plays were performed with an interval in the middle or not. Emrys Jones, having examined the continuity in action, parallelism, and audience response in a number of Shakespeare's plays, maintains that there is an interval in Shakespeare's plays in her *Scenic Form in Shakespeare*. She does not deal

with *All's Well* in her book, but her remarks are perfectly relevant to the present study. Referring to stage producers, she says "They have to determine the best place or places for a pause in the performance, a stopping-place where actors and audience can rest; and in doing so, they are likely to find, if they are at all competent, the true lines of continuity and break within the text".¹⁵⁾ This is also true of *All's Well*, and I personally believe that "the best place" to begin the second part of the play is Act III, scene v.

In this scene, Helena reappears on the stage for the first time after she has disappeared at the end of Act III, scene ii. She is no more a naive, romantic, immature woman, but a thoughtful, meditative, and if necessary, active woman. An interval before this scene is convenient not only to give a physical rest to the audience but to give them an actual and vivid impression of the passing of time. Consequently it contributes greatly to making the audience accept Helena's change in mood in the second part naturally. It is characteristic of Shakespeare's plays that changes in mood and thought of characters are often brought by strong shocks and become apparent after a certain interval of plot time.¹⁶⁾ Helena has gone through both of them. A considerable time has passed before Helena reappears in Florence, which is long enough for her to get over the shocks and become different.

The interval before Act III, scene v can be safely said to have several significant roles in *All's Well*. In this respect, the following remarks of Emrys Jones are valuable.

What Shakespeare often does is to treat the interval as a licence to himself to make considerable changes in the substance and presentation of his material, changes which otherwise—that is, without interval—might seem inadmissibly abrupt. Characterization, for example, can be radically modified. But also affected will be such things as tone and mood, quality and range of feeling, indeed the whole nature of audience's involvement with the events on stage. If we fail to notice the purposeful contrasts in the dramatic substance before and after the interval, we shall probably respond less clearly to what is in

front of us (as if one had not noticed that a sonnet was divided into an octave and a sestet). However, these remarks can be tested by considering particular plays.¹⁷⁾

Exactly so, and the purpose of this paper is to “respond” “clearly to what is in front of us”, giving due importance to the interval of *All's Well*. In this way, I hope, we may modify the inveterate image of Helena as “deceptive schemer” held by many critics, and suggest a new audience-oriented interpretation of the play. In my view, those critics who perceive something of “deceptive schemer” in Helena seem to ignore the importance of the interval before Act III, scene v. They do not seem to realize the change of Helena in characterization, so that they put too much importance on Helena's second soliloquy, as did Bertrand Evans in *Shakespeare's Comedies*. Evans says that we become more and more aware of “Helena's way of operating from the beginning” as we see the play, and that “She has not taken us into her confidence, but has kept silent, hinted loosely, or put us off with falsehood. Unlike our sense of earlier heroines, our understanding of her past conduct is repeatedly revised by our view of her present conduct. Her emerging character becomes gradually more consistent with the philosophy of that first [sic] soliloquy” and quotes Helena's soliloquy beginning with “Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie, ...” (I. i. 231 ff.).¹⁸⁾

Understanding Helena from the viewpoint of the audience, Evans maintains that a contriving, wily Helena gradually emerges in the mind of the audience as we see the play. This image of Helena is almost contrary to our image of Helena. Evans' analysis of Helena, paying careful attention to the audience's “awareness”, is superb, and in fact beneficial in many respects. But some of the points are too far-fetched to accept. One of them is that Helena goes first to St. Jaques le Grand, and persuades the priest there to declare her death, and comes back to Florence to meet the Widow and Diana. Evans illustrates the point by the fact that First Lord, on the the very night when Helena reappears in Florence, says two months has passed since Helena left, and her own letters describe her life up to her own death, which is, the Lord says, confirmed by the rector of

St. Jaques (IV. iii. 45–57). This point is unrefutable, for it is in the text, and Evans is unwilling to ascribe the sequence of action in the plot to Shakespeare's carelessness. I am also unwilling to do so, because the careful construction of the play itself gives the audience the image of Helena opposite to Evans' portrature of Helena.

The second part of the play begins in Act III, scene v, and it changes the course of *All's Well* in the opposite direction so as to move towards the comic ending. Helena has already gone through "a sea-change" and thoughtfully tries to fulfill the difficult tasks imposed by Bertram. But the succession of the scenes is so carefully constructed that the impression of a contriving Helena will not easily arise in the mind of the audience. In other words, the careful arrangement of scenes creates a number of illusions to secure a virtuous Helena, not a wily Helena. We will deal first with the second part up to Act IV, scene iv, examining the audience's response.

In the beginning of the second part, Bertram seems to have proved to be a valiant, honourable warrior, for we hear the Window say "It is reported that he has taken their greatest commander, and that with his own hand he slew the duke's brother" (III. v. 3–7). But immediately after this, we also hear that Bertram is tempting Diana just as a typical lascivious French warrior. We necessarily wonder which image is truer to Bertram. The play shows the audience a scene where Bertram is actually tempting Diana (IV. ii), and then gives a cutting interpretation of the scene through the mouth of Second Soldier: "He hath perverted a young gentlewoman here in Florene, of a most chaste renown, and this night he fleshes his will in the soil of her honour" (IV. iii. 13–15). In other words, *All's Well* maintains the illusion of a lascivious, unworthy Bertram in front of the audience. On the other hand, Helena reappears in the sympathetic atmosphere of the Window and Diana.

Dia. Alas, poor lady!

'Tis a hard bondage to become the wife
Of a detested lord

Wid. I warrant, good creature, whereso'er she is

Her heart weighs sadly. This young maid might do her

A shrewd turn if she pleas'd. (III. v. 63–68)

This illusion of ill-treated wife is to be maintained throughout the play. Of course, at the end of this scene Helena proposes to give them supper, probably having in mind a plan to fulfil Bertram's tasks, but we should notice that her intention is not revealed to the audience until they see the next scene, where French soldiers conceive a plan to disclose Parolles' hypocrisy in order to open Bertram's eyes. This is an example of the careful arrangement of two successive scenes to reduce the unpleasant implications of Helena's scheming to a minimum.

Another such device is the concurrent progress of the two plots, the soldiers' plot on Parolles and Helena's plot on Bertram, which are to be consummated during the same night. The atmosphere of Parolles' plot is so overwhelmingly comic that it also contributes greatly to refraining the audience from taking Helena's plot seriously. The bed-trick, which consummates her plot, and Helena's comment on it might be frowned upon by a scrupulous audience of a Victorian mind.¹⁹⁾

But, O strange men!

That can such sweet use make of what they hate,

When saucy trusting of the cozen'd thoughts

Defiles the pitchy night; so lust doth play

With what it loathes for that which is away. (IV. iv. 21–25)

However, the Elizabethan audience would not have responded in such a way,²⁰⁾ and the contemporary audience, if the play were well-performed and they had a definite idea on the structure of *All's Well*, would not be frowned upon by Helena's comment, because the expectation of the audience has been, from the beginning of the second part, carefully built up for the fulfilment of the tasks by Helena. Namely, the audience has been mentally motivated to expect the well-ending of *All's Well* in a predominant comic atmosphere up to Act IV, scene iv.²¹⁾ It is no mere coincidence that when the two plots have been consummated, Helena speaks these words:

But with "the word: the time will bring on summer"—

When briars shall leaves as well as thorns
And be as sweet as sharp. We must away;
Our wagon is prepar'd, and time revives us.
All's well that ends well; still fine's the crown.

Whate'er the course, the end is the renown. (IV. iv. 31–36)

This is exactly the kind of response the audience would have from *All's Well* up to this point, and they would have the same vantagepoint as Helena here.

But *All's Well* suddenly changes its foregoing comic course so as to threaten the audience's simple expectation of the well-ending. In Act IV, scene v, we hear Lafew proposing to the Countess of Rossillion the marriage between his daughter and Bertram, which has become possible by the reported death of Helena. Moreover, to the audience's surprise, Lafew says that the King will come back the next day, and answering him, the Countess says that Bertram will return on that night before the King's return. We know in the preceding scene that Helena had left for Marseilles to meet the King so that at this point we expect that they have already met and the King might have devised some plan for a happy ending as the Duke Vincentio Vienna has done in *Measure for Measure*. But such expectation of the audience is completely smashed in the next scene where Gentleman says to her "He hence remov'd last night, and with more haste / Than is his use" (V. i. 23–24), when Helena arrives at Marseilles, having travelled day and night. It seems that *All's Well* tries to break down its own dramatic form as comedy.²²⁾

What is the most problematic in this play is this tendency to break down the comedy from within. The audience inescapably feels the world beyond the control of human beings in the dramatic world of *All's Well* just as they have strongly felt this in *King Lear*. The audience's response here must be that of the Widow who says "Lord, how we lose our pains!" (V. i. 24). But interestingly, Helena's response to this vicious world is quite different. She says here almost the same words she uttered on the night when she bedded Bertram.

All's well that ends well yet,

Though time seem so adverse and means unfit. (Ibid. 25–26)

The audience would surely be surprised at this resilience in Helena, who is quite opposite to the Helena in first part of the play. The awareness of the vicious world in *All's Well* must have become stronger in the audience's mind in this scene, because they have already heard of the plan for the marriage between Bertram and Lafew's daughter. But if the audience clearly understood that Helena has changed and the production of the play were properly directed so as to let them know her change, the surprise would be smaller. Nevertheless, the very fact that this kind of would-be tragic moment is dramatized in *All's Well* should be paid full attention. This certainly reminds the audience that the world of *All's Well* is not that of the fairy-tale, but of our world, where "the worst" might yet happen while we say "This is the worst". (*King Lear*: IV. i. 28)

But from very moment, *All's Well* returns its former comic course towards a happy ending. One of the most difficult and intractable factors concerning any interpretation of *All's Well* is to give due balance to its incongruous world where realistic representation and allegorical, symbolic, and dramatically conventional representation co-exist rather harmoniously. In this paper, we are trying to give a due balance to the play in terms of the audience's response.

In Act V, scene ii, Parolles appears in shabby clothes, which makes a sharp contrast to his former showy, luxurious ones. Having been stripped of the semblance of a valiant warrior and honourable courtier by his fellow soldiers, he thinks he has been ill-treated by Fortune. He says to the Clown, Lavatch, "I am now, sir, muddied in Fortune's mood, and smell somewhat strong of her strong displeasure" (V. ii. 4–5), and also says to Lafew "I am a man whom Fortune hath cruelly scratch'd." (Ibid. 26–27) To him, Lafew replies as follows:

And what would you have me to do? 'Tis too late to pare her nails now. Wherein have you played the knave with Fortune that she should scratch you, who of herself is a good lady and would not have knaves thrive long under her? There's carducue for you. Let the justices make you and Fortune friends; I am for other business.

(V. ii. 28–34)

Lafew's idea of Fortune is that of Justice with a sword and a scale, quite different from Parolles' fickle Fortune. It is not out of place that the idea of Justice is suggested in "Fortune" just before the scene of *d'enouement*. It implies the possibility that Helena will be treated kindly by Fortune.

In fact, in the last scene the suggested marriage between Bertram and Lafew's daughter is ingeniously impeded by the device of two rings, the one bequeathed from generation to generation in the Rossillion family, and the other given to Helena by the King. The *d'enouement* is to be achieved by a series of actions. An iteration of the details is not necessary here except to call attention to several points. Firstly, the impression of Helena's scheming on the part of the audience is judiciously balked by her absence up to this very moment. Her absence is effective in reducing "our consciousness of Helena's plotting—her cleverness" "to keep the sympathy of the audience with her, and prevent it from shifting to Bertram", as Bennett has pointed out.²³⁾

Secondly, when Helena appears to speak the following words answering the King's question "Is't real that I see?" (V. iii. 300), the audience would accept them as words of a mature woman, if they were fully aware of her characterization in the second part.

No, my good lord;

'Tis but the shadow of a wife you see;

The name and not the thing. (V. iii. 300–2)

To regard the above words as ironical, or mere formal words would be seriously misleading. As we have pointed out before, she has changed into a thoughtful, mature woman after she went through several shocks. She has realized that love cannot be acquired by "merit" alone. She knows that the most difficult task is not to fulfill the tasks imposed by Bertram but to be loved by Bertram. Love should be given unconditionally, not in any way be wringed from another. Love is but "shadow" until it is given the substance, "the thing". This recognition has made her speak the words above.

"The shadow" is actually "the thing" by Bertram's words, "Both,

both. Pardon!" (Ibid. 302), and the play ends well. There are some critics, however, who question whether *All's Well* does actually ends well, on the ground that Bertram, Helena and the King speak conditional sentences.²⁴ But Bertram's "if" is an expression of surprise to witness the impossible tasks fulfilled and the audience, having seen the play, clearly knows that condition will be easily fulfilled.

If she, my liege, can make me know this clearly

I'll love her dearly, ever, ever dearly. (V. iii. 309–10)

The audience also knows that Helena's conditional sentence will be easily turned to an indicative statement.

If it appear not plain and prove untrue

Deadly divorce step between me and you. (Ibid. 311–12)

But the King's "if" in the quotation below involves more profound implications. It is apparently spoken to the characters on stage, but it is also spoken to the audience.

All yet seems well, and if it end so meet,

The bitter past, more welcome is the sweet. (Ibid. 326–27)

Because here ends the play which the audience has seen, the words unavoidably invite the audience to ponder over the nature of the play. Moreover, it is the King who speaks the Epilogue, which is more directly spoken to the audience.

The King's a beggar, now the play is done;

All is well ended if this suit be won,

That you express content; which we will pay

With strife to please you, day exceeding day.

Ours be your patience then and yours our part;

Your gentle hands lead us and take our hearts. (Epilogue: 1–6)

Whether we "express content" is completely up to us, and it may largely depend upon the production or the acting of the play, for which the Epilogue is naturally spoken as a convention to ask for the audience's good will. But it should be noted that whether we "express content" depends on the content of the play as well.

In *All's Well*, the idea of "all's well that ends well" is so carefully

internalized structurally that it cannot affect the audience. In this respect, the question of the effect of the words "all's well that ends well" on the audience is important enough to be carefully examined at the end of this paper.

It has been generally recognized that this play is written with a sense of realism, but it is also true that the play's adoption of fairy-tale framework has restricted the expression of realism within a certain limit. Realistic expression of the vicious world beyond control has been carefully muffled not to play an active part to destroy this comedy. Helena's realistic recognition of fundamental human desires and the world is only hinted under the overall cover of a virtuous wife of the fairy-tale. But the fairy-tale framework has not been adopted for nothing in *All's Well*, and the adoption is in the same line of Shakespeare's tendency to come to use such literary forms as romance, pastoral, or fairy-tale in his later works. To discuss this tendency needs a whole book and it is beyond the scope of this paper. Here we just point out that the adoption of the fairy-tale framework in *All's Well* is deeply concerned with the view of the world and the idea of the audience in the theatre.

The view of the world in this play is tragi-comic at bottom, which the very form of this play, tragi-comedy, reflects. The view is dramatically expressed in a scene where Helena cannot meet the King, but she does not despair, saying "All's well that ends well yet, / Though time seem so adverse and means unfit." (V. i. 25-26) This scene has a great importance in understanding *All's Well* in its own perspective. The nature of Helena's recognition of the world is more apparent here than when she said "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) Here, unlike the Helena in the first part, she has expressed unqualified belief in supernatural powers or "heaven" in the face of the vicious world beyond her control. Helena who has depended only on her "merit" in the first part has turned into another woman. She has acquired a mature, patient attitude believing in the goodness of the world.

In this play, the very meaning of "all's well that ends well" has been

continually deepened from its proverbial passive meaning into an active animated meaning by the carefully structured movement of the play. In other words, the audience has been urged to internalize the meaning of "all's well that ends well" to suit their experience of seeing *All's Well*. The meaning suggested in the whole play is not to justify the means by the end, which Helena has unconsciously done trying to marry Bertram by exploiting the prevalent belief in supernatural powers, but to reflect upon the justness of the means to the end, which she did before she put her plot into practice, saying "Let us assay our plot; which, if it speed, / Is wicked meaning in lawful deed, / And lawful meaning in a lawful act, / Where both not sin, and yet a sinful fact." (III. vii. 44-47), and also to do the best believing in the goodness of "heaven" even when "time seem so adverse" (V. i. 26).

This new lively meaning is embodied in the actions of Helena in the second part, and the realization of the meaning is guaranteed by the actual movement of the play. Helena's "plot" has become accepted favourably by the plot of the play, in which several unrealistic actions, for a modern audience, may have taken place, and by old generous elders like the King and the Countess of Rossillion. To the audience, the world of *All's Well* may seem to be an unstable world, and it is true that the world would easily turn into a tragic world if it were not for the elders in the play. But the very fact that they are on the stage and do express such a benevolent attitude quoted below inevitably affects the audience.

King. We lost a jewel of her, and our esteem
Was made much poorer by it; but your son,
As mad in folly, lack'd the sense to know
Her estimation home.

Count. 'Tis past, my liege,
And I beseech your majesty to make it
Natural rebellion done i'th'blade of youth,
When oil and fire, too strong for reason's force,
O'erbears it and burns on.

King. My honour'd lady,

I have forgiven and forgotten all,
Though my revenges were high bent upon him
And watch'd the time to shoot. (V. iii. 1–11)

If the audience should identify themselves with these generous elders, which is very probable, just as some critics think that the audience sees the play from such a viewpoint,²⁵ *All's Well* would seem to end well to them. The real well-ending of the play cannot exist outside the mind of the audience, and *All's Well*, not only the title but also the carefully structured form itself, requests the audience to agree with the well-ending. What this play really asks from the audience is their acceptance of the new meaning of "all's well that ends well" internalized in the play and its application to the actual world outside the theatre, if only the audience be aware that the theatre is the world.

Notes

- 1) E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's Problem Plays* (1950; rpt. Penguin Books, 1970), p. 90.
- 2) Russell Fraser ed., *All's Well That Ends Well: The New Cambridge Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985), p. 34.
- 3) *Ibid.*, p. 35.
- 4) Gerard J. Gross, "The Conclusion to *All's Well That Ends Well*," *SEL* 23(1983): 263.
- 5) S. T. Coleridge, *Lectures and Notes on Shakespeare* (London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1914), p. 298.
- 6) Richard A. Levin, "*All's Well That Ends Well*, and 'All Seems Well,'" *Shakespeare Studies* 13(1980): 131–44.
- 7) W. W. Lawrence, *Shakespeare's Problem Comedies* (1931; 2nd ed. New York: Frederic Ungar Publishing Co. 1960), p. 36.
- 8) James L. Calderwood, "The Mingled Yarn of *All's Well*," *JEGP* 62(1963): 61.
- 9) All quotations from *All's Well* are taken from *All's Well That Ends Well: The Arden Shakespeare*, G. K. Hunter ed. (London: Methuen, 1979).
- 10) The class difference is much emphasized in *All's Well* than in William Painter's translation of Boccaccio's story where Giletta was rich and "of a stock convenient to his [Bertram's] nobility". Geoffrey Bullough ed., *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, Vol. II (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), p. 391.

- 11) Calderwood, p. 65.
- 12) The first citation of this meaning is taken from Dryden (1700) according to *OED*, but it seems probable that Helena thinks of "merit" in this sense.
- 13) Many are unfavourable towards Helena, especially Clifford Leech, the author of "The theme of Ambition in 'All's Well That Ends Well'," *ELH* 21(1954).
- 14) It is often the case with Shakespeare that truths are often brought to characters through shocks, as in the cases of Edger when he seem miserable condition of Lear and Gloucester, and Hamlet in the graveyard scene.
- 15) Emrys Jones, *Scenic Form in Shakespeare*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 70.
- 16) Typically in the case of Hamlet, when he comes back from the travel to England which surely lasts a long time, he has got a new recognition about the world as we see from his speech on "Providence".
- 17) Jones, pp. 71-72.
- 18) Bertrand Evans, *Shakespeare's Comedies*, (1960; rpt. 1967, Oxford: OUP), p. 164.
- 19) The importance of the sexual connotation of Helena's speeches is judiciously evaluated of the themes of *All's Well* by John F. Adams in "All's Well That Ends Well: The Paradox of Procreation," (*SQ* 12, 1961, pp. 261-70) and Calderwood.
- 20) Josephine W. Bennett, taking into consideration the Elizabethan acting of the women's part being played by boys, comments to the effect that the audience would have enjoyed multiple illusions created by such acting, engaged in her at the same time detaching themselves from her, in "New Techniques of Comedy in *All's Well That Ends Well*," *SQ* 18(1967): 333-62.
- 21) The effect of the comic atmosphere created by Parolles' plot on the audience is inspiringly analyzed by G. J. Gross and J. W. Bennett.
- 22) Arthur Kirsch enlighteningly discusses *All's Well* from the viewpoint of tragic-comedy in *Shakespeare and the Experience of Love*, (Cambridge UP, 1981) and David Scott Kastan, pointing out the preposition of imperfectness of the world and erring human being in comedy, goes further than that to regard *All's Well* as "anticomic" in "All's Well That Ends Well and the Limits of Comedy," (*ELH* 52, 575-89), p. 581.
- 23) Bennett, p. 361.
- 24) Among recent critics is Eileen Z. Cohen, who is the author of "'Virtue is bold': The Bed-trick and Characterization in *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure*," *PQ* 62(1986): 171-87.
- 25) We quote here Bennett's comment: "In *All's Well That Ends Well* Shakespeare

has reassured his audience, by means of his title, about the outcome; and then he has proceeded to present a youthful romance from a mature point of view. He has used the Countess and Lafeu especially, but the King and the Window also, and even the Clown, to help us to see Helena's troubles through grown-up eyes." *Op. cit.*, p. 345.