

Barbara Gaines
Artistic Director

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Executive Director



Chicago Shakespeare Theater is Chicago's own professional Shakespeare theater. Founded as Shakespeare Repertory in 1986 by Artistic Director Barbara Gaines, Chicago Shakespeare Theater brings to life the plays of William Shakespeare on Chicago's stage.

In October 1999, the company opened its new home on Navy Pier. The new complex includes a 525-seat thrust stage theater, a flexible-seat studio theater, a teacher resource center, administrative offices, a bookstall, and views from its lobby of Chicago's magnificent lakefront and skyline.

In its first twelve seasons, the Theater produced nearly half of Shakespeare's canon: *Antony and Cleopatra*, *As You Like It*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Hamlet*, *Henry IV Parts 1 and 2*, *Henry V*, *King John*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Measure for Measure*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Othello*, *Pericles*, *Richard III*, *The Tale of Cymbeline*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Timon of Athens*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Twelfth Night*, and *The Winter's Tale*.

Each year, Chicago Shakespeare receives widespread critical acclaim for artistic excellence and its accessible, creative approach to Shakespeare's work. Chicago's Jeff Awards have honored the Theater 25 times in the company's history, including repeated awards for Best Production and Best Director, the two highest honors in Chicago theater.

Since Chicago Shakespeare's founding, its programming for young audiences has been an essential element in the realization of its mission. Chicago Shakespeare Theater's multifaceted education program, *TEAM SHAKESPEARE*, supports education in our schools, where Shakespeare is part of every required curriculum. As a theater within a multicultural city, we are committed to bringing Shakespeare to a young and ethnically diverse audience of 50,000 students each year. Team Shakespeare's programming includes free teacher workshops, student matinees of mainstage shows, post-performance discussions, comprehensive teacher handbooks, and an abridged, original production each year of one of the "curriculum plays." Team Shakespeare offers a region-wide forum for new vision and enthusiasm for teaching Shakespeare in our schools.

The 1999-2000 Inaugural Season on Navy Pier offers a student matinee series of Chicago Shakespeare Theater's three mainstage productions: *Antony and Cleopatra* (fall), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (winter), and *All's Well That Ends Well* (spring). This winter, Chicago Shakespeare presents especially for students a 75-minute abridged adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* at its theater on Chicago's Navy Pier and on tour to schools and theaters regionally in the spring. We hope that you and your students will enjoy our work—and Shakespeare's creative genius brought to life on stage.

Marilyn J. Halperin, Director of Education
Kelly A. Lewis, Assistant to the Director of Education

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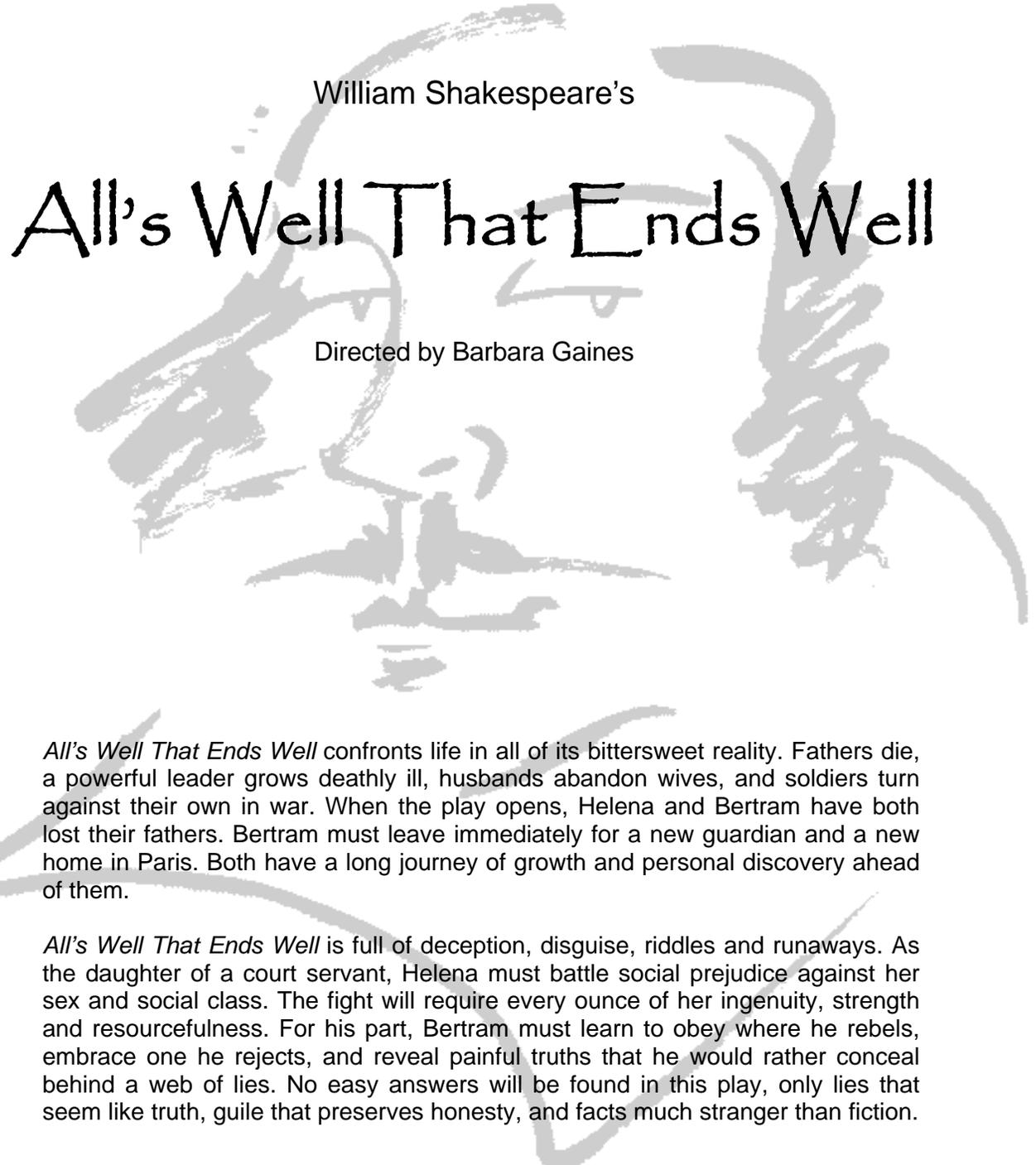
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William Shakespeare's

All's Well That Ends Well

Directed by Barbara Gaines

All's Well That Ends Well confronts life in all of its bittersweet reality. Fathers die, a powerful leader grows deathly ill, husbands abandon wives, and soldiers turn against their own in war. When the play opens, Helena and Bertram have both lost their fathers. Bertram must leave immediately for a new guardian and a new home in Paris. Both have a long journey of growth and personal discovery ahead of them.

All's Well That Ends Well is full of deception, disguise, riddles and runaways. As the daughter of a court servant, Helena must battle social prejudice against her sex and social class. The fight will require every ounce of her ingenuity, strength and resourcefulness. For his part, Bertram must learn to obey where he rebels, embrace one he rejects, and reveal painful truths that he would rather conceal behind a web of lies. No easy answers will be found in this play, only lies that seem like truth, guile that preserves honesty, and facts much stranger than fiction.

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Drama, like no other art form, is a *living* art. It is written to be performed live before a group of people who form an audience and *together* experience a play. Ancient cave paintings depict men disguised as animals. Since ancient times, impersonation and imitation have served man in his effort to express himself and to communicate. The drama of western civilization has its roots in the ancient Greeks' religious rituals and observances. Until the Renaissance, when Shakespeare wrote, drama was closely tied to religious beliefs and practice.

Drama not only depicts human communication, it *is* human communication. In theater, unlike television or film, there is a two-way communication that occurs between the actors and their audience. The audience hears and sees the actors, and the actors hear and see the audience. We are used to thinking about the *actors'* roles in a play, but may find it strange to imagine ourselves, the audience, playing an important role in this living art. Because the art lives, each production is guaranteed to be different, depending in part upon an audience's response. Live drama is the sharing of human experience, intensely and immediately, in the theater, which momentarily becomes our universe.

A live theater production depends upon its audience. The best performances depend upon the best actors—and the best audiences. When the actors sense a responsive, interested audience, their work is at its best—full of animation and energy. When the actors sense disinterest, they, too, are distracted, and the play they create is less interesting.

How can you help us give you the best performance we can?

- Please don't talk during the performance. Talking distracts the actors as well as the people sitting nearby.
- Respond *naturally* to our play. Emotions are part of drama. We hope that you'll laugh, cry and even gasp—but as a *natural* response to the story, and not in order to distract attention from the stage.
- Please keep all "noisemakers"—food, gum, personal stereos, etc.—back at school or on the bus! In a quiet theater, wrappers and munching are heard by all, the actors included.

- **No photographs, please!** Flashbulbs can cause the actors to lose their concentration.

One actor described the experience of live performance as a story told by the actors *and* audience together. In this sense, you are also a storyteller in the experience of live theater. We hope you'll enjoy your role—and help us give you a dramatic experience that you'll always remember.

[Theatrical performance] is essentially a sociable, communal affair. This is important. To resist this is, I think, to ruin one of the very important parts of the theatrical experience. Let the play and let the fact that temporarily you are not your private self, but a member of a closely-fused group, make it easy for the performance to 'take you out of yourself.' This, I suggest, is the object of going to a play . . . to be taken out of yourself, out of your ordinary life, away from the ordinary world of everyday.

—Tyrone Guthrie, 1962



Those people who think that plays written 400 years ago will be boring and irrelevant to their lives today will be surprised by Chicago Shakespeare Theater's productions. In performance, we think you'll see that Shakespeare was a very down-to-earth man who understood politics and people very well—and wanted to entertain a greatly diverse audience.

The exact date of William Shakespeare's birth is not known, but his baptism, traditionally three days after a child's birth, was recorded on April 26, 1564. His father John Shakespeare was a tanner, glover, grain dealer and town official of the thriving market town of Stratford-upon-Avon. His mother Mary Arden was the daughter of a prosperous, educated farmer. Though the records are lost, Shakespeare undoubtedly attended Stratford's grammar school, where he would have acquired some knowledge of Latin and Greek and the classical writers. There is no record that Shakespeare acquired a university education of any kind.

Some skeptical scholars have raised doubts about whether Shakespeare, due to his relatively average level of education and humble origins, could have possibly written what has long been considered the

best verse drama composed in the English language. But not until 1769, 150 years after Shakespeare's death, did these theories arise and, to all appearances, Shakespeare's contemporaries and immediate successors never seemed to question whether William Shakespeare wrote the celebrated works attributed to him.

At 18, Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, eight years his senior. They had one daughter Susanna, followed by twins, Hamnet and Judith. Hamnet, Shakespeare's only son, died at age 11. From 1585, the year in which the twins were baptized, until 1592, when he is first referred to as a dramatist in London, we know nothing of Shakespeare's life. Consequently, these seven years are filled with legend and conjecture. We may never know what brought Shakespeare to London or how he entered its world of theater. The first reference to Shakespeare as an actor and playwright appears in 1592 and was made by Robert Greene, a rival playwright and pamphleteer, who attacked Shakespeare as an "upstart crow" for presuming to write plays (when he was only a mere actor) and copying the works of established dramatists.

Subsequent references to Shakespeare indicate that as early as 1594 he was not only an actor and playwright, but also a partner in a new theatrical company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, which soon became one of London's two principle companies. The company's name changed to the King's Men in 1603 with the accession of James I, and it endured until the Puritans closed the theaters in 1642. From 1599 the company acted primarily at The Globe playhouse, in which Shakespeare held a one-tenth interest.

During his career of 20-22 years, Shakespeare wrote 37 plays. His earliest plays, including *Love's Labor's Lost*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Richard III*, *King John* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, were written between 1589 and 1594. Between 1594 and 1599, Shakespeare wrote both *Julius Caesar* and *Romeo and Juliet* as well as other plays, including *Richard II*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *As You Like It*. His great tragedies, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*, were composed between 1599 and 1607, and were preceded by his last play traditionally categorized as comedy, *Measure for Measure*. The earlier histories, comedies and tragedies made way for Shakespeare's final dramatic form—the so-called "romances" which were written between 1606 and 1611 and include *Cymbeline*, *Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*. These were the plays of a playwright no longer bound by the constraints of his earlier historical and tragic forms. Although some "quarto" versions of the plays were published in

Shakespeare's lifetime, there is no evidence that suggests that he oversaw their publication. It was not until 1623, seven years after Shakespeare's death, that his complete plays were published in the First Folio. Drama was only just beginning to be understood as "literature" as we understand it today, and so it is not at all surprising that so little attention was given to Shakespeare's plays in published form until seven years after his death. However, we do know that Shakespeare did oversee the publication of three narrative poems and a collection of 154 sonnets.

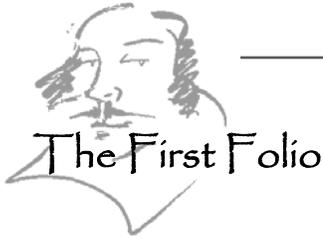
Shakespeare seldom devised his own plots for his plays, but creatively borrowed here and there from histories, prose romances, poems, and plays of his own and others. Shakespeare was an ingenious dramatic artist with a vast imagination. He created masterpieces out of conventional and unpromising material. In Shakespeare's time, ancient stories were told and re-told. The important thing was not the originality of the plot but *how* the story was told. In the telling of a story, there are few writers who rival Shakespeare in theatrics, poetry, and depth of character.

For nearly 400 years, William Shakespeare has been the world's most popular playwright. Why this continued popularity? His plays are filled with action. His characters are entirely believable and like people we know—even when they happen to be kings and princesses. Shakespeare's language is full of poetry and rhythm and is thrilling to hear. Most of all, Shakespeare was a profound student of the human condition. He had a great understanding, compassion, and love for all sorts of people, whom he understood to be complicated and often contradictory in their behavior.

By 1592, Shakespeare had emerged as a rising playwright in London, where he continued to enjoy fame and financial success as an actor, playwright and part-owner of London's leading theater company. After living life in the theater for nearly 20 years, in 1611 he retired to live as a country gentleman in Stratford, his birthplace, until his death on April 23, 1616.

Shakespeare was the man, who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of Nature were still present to him, and he drew them not laboriously, but luckily; when he describes any thing, you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learned; he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature; he looked inwards, and found her there.

—John Dryden, 1688



Shakespeare wrote his plays for the stage, not for the printed page. In Shakespeare's day, plays weren't considered "literature" at all. When a play was printed, it was printed typically for use in the theater, and not for selling to a reading public. It was not until 1616, the year of Shakespeare's death, when a contemporary of his, dramatist Ben Jonson, published his own plays in a folio, that plays were viewed as literature worthy of publication. Jonson was chided as bold and arrogant for his venture.

Two of Shakespeare's close colleagues decided to ignore tradition and gather his plays for publication. In 1623, seven years after Shakespeare's death, the first Folio, a book containing 36 of his 37 plays, was published. The first Folio was compiled from stage prompt books, from the playwright's handwritten manuscripts, from various versions of some of the plays already published for use in the theater—and from the memory of his actors. Its large format (something like a modern atlas) was traditionally reserved for the "authority" of religious and classical works.

Shakespeare's first Folio took five "compositors" two-and-one-half years to print. The compositors manually set the type by first memorizing the text line by line. There was no copy editor, and the compositors frequently altered punctuation and spelling. Errors caught in printing would be corrected but, due to the prohibitively high cost of paper, earlier copies remained intact. Of the 1,200 copies of the first Folio that were printed, approximately 230 survive today, each slightly different. Chicago's Newberry Library contains the Folio in its rich collections.

Chicago Shakespeare Theater's use of the first Folio as its script and "blueprint" is unique. The first Folio serves as the most authentic and effective manual available to Shakespearean actors nearly 400 years after its publication. Its punctuation gives clues to our actors about what words to emphasize and about what ideas are important. In Shakespeare's own theater company, with only a few days at most to rehearse each new play, these built-in clues were essential. Today, they still help actors make the language much easier to understand—even though you're hearing language that's 400 years younger than ours.

A key to understanding Shakespeare's language is to appreciate the attitude toward speech accepted by him and his contemporaries. Speech was traditionally and piously regarded as God's final and consummate gift to man. Speech was thus to Elizabethans a source of enormous power for good or ill . . . Hence the struggle to excel in eloquent utterance.

—David Bevington, 1980
"General Introduction"
The Complete Works of Shakespeare



Elizabeth I ruled England for 45 years from 1558 to 1603 in a time of relative prosperity and peace. "Few monarchs," says Shakespearean scholar David Bevington, "have ever influenced an age so pervasively and left their stamp on it so permanently." The daughter of Henry VIII and his second wife Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth was regarded by many Catholics as an illegitimate child and an illegitimate monarch. The politics of religion constantly threatened Elizabeth's reign even though it was one of the most secure that England had known for hundreds of years. Religious conflict during the Tudors' reign pervaded every aspect of English life and, most particularly, its politics. Elizabeth had no heir, and so, throughout her reign, the matter of succession was a real and disturbing threat to the nation's peace (and a recurrent subject of Shakespeare's plays). While Shakespeare was writing *Julius Caesar*, one of the Queen's favorites, the Earl of Essex, rebelled against her government. Shakespeare's portrayal of the enforced abdication of a king in *Richard II* was censored in performance during Elizabeth's reign.

Elizabethan England was a smaller, more isolated country than it had been previously or would be later. It had withdrawn from its extensive empire on the Continent, and its explorations of the New World had barely begun. There was a period of internal economic development as Elizabeth ignored the counsel of her advisors and kept out of war until the attempted invasion by Spain and the Great Armada in 1588. England's economy was still, however, based in agriculture, and its farmers were poor and embittered by strife with rich landowners who "enclosed" what was once the farmers' cropland for pastures. Uprisings and

food riots were commonplace in the rural England surrounding Stratford-upon-Avon, where Shakespeare grew up. London, then the largest city of Europe, was a city of contrasts: the richest and the poorest of England lived here, side by side. While many bettered themselves in a developing, urban economy, unemployment was a serious problem. It was a time of change and social mobility. A rising middle class for the first time in English history aspired to the wealth and status of the aristocracy.

Under Elizabeth, England returned to Protestantism. But in her masterful style of accommodation and compromise, she incorporated an essentially traditional and Catholic doctrine into an episcopal form of church government that was ruled by the Crown and England's clergy rather than by the Pope. Extremists on the religious right and left hated her rule and wanted to see Elizabeth overthrown. She was declared a heretic by Rome in 1569, and her life was endangered. "Her combination of imperious will and femininity and her brilliant handling of her many contending male admirers have become legendary," says David Bevington, and resulted in a monarchy that remained secure in the face of religious and political threats from many sides. In choosing not to marry, Elizabeth avoided allying herself and her throne with a foreign country or an English faction which might threaten her broad base of power and influence.

Throughout Renaissance Europe, governments were centralized, assuming the power that once belonged to city-states and feudal lords. The rule of monarchies, like Elizabeth's, was absolute. She and her subjects viewed the monarch as God's deputy, and the divine right of kings was a cherished doctrine (and the subject of Shakespeare's history plays). It was this doctrine that condemned rebellion as an act of disobedience against God. However, this doctrine didn't free Elizabeth from occasional rebellion at home—even from her closest advisors—or from challenges from abroad.

Elizabeth's successor, James I, ruled from 1603 to 1625 (Shakespeare died in 1616). James clearly lacked Elizabeth's political acumen and skill, and his reign was troubled with political and religious controversy. He antagonized the religious left, and his court became more aligned with the Catholic right. It would be James' son, Charles I, who would be beheaded in the English civil wars of the 1640's.



The Renaissance Theater

A man who would later become an associate of Shakespeare's, James Burbage, built the first commercial theater in England in 1576, about 15 years before historians think Shakespeare arrived on the London theater scene. Burbage skirted rigid restrictions governing entertainment in London by placing his theater just outside the city walls, in a community with the unglamorous name of "Shoreditch." The name reflected the position of his theater, on the shore of the Thames River and just beyond the ditch created by the walls of London.

Burbage was not the only one to dodge the severe rules of the Common Council by setting up shop in Shoreditch. His neighbors were other businesses of ill-repute, including brothels. Since the theater is such a prestigious form of entertainment in our society—especially Shakespearean theater—it may be surprising to realize that actors and playwrights in Shakespeare's day had "vagabond" status. They were considered little better than common criminals, unless they could secure the patronage of a nobleman, or better still, the monarch.

Shakespeare and his fellow actors managed to secure both. They became popular entertainment at Queen Elizabeth's court as the Lord Chamberlain's Men and continued to enjoy court patronage after King James came to the throne in 1603, when they became the King's Men. Their success at Court gave Shakespeare and his fellow shareholders in the Lord Chamberlain's company the funds to build the Globe playhouse in 1599. The Globe joined a handful of other theaters in Shoreditch and the surrounding community just out of the city's jurisdiction as the first public theaters in England.

Shakespeare probably developed his love for the theater by watching traveling acting troupes temporarily transform a courtyard into a theater (see essay below). When he was a boy growing up in rural Stratford-upon-Avon, acting troupes traveled around the countryside in flat-bed, horse-drawn carts, which did triple duty as transportation, storage for props and costumes, and stage. Their horses pulled the cart into an inn yard, or the courtyard at a country estate or college. People gathered in the courtyard to watch, or flung open the windows in the surrounding buildings

and leaned over the sills to view the action on the impromptu stage below.

Many of these traveling performances staged religious stories, enacting important scenes from the Bible. During the Renaissance, the stories enacted in these performances became more secular. Public officials scorned the theater as immoral and frivolous. The theaters just outside London's walls came to be feared as places where physical, moral and social corruption could spread. They were frequently shut down by the authorities during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, when the city was menaced by the plague, or by political and social rioting. Even when the theaters were open, the Master of the Revels had to read and approve every word in a new play. The show could not go on until he gave his permission.

All kinds of people came to plays at the Globe, and they came in great numbers. A full house in the Globe numbered about 3000 people. They arrived well before the play began to meet their friends, drink ale and snack on the refreshments that were sold at the plays. From start to finish, a day at the theater could take half the day. It was more like tailgating at a football game, or going with friends to a rock concert than our experience of attending theater today.

Affluent patrons paid two to three pence or more for gallery seats (like the two levels of balcony seating at Chicago Shakespeare Theater) while the "common folk"—shopkeepers and artisans—stood for a penny, about a day's wages for a skilled worker. They were a demanding, diverse group and Shakespeare depicted characters and situations to appeal to every level of this cross-section of Renaissance society. The vitality and financial success of the Elizabethan theater is without equal in English history.

There was no electricity to run lights, so all plays were performed in daylight. Sets and props were bare and basic. Thrones, tables, chairs, and beds all had to be brought on stage during the action since Elizabethan plays were written to be performed without scene breaks or intermissions. When the stage directions for *Macbeth* indicate that "a banquet is prepared," the stage keepers prepared the banquet in full view of the audience. All of Shakespeare's plays were performed in "modern" dress—that is, the clothes of Shakespeare's time—regardless of their historical setting. The actors wore the same clothes on the stage as their contemporaries wore on the street. Hand-me-downs from the English aristocracy provided the elegant costumes for the play's royalty.

Most new plays were short runs and seldom revived. The acting companies were always in rehearsal for new shows but, due to the number of productions, most plays were rehearsed for just a day or two. All actors were male. Female roles were performed by boys (or young men). Elaborate Elizabethan and Jacobean dresses disguised a man's shape and the young actors were readily accepted as "women" by the audience. It was not until 1660 that women would be permitted to act on the English stage.

In 1642, the Puritans succeeded in closing the theaters altogether. They did not reopen until Charles II came to the throne 18 years later. A number of them, including the Globe, were not open very long before the Great Fire of London destroyed them in 1666. During these years when the English theaters were closed, many of the traditions of playing Shakespeare were lost. The new theater of the Restoration approached Shakespeare's plays very differently, rewriting and adapting his original scripts to suit Restoration tastes. It is left to contemporary scholars to reconstruct the traditions of Elizabethan theater from clues left behind.



Chicago Shakespeare's Courtyard-style Theater

David Taylor of Theatre Projects Consultants has devoted a great deal of energy and imagination to the question of what kind of space is best suited to presenting Shakespeare's plays. Taylor, who worked as one of the primary consultants on the design of the new Chicago Shakespeare Theater, feels that this unique performance space reflects elements of both the Globe playhouse and the courtyards-turned-theaters, in which the young Shakespeare might first have acquired his love of the stage.

The interior of the Globe playhouse, opened in 1599, was simple and similar to that of Chicago Shakespeare Theater—a raised platform for the stage surrounded by an open, circular area with three galleries, one above the other. Both theaters use a thrust stage with an open performance area upstage; basically, the entire performance space is in the shape of a capital "T." The audience sits on three

sides of the thrust stage, so the play is staged in the middle of the audience. This immersion of the stage and the action performed on it in the audience creates a three-dimensional theater that demands three-dimensional directing and acting.

The people sitting in the side seats have the closest interaction with the performers, and the performers with them. The play unfolds between the audience members seated on the sides, and the actors draw upon the responses on both sides of them (laughter, gasps, nervous shifting in chairs when tension mounts) as they perform. "The backdrop and the scenery for Shakespeare is the human race," Taylor notes. "So we're putting Shakespeare into its proper context because the backdrop for those sitting in any seat in the theater is always the human race."

"This close, close relationship with the performers on stage is the very essence of the courtyard experience," according to Taylor. "The courtyard experience was about leaning out windows. It was about throwing open the windows in the courtyard when the stage was brought through on a cart and leaning out and interacting." Audience members seated in the galleries at Chicago Shakespeare Theater are encouraged to use the "leaning rails" to watch the players below—much like those watching from courtyard balconies might have done centuries ago when a traveling troupe set up their temporary stage.

The actors and the audience share the experience of seeing and interacting with one another. Taylor thinks that actors benefit tremendously from the courtyard design since, "They're not looking at people sitting in straight rows, disconnected from everybody around them in big seats. There's a sense of community in the space, a sense of embracing the performer on stage." Actors are always "fed" by the energy generated from their audience. The design of Chicago Shakespeare Theater offers a feast of feedback to the actors on its stage.

As an audience member, your facial expressions and body language serve both as the focal point of the actors' energy and the backdrop for the other audience members seated across from you. "It's important that we don't lose the performer among the faces, but it's essential to understand that every single face is a live piece of scenery reflecting and framing what's going on," Taylor reflects. "That's the reason why the courtyard theater shape is such a wonderful historical springboard for modern theater design."

Speaking of his experience directing on the open stage in Stratford, Ontario, Tyrone Guthrie once said: "Theatrical performance is a form of ritual; the audience is not asked to subscribe to an illusion but to participate in the ritual . . . The attraction for me of the 'open stage' as opposed to the proscenium, is primarily this: that it stresses the ritual as opposed to the illusionary quality of performance." (see "All's Well on Stage" essay).

Other theaters have been modeled upon the Elizabethan experience of courtyard theater, perhaps most notably the Swan Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon. The Swan served as an important model for Chicago Shakespeare Theater. An important element in both theaters are the brick walls that surround the audience. Brick is an aesthetic choice, but, due to its particular design, it also serves as an acoustical choice. Notice the angle of the bricks in the side walls—they help diffuse sound, sending it in different directions throughout the theater. The sound, lighting and rigging systems are all state-of-the art. Chicago Shakespeare Theater's design allows for a wide array of possibilities for structuring and using the performance space. Performers will enter from surprising places, enormous set pieces will emerge seemingly from nowhere, and parts of the stage that seem permanent and solid to you will prove not to be so!

Lean out of your courtyard "window." Enjoy not just what is happening on stage, but also the responses of the people sitting across from you. Shakespearean theater is about people. As Taylor concludes, "You're the scenery. You're the special effects. And the people you see performing this play are performing it in front of and out of you."

►To think about...

The newly reconstructed Globe Theatre in London maintains an excellent website which will give you a good sense of what a courtyard theater space looks like and how actors work within it. **Before you attend the production** at Chicago Shakespeare Theater, visit the Globe's website at <http://www.rdg.ac.uk/globe/> and check out the thrust stage and surrounding seating space in the galleries. Can you guess how key scenes will be staged in such a space? Discuss your ideas as a class. **After you attend the production**, discuss moments in the play where you thought that the courtyard theater design helped heighten the impact of the scene. How, or why?

Timelines

DATES	COMEDIES	HISTORIES	TRAGEDIES	ROMANCES
1592-1595	<i>Love's Labor's Lost</i> <i>The Comedy of Errors</i> <i>The Two Gentlemen of Verona</i> <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> <i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>	<i>1, 2, 3 Henry VI</i> <i>Richard III</i> <i>King John</i>	<i>Titus Andronicus</i> <i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	
1596-1600	<i>The Merchant of Venice</i> <i>Much Ado About Nothing</i> <i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i> <i>As You Like It</i> <i>Twelfth Night</i>	<i>Richard II</i> <i>1, 2 Henry IV</i> <i>Henry V</i>	<i>Julius Caesar</i>	
1601-1609	<i>Troilus and Cressida</i> <i>All's Well that Ends Well</i> <i>Measure for Measure</i>		<i>Hamlet</i> <i>Othello</i> <i>King Lear</i> <i>Macbeth</i> <i>Antony and Cleopatra</i> <i>Timon of Athens</i> <i>Coriolanus</i>	
1609-1613		<i>Henry VIII</i>		<i>Pericles</i> <i>Cymbeline</i> <i>The Winter's Tale</i> <i>The Tempest</i>
1558 Accession of Queen Elizabeth I.	1558 Marriage license issued for William Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway. Shakespeare was 18, eight years younger than Anne who was pregnant at the time of their marriage.	1558 Globe Theatre opened. Open-air performances. Shakespeare part owner. Home of Lord Chamberlain's Men.	indoor theater, became winter home of King's Men while their summer home remained the Globe.	
1564 William Shakespeare christened; son of John Shakespeare and Mary Arden, Stratford-upon-Avon.	1564 Christening of son Hamnet (who lived eleven years) and his twin Judith.	1564 Death of Queen Elizabeth I. Accession of James I. Lord Chamberlain's Men became the King's Men upon endorsement of James I.	1612 Shakespeare described as Stratford-upon-Avon gentleman. Returned to live permanently in the town in 1610.	
1582 Daughter Susanna Shakespeare christened.	1582 The "lost years" for which there are no records about Shakespeare.	1582 Marriage of Susanna Shakespeare to Dr. John Hall.	1613 Globe Theatre destroyed by fire.	
1585 Christening of son Hamnet (who lived eleven years) and his twin Judith.	1585/91 The "lost years" for which there are no records about Shakespeare.	1585/91 Blackfriars Theatre, London's first commercial	1614 Globe Theatre rebuilt.	
1592 Shakespeare listed as an actor with the Lord Chamberlain's Men. Shakespeare's first-known play. <i>1 Henry VI</i> , produced.		1592 Blackfriars Theatre, London's first commercial	1616 Judith Shakespeare married Thomas Quinney. Death of Shakespeare, age 52; buried Stratford Parish Church. Most of his estate left to Susanna.	
			1623 Publication of Shakespeare's completed works in <i>The Folio</i> .	
			1642 Puritans closed the playhouses. Theater suppressed until the Restoration by Charles II, 18 years later.	

Shakespeare's All's Well That Ends Well

Dramatis Personae

THE COURT IN ROSSILLION

Countess of Rossillion
Bertram, Count of Rossillion (her son)
Helena, a gentlewoman adopted into the Countess's household
Lavatch, a clown, servant to the Countess
Parolles, a friend of Bertram
Rinaldo, steward to the Countess
Servants

THE COURT IN PARIS

King of France
Lafew, an old Lord
First and Second Lords Dumaine, brothers and,
later, captains in the Florentine Army
Other young lords and servants in the service of the King

THE COURT AND CITIZENS OF FLORENCE

Duke of Florence
Widow Capilet
Diana Capilet, her daughter
Mariana, friend of the Widow
Violenta, neighbor of the Widow
Other citizens, soldiers and a messenger

SCENE: France and Italy



The Story

All ends. And it is with death that our tale now begins. The funeral of the Count Rossillion follows close on the heels of the death of Helena's father, Rossillion's celebrated physician. Helena is consumed with grief. She has grown up here in the Rossillion court. Now, with the Count's death, Bertram, his son and heir, prepares to leave home for the King's court in Paris.

Hopelessly in love with the young nobleman, Helena confesses her longing to Bertram's mother, the Countess Rosillion, and plans to secretly follow him.

In Paris, the King's subjects fear for his life, threatened now by a mortal illness no one can cure. Against all odds, Helena persuades the King that she can help with medicinal powers learned from her father, and miraculously the King recovers. He grants her the husband of her choice. She chooses Bertram.

Enraged, the young bridegroom flees the country. His escape signals the beginning of a remarkable journey for him and for Helena, their paths marked by vows broken, treasures lost, and meetings cloaked in darkness.



Act-by-Act Synopsis

Act 1

The play begins in the French Palace of Rossillion, which is steeped in sadness. **The Countess** is grieving both the death of her husband, the Count of Rossillion, and the loss of her son **Bertram**, who must now go to live in Paris with his new guardian, the **King of France**. **Helena**, daughter of the celebrated court physician at Rossillion, was adopted by the Countess after her own father's death six months before. Living at the palace, Helena has fallen in love with Bertram. After he leaves for Paris, Helena speaks privately of her love for him—and of its impossibility since he is a member of the nobility and she is not.

The Countess' steward, **Rinaldo**, overhears Helena agonizing over her love for Bertram, and he reveals what he has heard to the Countess. The Countess confronts Helena about her love for Bertram and offers to support Helena's plans to follow Bertram to Paris. Helena hopes to win his love by curing the King's life-threatening illness that no physician has been able to successfully treat.

Helena runs into a friend of Bertram's, **Parolles**, and they have a bawdy conversation about women losing their virginity. Helena reveals that she thinks Parolles is a liar and a coward, but she tolerates him because she knows that Bertram is close to him. Parolles leaves for Paris, too. The sick King welcomes Bertram to Paris and reminisces about how virtuous and kind his father was. He discusses with his courtiers an ongoing war in Italy, and ultimately decides that he will not send French troops into the battle, but will permit Frenchmen to enlist independently as paid soldiers if they wish.

Act 2

A number of French lords have decided to join the Italian wars. The King confers his parting blessings upon them, and Bertram frets at the fact that the King has told him he is too young to accompany them. He threatens to run away and join them anyway, and some of his friends, including Parolles, encourage him.

Lafew, a servant to the King, announces that Helena

has arrived and requested permission to try her healing powers on the dying monarch. At first the King dismisses her, but finally agrees on the condition that if she does not succeed in two days, she will be put to death. If she does succeed, she may choose any husband from among the men at court.

Using medical skills learned from her famous father, Helena cures the King and chooses Bertram for her husband. But Bertram refuses her because she is of low social status. The outraged King makes him marry her anyway, promising to confer wealth and title upon her. Furious at Bertram's stubbornness, the King orders the marriage to be performed immediately. Once married, Bertram orders Helena back to Rossillion without even consummating their marriage. He plans to join the Italian wars with Parolles. Both Lafew and **Lavatch**, a servant to the Countess, express their low opinions of Parolles, but Bertram trusts him still.

Act 3

The Countess learns from a letter Bertram sent that he has "wedded but not bedded" Helena, and plans to keep running from her forever if necessary. Helena arrives at Rossillion with a letter of her own, in which Bertram swears that he will never accept her as his wife until she can secure his ring, a family heirloom, and become pregnant with his child. Heartbroken that Bertram will not honor his marriage to her and feeling guilty that he has put his life in danger in the Italian wars rather than be near her in France, Helena decides to leave Rossillion. The Countess disowns Bertram because of his ill-treatment of Helena, and grieves at the news of Helena's departure.

Bertram greatly impresses the Duke of Florence and the people of Italy with his talents on the battlefield. Helena arrives in Florence on a religious pilgrimage and, as luck would have it, Bertram is marching by just as she arrives. **The Widow** who runs the lodge for religious pilgrims has a daughter, **Diana**, whom Bertram has been courting. Helena reveals her identity as Bertram's wife to the Widow privately and promises to give Diana and the Widow a small fortune for Diana's dowry if they agree to help trick Bertram into sleeping with his own wife and securing his ring.

Bertram and Parolles's army troop has lost their drum in battle, a great dishonor to the regiment. In his usual bombastic way, Parolles has sworn that he will get it back. The two Dumaine brothers promise Bertram that they will play a trick on Parolles that will reveal his cowardice once and for all.

Act 4

The **Dumaine brothers** and some other French soldiers trick Parolles into believing that they are an enemy army and they “kidnap” him. After leaving him blindfolded in the stocks all night, they interrogate him in front of Bertram, proving his friend to be a cowardly, disloyal person.

Bertram arranges a rendezvous with Diana. She persuades him to give her his family ring. But, unbeknown to Bertram, it is Helena he meets in Diana’s bed that night. She gives him the ring that the King of France gave her. The war ends, and Helena circulates a fictitious story about her death in Florence. Since Bertram promised Diana that he would marry her when Helena died, he flees back to Rossillion thinking that he is free of Helena and now in danger of being trapped into a new marriage to Diana.

Far from dead, Helena makes plans to travel to Marseilles with the Widow and Diana to plead their case before the King. The Countess and the King have also heard of Helena’s “death.” The King, apparently committed to meddling in Bertram’s marital arrangements, has agreed to marry him to Lafew’s daughter upon his return to the French court. Consumed with grief over Helena’s reported death, the Countess agrees.

Act 5

Helena, Diana and the Widow run into a falconer, who tells them that the King has left Marseilles for

Rossillion. Sending him on ahead with a message for the King, they follow quickly behind. Lafew welcomes back to Rossillion a Parolles who has come considerably down in fortune. The King and the Countess welcome Bertram back, forgiving him for defying them and for his ill-treatment of Helena.

The King tells Bertram to forget Helena, and move on to Lafew’s daughter, **Maudlin**. But when Bertram tries to send to Maudlin the ring that Helena gave him on their night together, Lafew, the King and the Countess all recognize it as Helena’s. Fearing that he may have harmed Helena, they put Bertram in prison. In the meantime, Diana and the Widow arrive at the Court, and Diana asks the King to make Bertram keep his promise to marry her.

Bertram is brought back to answer Diana’s charges. He denies everything, only eventually admitting to an affair with her. He accuses Diana of being the seducer, and it is only her presentation of his ring that convinces the Court that it is she who is telling the truth. They begin to doubt her word, however, when she cannot explain how Bertram acquired Helena’s ring from her. Once Diana is threatened with imprisonment, Helena enters and explains. Bertram agrees to live as her husband now that she has met his once seemingly impossible conditions, and the King extends to Diana the same “reward” that started the whole debacle in the first place: her choice of a husband.



Beg, Borrow or Steal? Tales and Traditions Behind the *All's Well* Story

Many people have compared *All's Well That Ends Well* to a fairy tale because so much magic and mystery surround Helena's struggle to win Bertram's love. Even when Shakespeare wrote the play, some of the basic elements in his plot were already very familiar from popular tales in the oral tradition and early written literature. The ability to read was not as widespread in Shakespeare's England as it is in our society today. So, most people either told each other stories from memory, or would listen to traveling storytellers who read, recited or sang tales in the form of ballads.

Shakespeare probably heard stories such as these when he was a boy. In *All's Well*, Shakespeare is drawing upon a very popular type of folk story, the Tale of Impossibilities. As the name suggests, these stories depicted people who were faced with a seemingly insurmountable obstacle, or set of obstacles, in their quest for a particular goal, such as marriage. Cleverness is always necessary to overcome the obstacles, and quite often magic or trickery is required.

To win Bertram, Helena relies on her wit, the medical knowledge she gained from her father, and trickery. Faced with the obstacle of the difference in their social positions—he is a count, she is the daughter of a servant in his household—she first gets his mother's support for the match and then miraculously cures his guardian, the King. Bertram responds to the King's wish that he be a good husband to her by throwing new obstacles into her path. He leaves for the wars in Italy and tells Helena that he will never return to live with her as a husband until she gets the ring from his finger and can produce his child. Undaunted, Helena fakes her own death and then tricks Bertram into sleeping with her, wheedling the ring from his finger by pretending to be an Italian woman he lusts after.

While tales of brides or wives subjected to numerous tests by their husbands were very common in the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries, many scholars also think that Shakespeare read a story very

similar to the one he writes about Helena in William Painter's *The Palace of Pleasure*. Religion and politics were closely intertwined in Shakespeare's England, and there were strict laws governing what kind of material could appear in print and on the stage. Shakespeare's plays had to be approved by a government official called the Master of the Revels before they could be performed. A similar censoring function was performed for published works. Painter's *Palace of Pleasure* was an English version of a number of stories from other countries, including France and Italy, which had not been approved for sale in England because of their racy or irreverent content. Painter translated the stories into English and took out the most objectionable material.

The Thirty-Eighth Novel in Painter's *Palace of Pleasure* has a plot quite similar to that of *All's Well*, though Shakespeare changed some of the characters' names and added many new ones, like Parolles. The work that Painter, in turn, adapted was the Italian Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron*. Geoffrey Chaucer also used the *Decameron* as a source for *The Canterbury Tales*, particularly in the structure of his long poem. Both Chaucer and Boccaccio claim to be recounting the tales told by a group of travelers. In Boccaccio's case, ten travelers tell ten tales over the course of their journey, producing a total of one hundred.

The story of Giletta of Narbon is the ninth story told on the third day in the *Decameron*, a day devoted to tales of fickle Fortune, and gaining or regaining something very badly wanted. As Painter tells the tale, Giletta, the model for Helena, is the wealthy daughter of Gerardo of Narbona, physician to the Count of Rossiglione. The count dies first in Painter's version, and his son, Beltramo, leaves for Paris to stay with his guardian, the king. Giletta's father dies a little while later and she decides to go see Beltramo in Paris because she loves and misses him.

From this point on, the story Painter tells sounds very much like that in *All's Well*, but the realities of writing for the stage required Shakespeare to make a number of changes in the pace of the action. Beltramo sends Giletta back to Rossiglione immediately after they are married, promising to join her there to consummate the marriage. Instead, he slips away to Tuscany and joins the wars. Giletta stays in Rossiglione for quite some time, taking care of the duties that Beltramo should be fulfilling as count and winning the love of his subjects. Shakespeare compresses the action, never showing Helena taking on a leadership role in Rossillion.

Gillette only leaves Rossiglione after it becomes clear that Beltramo will not return to his people as long as she is there. Like Helena, she meets up with Beltramo in Florence, where she stays until she is delivered of not one, but two sons—twins that resemble their father. Shakespeare changes this, too, having Helena confront Bertram with his ring and her pregnancy.

Painter seems the most obvious source for Shakespeare to have consulted, but there are a few other versions of this same basic tale that he might have known. A version of the story appeared in French in the fifteenth century and might have been available to Shakespeare. His use of French names and the lengthy scene full of French puns in *Henry V* suggest that he had some familiarity with the language. There had actually been an earlier theatrical version of the story, too. Bernardo Accolti's *Virginia* was staged in 1494 in Siena for, of all things, a wedding celebration! However, there is no known English translation of that play, and if Shakespeare read it, he might also have read Boccaccio's *Decameron* in the original, racy Italian. We'll never know for sure, but it is interesting to speculate why Shakespeare chose this tale, and why he made the changes that he did.

► **To think about...**

1. Ask students to name some of their favorite fairy tales from childhood and list them on the board. Create small groups for each of the tales they suggest until everyone is in a group. Work together to compile as many details from the story you chose as possible without rereading it. Now, discuss how you would adapt these details into a new story, perhaps one set in your community. For example, *The Blair Witch Project* could be seen as a modern adaptation of "Hansel and Gretel." Once you've finished, share your ideas with the rest of the class.

► **For discussion...**

2. Some scholars think that Shakespeare added Parolles to his version of this story because his troupe had a particularly strong comic actor whose talents they wanted to exploit. One critic suggested that Shakespeare created Parolles so that Bertram would not be the worst character in the play. What do you think?
3. Imagine that you are a member of a review board that has to "rate" *All's Well That Ends Well* for violence, sexual content, adult situations and profanity. What sort of rating would you give it? Work with a partner to write a paragraph which

describes what audience members can expect from this play, like the warnings that precede television programs such as "Law and Order."



When Comedy's a Problem...

Literary critic Frederick Boas developed the term "problem play" in the late nineteenth century to refer to Shakespearean plays that depict social, moral and psychological conflicts without offering emotionally gratifying solutions to them. Since most of the plays that fit this classification are listed as comedies in the first Folio (see essay), Boas contends that the plays have structural problems as well (Neely 58-59). What are these serious social issues doing in supposedly "comic" plays? The three plays most consistently identified as problem plays are *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure* and the bizarre tragic-comic history play, *Troilus and Cressida*. All three pose problems because they mix so much tragedy in with their comedy.

All's Well, for instance, begins with a French courtly household immersed in grief over the loss of their political and familial head, the Count. Sorrow piles on sorrow in the first act as we learn that Helena's father has recently died, too, and that the Countess is soon to lose her last living family member, her son, Bertram, who leaves for the King's Court in Paris. No sooner is Bertram gone than Helena reveals another source of pain: she loves Bertram, but is socially inferior to him and fears that her love will never be reciprocated.

Bertram has left his fatherless home to take up residence with the King, who is also dying. So far, there is much reason to suppose that the compositors who assembled the first Folio of Shakespeare's works put *All's Well* in the wrong place. But then Helena gets the Countess's blessing to pursue Bertram for her husband, receiving tender assurances of the Countess's love for her as well. Emboldened with his mother's support and confident in the medical skills she learned from her father, Helena travels to the French court to try to cure the King and win Bertram's hand.

She wins renown at the Court and the admiration of the King by miraculously healing him. He promises

her the husband of her choice, and it seems that things may be looking up for Helena until Bertram makes it clear that he is not happy about the idea of marrying her. The King forces Bertram to go through with the marriage, and the young man responds by refusing to sleep with Helena after their wedding. Worse still, he plans to run away from her and enlist as a soldier in the Italian war. When he takes leave of his sorrowful bride, Bertram refuses even to kiss her.

Determined not to accept her husband's rejection, Helena pretends to be dead and follows him to Italy, where she tricks him into sleeping with her. Nineteenth-century audiences were scandalized by this stunt, which they found to be utterly unacceptable feminine behavior (see essay on stage history). Even though many audience members today find Helena's aggressive pursuit of Bertram less offensive than earlier audiences did, few people find a bed trick entirely above reproach.

Bertram still poses problems for contemporary audiences, too. Whether you like him as a character or not, what happens to him over the course of the plot can be difficult to watch—and not very funny. He is forced to marry a woman against his will and then tricked into having sex with her. However, Bertram is not a wronged angel—he is not only unkind to Helena, but also tries first to deny the sexual relationship that he thinks he had with Diana, and then blames it all on her.

Playwrights usually create sympathetic characters in their works, whether they are comic, tragic or historical. But problem plays often feature characters who do things that are not very appealing, and it can be difficult for audience members to identify with them (Neely 59). Usually even characters who do illegal, immoral or just plain rude things in comedies do them in humorous, almost likeable ways. The absence of humor in the presentation of events in plays like *All's Well* is another element that makes these plays problematic. In the view of many critics, plays like *All's Well* do not give the audience a clear point of identification. Such critics go beyond Boas, who had identified problem plays on the basis of their willingness to deal with problems, and call the plays themselves problems. This kind of attitude kept *All's Well* off of the stage for much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Carol Thomas Neely thinks that plays like *All's Well* grapple meaningfully with social issues and are, therefore, not problems (in the sense of theatrical failures) at all. She acknowledges that plays such as

All's Well and *Measure for Measure* “differ from the festive comedies by rendering the elements of sex, love, and marriage deliberately problematic and in conflict with each other” (61). However, she finds these plays complex and honest in their treatment of these issues, which even in real life involve a great deal of conflict and sadness mixed with concord and joy.

All's Well definitely ends with a mix of concord and conflict. Bertram and Helena are reunited, but only after a very tense scene in the Countess's residence. Bertram promises to love Helena “dearly, ever, ever dearly,” but there is a big “IF” preceding that statement: “If she, my liege, can make me know this clearly, / I'll love her dearly, ever, ever dearly” (V.iii.305-306). Plus, Bertram delivers this promise of love to the King and not to Helena. Her reply also begins with an “IF,” introducing the possibility of divorce, a shocking idea for Shakespeare's audiences since it was not allowed except in extreme cases.

The King is given the last word, and even he does not seem terribly optimistic. In a variation on the title's theme, he says, rather tentatively, “All yet seems well” and includes an “IF,” too: “if it end so meet” (V.iii.322). He does not seem confident that it will end that way. As Neely notes, “The marriage that is ratified at the end of the play is presented not as a joyous lovers' union but as a compromised bargain, not as a happy ending but as a precarious beginning” (65). This unsatisfying ending is another characteristic of problem plays, which veer away from happily ever after to honestly depict the constant struggle paradoxically required to maintain community harmony and personal peace.

►To think about...

Part of the problem at the end of *All's Well* is that everything in Helena and Bertram's relationship has yet to happen. We have never seen them together as husband and wife, except when Bertram was preparing to run away from her. In small groups, write a scene that takes place at some future point in their marriage. It might be the next week, the day that their child is born, or ten years in the future. Using the members of your small group, cast and direct this scene. After all of the groups have had a chance to practice, present each scene to the class and discuss it. Do you think that each scene is plausible, given what you know about the characters from Shakespeare's play?



The Renaissance

Bait-and-Switch Routine

Helena uses a clever ruse to get her husband, Bertram, to sleep with her. He refuses to even kiss her before he leaves for the wars in Italy. Worse still, Bertram tells her that he will never live as her husband until she presents him with the ring from his finger and becomes pregnant with their child. She meets both demands by tricking her husband into sleeping with her by pretending to be Diana, an Italian woman whom he is currently chasing.

While we might find this an odd way to catch and keep a husband, this plot device was quite common on the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century stage. There are at least 45 plays from Renaissance England that use a so-called “bed trick” to resolve relationship issues. Shakespeare wrote four of them: *All's Well*, *Cymbeline*, *Measure for Measure* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (co-authored with John Fletcher).

Partly because of the similarities in the bed tricks used to facilitate the plays' endings, *All's Well* and *Measure for Measure* are often grouped together as two of Shakespeare's “problem comedies” (see essay and exercises). In *Measure for Measure*, probably a later play, Shakespeare reverses the trick as it is played in *All's Well*. In *All's Well*, Helena sleeps with Bertram in Diana's place, preserving Diana's virginity and her husband's fidelity to her. Isabella substitutes Mariana for herself in Angelo's bed in *Measure for Measure*, preserving her own virginity and helping Mariana force Angelo to honor the promise he had made to marry her.

All's Well is unusual in its strong depiction of female characters. Women are seldom the main characters in Renaissance plays, and very seldom the almost exclusive focus of attention as they are in *All's Well*. Bertram has far fewer significant scenes than his mother and Helena have, and the Countess is given the first line of the play. The bed trick as it is played in both *All's Well* and *Measure for Measure* also casts women in unusual positions of sexual power. Most of the Renaissance plays employing a bed trick depict one played by a man, at the expense of a woman.

Helena is married to the man that she tricks into bed.

When men are depicted playing a bed trick they are usually doing it simply for sex, or to force a woman to marry them. Sexual intercourse was considered a sign of intent to marry in Renaissance England, like a diamond ring is today. Since they considered marital infidelity a sin, Shakespeare's audience might have thought that Helena was doing a noble thing. Bertram thinks he is having an affair, but he is really sleeping with his own wife. By pretending to be Diana, she preserves Bertram from the sin of infidelity and cleverly satisfies his seemingly impossible conditions for their marriage.

The bed trick poses problems when it is used to set the stage for a “happy” ending. Helena knows that her husband would be unfaithful to her, given the opportunity. She also knows that Bertram finds at least one other woman more attractive than he finds her. Bertram, meanwhile, will soon share parenting responsibilities with a woman from whom he fled. Are we really meant to believe that all's well at the end of *All's Well*?

►For discussion...

1. After her furtive rendezvous with her own husband, Helena says “O, strange men, / That can such sweet use make of what they hate” (IV.v.21-22). How do you think she feels about their lovemaking and its secretive circumstances?
2. Bertram is often played as a rather unsympathetic character because of the way he treats Helena. Did you have more sympathy for him after Helena played the bed trick? What about after Diana confronts him in front of the French court? Is he treated harshly in the end, or do you think he gets what he deserves?
3. Marliiss Desens wrote a book about the bed trick on the Renaissance stage. She claims that bed trick plays depict rape, because at least one of the participants is not giving their informed consent. Even if they are not drugged and are agreeing to have sex, they are not aware of the identity of the person with whom they are sleeping. Therefore, Desens says, it is a rape. Do you agree? Why or why not?
4. What do you think of Helena after she plays the bed trick? Does it make you think less of her?
5. Helena delivers the line that is the source of the play's title—“all's well that ends well”—after executing the bed trick plan with Diana and her mother. The critic Osbert Lancaster complains, “The plot, creaking and groaning with improbabilities . . . can only be resolved by that hammiest of all Elizabethan gimmicks, the GREAT BED TRICK.” Does this trick end well?

Use the play to demonstrate why or why not.



Clowning Around . . . Seriously

When we hear the word “clown,” a grease-painted face with an orange wig and a bulbous red nose, an oversized tie and shoes that look like wet-suit flippers might come to mind. Clowns in Shakespeare’s plays are not usually quite so physically obvious (though there have been productions that have depicted them this way!). Shakespearean clowns are a bit more like what you might think of when you hear the phrase “class clown.” They aren’t necessarily visibly identifiable as clowns, but their rambunctious, outrageous behavior marks them as such. In Shakespearean drama, clowns typically interrupt (and disrupt) an otherwise serious situation, offering commentary upon or insight into it.

The clown was already a popular figure in early modern drama when Shakespeare began writing plays in the 1580s. In the years before the professional London theaters were built, acting troupes traveled through the countryside, performing in inn yards and at colleges and country estates (see essay on “Courtyard-style Theater”). The actor cast in the clown role was responsible for gathering a large crowd with his antics, collecting money from the people who came to watch the play, and performing zany dance routines for the audience after the play was over, begging for more money the entire time. It was also common in both medieval and Elizabethan England for noble households to privately employ performers for their personal amusement. These people were also called clowns and sometimes fools, though you might be more familiar with the term “court jester.”

In essence, clowns were servants of the households that employed them. This low status followed the clown character onto the stage, where he was almost always depicted as a servant, sometimes as a wandering thief, and often portrayed as being uneducated (though crafty). Though we have some record of the lines assigned to theatrical clowns in plays such as *All’s Well That Ends Well*, much of their stage fooling was probably improvised and therefore impossible to recreate today. Much of it was probably physical humor, relying on weird facial expressions, patched costumes and exaggerated movements.

Lavatch is the “clown” figure in *All’s Well* (although Parolles can be pretty funny, too—see the essay “A Great Way Fool, Solely a Coward”). He is employed by the Countess for the apparent purpose of entertaining her and the other members of the Court. Like most of his fellow clown characters in theatrical tradition, he does so mostly by poking fun at issues that are vitally important to the main plot.

Crude, sexually suggestive humor was a staple of the stage clown’s existence. This crass humor often cast a revealing light on the behavior of the “serious” characters in the plot, much as Lavatch’s lewdness highlights the unacceptability of Bertram’s conduct toward his wife, his guardian and his mother. Lavatch tells the Countess that he must finally marry because he can no longer contain his sexual urges, and because he wants children. He is not exactly optimistic about the way his marital relationship will go, though. This is a parody of the situation that unfolds between Bertram and Helena. Bertram tells Helena that he will never consummate his marriage to her unless, perversely, she can present him with a child to whom he is the father first. Both Bertram and Lavatch present similar conditions for their marriages, and both are chastised for their harsh attitudes toward marriage. The Countess disowns Bertram for his irresponsible treatment of Helena, and chides Lavatch for his lewdness and obscene joking in the scene where he describes his plan to marry Isabel.

The clown is the character who drops “company manners” and tells the truth as he sees it. Paradoxically, his humor takes the plot to a new level of seriousness, his bare-bones honesty reveals the duplicity and pretension all around him, and his lowliness reveals the basic humanity behind each and every one of the other characters in the play, from King to widow and Countess to soldier.

► To think about...

1. Meredith Skura¹ says of clown characters in Shakespearean drama: “Although they may be ignorant and gauche, they are also savvy, even wise. They know things that the aristocrats have to learn” (24). Can you think of any life lessons that Lavatch seems to have learned that the aristocrats in *All’s Well*—including the King, Parolles, Bertram, and the Countess—have yet to learn? Do they learn these lessons? Use the text to support your views.
2. Actors and directors use the term “stage business” to describe the actions and gestures of characters on stage which are inspired by—but often not

¹To learn more about clown characters in Shakespearean drama, see Meredith Skura’s essay “Shakespeare’s Clowns and Fools” in *Shakespeare Set Free: Teaching Romeo and Juliet, Macbeth, and A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, edited by Peggy O’Brien and published by Washington Square Press, 1993.

explicitly written into—the script. The limited stage directions in Shakespeare’s plays require actors to improvise much of this action. Examine a scene in which Lavatch appears (such as Act I, scene iii) and imagine what he would be doing during that scene. Work in groups of three to block out the action in this scene, a conversation between Lavatch and the Countess which is overseen by Rinaldo. What is Lavatch doing to accompany his lewd dialogue with the Countess?



“A Great Way Fool, Solely a Coward”¹

Parolles is drawn from a long theatrical tradition of soldiers whose loud-mouthed boasting constitutes a vain attempt to hide their cowardice. The *commedia dell’ arte* tradition, which developed in Italy during the Renaissance, included a number of standard comic figures, including the clown (see “Clowning” essay) and the *miles gloriosus*, or self-aggrandizing fool.

Parolles is far more interested in keeping his uniform in impeccable condition and retaining his regiment’s drum than he is in fighting valiantly to defend the political interests of the Duke of Florence. Both of these attributes are trademarks of the braggart soldier. Characters in the play such as the King’s servant Lafew recognize Parolles for the “type” of character he is immediately on sight, and the members of Shakespeare’s audience probably did, too. Lafew’s lines about Parolles’s exotic costume are imbedded cues for the designers to dress this bird in attention-getting plumage.

The literary critic A. P. Rossiter claims that one of the elements that makes *All’s Well* a disturbing play is the fact that Parolles does not simply serve as amusement. When the soldiers reveal his cowardice by playing an elaborate trick on him, he does not try to lie his way out of it (as Falstaff does in *1 Henry IV*). Instead, Parolles makes it clear that his pride has been wounded. Furthermore, the soldier’s exposé of his cowardice directly affects his lifestyle. When we see him again in Act V, he has come down considerably in fortune and has to beg Lafew for money. This is particularly insulting since Lafew

addressed Parolles as Bertram’s servant long before Parolles’s reversal of fortunes. Parolles has, by the end of the play, been forced into a low social position which he once scorned.

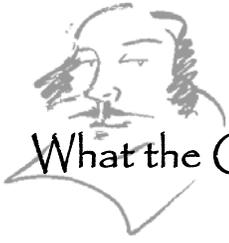
A braggart is, by definition, the victim of excessive pride. A braggart soldier like Parolles focuses on the finer points of his uniform instead of his fighting form, the loss of a drum rather than the loss of comrades’ lives, and his own needs rather than those of friends, ruler, and country. Typically, though, such a role is played for laughs. We don’t usually end up hating the braggart soldier, because in him we may recognize our own kinds of self-absorbed thinking and behaviors.

To Think About:

1. In Act IV, the soldiers harassing the “kidnapped” Parolles find a letter in his pocket that he wrote to Diana (IV.iii.186-195). Someone interested in playing Parolles should read this letter aloud to the class, trying to imagine how he would say the things written there. As a class, consider what Parolles seems to be getting at in the letter. Remember, he is supposed to be helping Bertram entice Diana. Now, two volunteer actors play the parts of Diana and Parolles in an imagined scene in which he *does* give this letter to Diana. The rest of the class directs their actions. How would he give it to her? How would you direct her to respond to it? Even though this scene is not in the play, encourage the two actors to play their roles in the way that you think these characters would. Finally, discuss the play as it stands, and the fact that Parolles did not give Diana the letter. How is this whole scenario indicative of his character?

2. Warfare (based on real conflicts in history, fictitious battles waged in distant galaxies or time periods, or urban conflicts between rival groups of people) is a common theme in contemporary film. Can you think of any such movies that include a character you would describe as a “braggart soldier”? What does this character do that leads you to identify him or her in this way? What role does this boastful coward serve in the overall story told by the movie?

¹Helena’s description of Parolles as he makes his first entrance (I.I.89).



What the Critics Say

1700s

*The Irregularity of the Plot is visible enough when we are in one Part of a Scene in **France**, in another in **Italy**, &c. The Story it self is out of a Possibility almost, at least so far out of the Way of Custom and Experience, that it can't be call'd natural.* Charles Gildon 1710

I cannot reconcile my heart to Bertram; a man noble without generosity, and young without truth; who marries Helen 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.

Samuel Johnson 1765

In all our comic writers, I know not where to meet with such an odd compound of cowardice, folly, ignorance, pertness, and effrontery, with a certain semblance of courage, sense, knowledge, adroitness, and wit, as Parolles. He is, I think, inferior only to the great master of stage gaiety and mirth, Sir John Falstaff. Thomas Davies 1783

1800s

Love appears here in humble guise: the wooing is on the woman's side; it is striving, unaided by a reciprocal inclination, to overcome the prejudices of birth. But as soon as Helena is united to the Count by a sacred bond, though by him considered an oppressive chain, her error becomes her virtue. August Wilhelm Schlegel 1811

The character of Helen is one of great sweetness and delicacy. She is placed in circumstances of the most critical kind, and has to court her husband both as a virgin and a wife: yet the most scrupulous nicety of modesty is not once violated. There is not one thought or action that ought to bring a blush into her cheeks, or for that one moment lessens her in our esteem. William Hazlitt 1817

Helena, as a woman, is more passionate than imaginative . . . There never was, perhaps, a more beautiful picture of a woman's love, cherished in secret, not self-consuming in silent languishment—not pining in thought—not passive. Anna Brownell Jameson 1833

Bertram had surely good reason to look upon the king's forcing him to marry Helena as a very tyrannical act. Indeed, it must be confessed that her character is not very delicate, and it required all Shakespeare's consummate skill to interest us for her; and he does this chiefly by the operation of the other characters—the Countess, Lafeu, &c. We get to like Helena from their praising and commending her so much. Samuel Taylor Coleridge 1835

Helena, whom virtue and true nobility of soul raise far above the lowliness of her birth, allows herself to indulge the fond belief that her affectionate devotion and services may win the love of the high-born, powerful, and wealthy Count of Rousillon . . . What she in vain claims as due to her virtues, she at last gains by a happy deception. Hermann Ulrici 1839

The idea that merit goes before rank . . . is the soul of the play, and of the relation between Bertram and Helena. G. G. Gervinus 1849-50

*In few plays do we feel, so much as in **All's Well That Ends Well**, what excessive scope the poet leaves open to the actor's art . . . Only by seeing this work of art and by trusting the eye, can we be sensible of its full and harmonious effect.* G. G. Gervinus 1849-50

1800s

The plot is indelicate, even beyond the limits usually conceded to Elizabethan dramatists, although these are allowed a pretty open field for the display of their eccentricities. If a young lady were to ask a gentleman to give her some notion of it, the latter would be driven at once to a nonplus . . . we can see no other course open, but a bold digression on the state of the weather.
The Times, London 1852

She by no means wishes to become Countess Rousillon for the sake of the wordly advantages which would thereby accrue to her; she desires nothing but her beloved and his love. She soars to enthusiastic masculine activity so long as this object has to be fought for, and, as soon as it is attained, relapses into the unselfish humility of a woman.

Karl Elze 1874

1900s

This is one of Shakespeare's earliest and worst efforts. It was misconceived, misbegotten and misnamed. Its ending is far from well. It finishes deplorably. What possible satisfaction can there be to anyone in the reunion of such an ignominious pair? A more unsympathetic hero and heroine it is impossible to find in the whole gallery of Shakespearean portraits.

The Sunday Times 1921

I must say Helena is a terrifying female. Her virtue, her persistence, her pegging away after the odious Bertram . . . And that tame fish Diana. As to lying in Diana's bed and enjoying the embraces meant for Diana—well, I know nothing more sickening. Katherine Mansfield 1921

Helena cannot quite be explained by medieval tradition, to be condoned upon it . . . we detect in her a stain of the modern young woman familiar to us in modern dramas and novels; a heroine of the pushing, calculating sort, that knows its own mind and will get its own way to its own ends without inconvenient scruple.

Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch 1929

*Yet **All's Well That Ends Well** is the motto; a nymphomaniac succeeding in her quest and the whole worthless loveless bargain sanctified by the name of marriage.* H. B. Charlton 1935

Shakespeare could see nothing in Bertram because he could conceive no reality in a young man who would have to do the things the story calls upon him to do . . . Bertram thins into a mere figure of fable as the plot wears on. He is there only because the play needs him, and because a commonplace cad will do.

Mark Van Doren 1939

We realize at once that SHAKESPEARE, bored by some of his characters, lost his heart to his heroine. Such losses are infectious. When genius adores, all must capitulate. Helena . . . is a creature from a fantastic story-book. You need not believe in her, but love her you must—and love her you will.

Ivor Brown 1940

What is admirable in Helena is, as we guess from a few odd glimpses, and the opinion of such characters as the Countess, her normal essential self; for most of the play, a dupe to her emotions, she is blindly and stupidly in love with a worthless young fellow, prepared to stoop to any shift and humiliation to win him . . . If we appreciate this, we shall avoid the extremes of idealization and disparagement to which she has been distorted.

E. C. Pettet 1949

Shakespeare not only made Helena and Bertram highly realistic figures but made them represent heavenly grace and natural, unredeemed man respectively. E. M. W. Tillyard 1949

*For once, the dramatist and the poet in Shakespeare were pulling different ways. **All's Well That Ends Well** expresses in its title a hope that is not fulfilled; all did not end well, and it is not a successful play . . . Bertram's conversion must be reckoned among Helena's miracles. What is well ended is her struggle for recognition, which he concedes her.*

M. C. Bradbrook 1950

1900s

Let us rather say that Helena belongs to a type of woman uncommon, but credible and admirable in Shakespeare's day, though not in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Not everyone likes or understands the type today, but two wars and a social revolution have made it commoner than it was; intelligent, determined women, perfectly capable of managing a romance and a profession, and ready to do so on the same terms as men.

Tyrone Guthrie 1953

The play is undoubtedly about a woman who twice puts the man whom she loves into an intolerable position, which nothing but a King can end by intolerable edict. Few can read, or see, the play with any hope of the possibility of happiness in a couple so married.

John Masefield 1954

We have had it drummed into us by every commentator that this is a problem play . . . No modern audience, we are told, can stomach a hero as priggish and as caddish as Bertram, or sympathize with a heroine who like Helena is determined that a man who does not love her shall accept her as his wife, and who resorts to the most ignoble tricks to cheat him into doing so.

Richard David 1955

For Shakespeare the story immediately came to be about the confounding of love, in parents and in lovers. And soon enough we begin to see that part of the meaning that is being developed is through the comparison of the failures, that the most generous love of parents can seem as cruelly possessive to the child as the unwanted love of a maiden, and that both work alone and in the dark.

John Arthos 1955

That Bertram grows up during the play makes him kin to many another hero. His problem is a human one: he must win his independence before he can surrender it.

Alfred Howard Carter 1956

Helena can best be discussed under two main headings . . . as (i) the supreme development of Shakespeare's conception of feminine love, and (ii) as miracle worker.

G. Wilson Knight 1958

Parolles and Helena are arranged on either side of Bertram, placed rather like the Good and Evil Angels in a Morality. His selfish ostentation balances her selfless abnegation; both are poor people making good in a world open to adventurers, but the magical and romantic actions of Helena are in strong contrast to the prosaic opportunism of Parolles.

G. K. Hunter 1959

*What I find ambiguous about **All's Well** now is the character of Helena, who has been celebrated as the archetype of the profoundly enamoured and loyal woman who though spurned by the man she loves wins him at last by the persistence of her passion . . . Yet it is clear that the young ass she is in love with does not want her, not only for the snobbish reason he gives that she is only a poor physician's daughter, but because she obviously fails to inspire him with any male heat.*

Harold Clurman 1959

Though she might easily have spared Bertram his hour upon the rack, she does not . . . Helena, dealing with a hero, puts him to the torture.

Bertrand Evans 1960

*It would, manifestly, be foolish to try to maintain that **All's Well That Ends Well** is among the more successful of Shakespeare's works . . . The plot, creaking and groaning with improbabilities, which can only be resolved by that hammiest of all Elizabethan gimmicks, the GREAT BED TRICK, can barely have sufficed to hold the reader's interest in the original Boccaccio conte; transferred to the stage it demands of the audience a suspension of disbelief which even Shakespeare's skill and language are powerless to achieve.*

Osbert Lancaster 1963

*It is generally agreed that **All's Well** is an unsatisfactory play and that much of the trouble lies in the uneasy conjunction of romance and realism, fairy tale and irony, allegorical abstraction and concrete details.* James L. Calderwood 1964

I have often wondered what exactly is meant by a problem play? . . . In Shakespeare it is generally a play in which two people find themselves in bed together for reasons which the dramatist thinks are right and the audience thinks are wrong. Robert Speaight 1967

Helena's frankness was true to the life and manners of Shakespeare's day, but we must also remember that this dialogue was written to be spoken, not by a woman or young girl, but by a boy impersonating a woman . . . The imagined Helena can have more subtlety and variety because our protective (or concupiscent) emotions are not aroused; we are not involved with her as a woman, but only as acted and imagined woman. Josephine Waters Bennett 1967

That Helena should have to suffer such a man, and more, that she should choose to love him, are of course the real problems of the play . . . Where he is merely a boy, she is a woman; where he is callow, she is sensitive; and where he is emotionally unprepared for love, she is its creature and its emblem. Arthur C. Kirsch 1972

Helena is a complete woman who knows her own mind and pursues her own ambition. That her love for Bertram is not reciprocated is both a challenge to her constancy and a test for her vision. John Fraser 1977

The play seems so calculated to test the limits of our credulity and tolerance that an exceptional amount hangs on actors who are not only convincing but . . . convinced. Jeremy Treglown 1981

As Helena's raptures over his 'hawking eye,' his curls, and so forth indicate, one of Bertram's problems is that he is so good-looking that people are ready to make excuses for him and eager to see a potential for nobility in him that he does not really possess. R. B. Parker 1984

Not only does it have some brilliantly theatrical scenes . . . its broader concern with the pains and angularities of relations between the sexes, and the generations, makes it well worth more frequent revival than it achieves. Robert Smallwood 1989

In the reading of a play, its language comes to the attention large and distorted like a face in a convex mirror. The contexts of words become peripheral, the words themselves more completely abstractions that have lost much of the referentiality of speech. It is easy for a reader to entertain interpretations that are unactable or untheatrical: Bertram as a heroic victim, Helena as a relentless bitch, Lavatch as a foul dullard . . . When the play is performed, however, all this is overturned. Sheldon P. Zitner 1989

Meet Helena, our heroine. She crams the sickly King of France with Renaissance antibiotic, and then presents him with the bill for his cure, which is the hand of a nobleman she has no reason to suppose likes her any better than his horse. When he leaves the wedding reception in dismay, she follows him disguised as a nun, and tricks her way into his bed . . . Flaunting his ring, pregnant with his child, she then reclaims him in what everybody sees as a nice, romantic ending. Benedict Nightingale 1992

It is an unusual title, unique in the Shakespeare canon in calling attention to the ending and affirming something about that ending. Susan Snyder 1992

***All's Well** would not seem to be in line for presenting a problem at all . . . To make of it a problem because its male protagonist is a callow youth and its female protagonist determinedly in pursuit of her man (which of the comic heroines, save Beatrice, is not?) is surely nonsense as criticism, reducing our expectation of Shakespeare to the level of a tabloid magazine.* Ruth Nevo 1998

Playnotes



The Man Who Committed Adultery with his Own Wife

Scholars call *All's Well That Ends Well* one of Shakespeare's "problem plays," and I have two problems of my own with it. [1] Why does Helena, a real smart gal, persist in loving the spectacularly inadequate Bertram? And [2] Why doesn't Bertram realize that he's in bed with Helena instead of Diana (when Helena takes Diana's place in the dark bedroom)?

The two questions are interrelated: One might ask, why does Helena persist in loving a man who doesn't recognize her in bed? One superficial answer is that Shakespeare based this play on a widespread folktale whose conventions required the audience to suspend their critical faculties and assume that the man could not recognize the woman. The basic plot is what folklorists call "The Clever Wife" or "The Clever Wench," the tale of the woman who manages to outwit her husband when he challenges her to get his ring (which he never takes off) and a child (though he will not sleep with her). We, and Shakespeare, also know the story from the Hebrew Bible (Genesis 38), where Tamar tricks her father-in-law Judah into impregnating her when she is disguised as another woman--and gets his ring from him to prove that it was he who had fathered the child.

More broadly, *All's Well* is the play for which Shakespearean scholars coined the term "bedtrick"—sex with a partner who pretends to be someone else, a theme often reworked in the Elizabethan theater. Shakespeare plays with the bedtrick convention of non-recognition, depicting Bertram as an "in the dark all cats are gray" kind of guy. On the other hand, the playwright chooses not to challenge the folktale's assumption that the clever wife wants to get her husband back even though he rejects her. This, we may assume, had a kind of psychological truth for Shakespeare; women, and men, do sometimes, stay with people who treat them very badly indeed. Helena continues to want Bertram, even when Diana—who admires Bertram's

good looks and bravery—tells Helena how she pities Bertram's wife for being married to a philanderer who detests her.

The subplots, too, both echo the central plot of the folktale and move in new directions. For example, Bertram's alter ego, Parolles, is blindfolded and, thinking himself captured by the enemy, betrays his own friends who are, unknown to him, present (who are, in fact, his captors) and who babble in a hilarious nonsense language. There is a clear parallel between Parolles and Bertram: in the dark (perhaps even blindfolded), thinking himself captured in Florence by a foreign woman to whom he falsely believes he cannot speak, Bertram betrays his own wife, who is, unknown to him, present in the bed, and who does indeed speak his language. Parolles with a bag over his head is a grotesque metaphor for Bertram's blind lust.

Another variant of this trope occurs in Shakespeare's other play about a bedtrick, *Measure for Measure*, in which, while Angelo is in bed with one woman whom he mistakes for another, Lucio encounters the Duke (disguised by a hood over his head) and, mistaking him for someone else, slanders the Duke to his hooded face. Both plays conflate the speech act and the sexual act, assimilating political to sexual treachery: just as Parolles thinks he is betraying his fellow soldiers, Bertram thinks he is betraying his wife. But in another sense, it is she who betrays him: when he thinks he is cheating on her (with Diana), she cheats him (as Diana), so that he ends up in bed with the very woman he was trying to get away from, committing adultery with his own wife. But her victory is bittersweet, even Pyrrhic; she is humiliated by watching Bertram in bed with her when, as she herself admits, he hates and loathes her. She feels defiled by her knowledge that he enjoys her only because he thinks she is someone else. Are we meant to believe that all really does end well?

Wendy Doniger, 2000
University of Chicago

A Play Comes to Life



A Look Back at *All's Well That Ends Well* in Performance

All's Well That Ends Well is a curious play. It begins with a small noble family mourning the death of husband, father and master; climaxes with a dying king restored to health who presides over a fairy-tale wedding engagement; and ends with a woman thought dead restored to life—and to a husband who once ran away from her. Perhaps because it is so difficult to pin down in terms of genre and overall tone, relatively few directors over the centuries have attempted to stage it.

The play's appeal has improved significantly over the course of the twentieth century. There have been twice as many major productions of *All's Well* since 1900 than in the three preceding centuries. Little is known about when Shakespeare wrote the play and even fewer clues remain about the earliest performances of it. The text probably dates from 1602-1603, when Shakespeare had become established in London as a member of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, and quite possibly after King James I granted his theater company a royal patent to perform as the King's Men.

The first formal record of a production of *All's Well* occurs in 1741, when it appeared at Goodman's Fields. After over a century of neglect, it was revived again the very next year—a production that turned out to be jinxed. One night, the actress playing Helena fainted on stage, and the actor cast in the role of the ailing King of France, taking too many cues from his stage life, died of a severe cold during the run!

Eighteenth-century audiences concentrated their attention—and their enthusiasm—on Parolles. An important tradition in the portrayal of Parolles as a stage clown (see “Clowning Around . . . Seriously”) took root in 1746 when actor Harry Woodward portrayed him in the Harlequin style. David Garrick, a famous eighteenth-century director, sharply edited the play to make Parolles and not Helena the central character. Woodward, the star of Garrick's

abbreviated version, was so popular with theater audiences as Parolles that he took the role on tour throughout Britain.

The British director John Kemble restored Helena to a central position in the play in his turn-of-the-century version of *All's Well*, which shifted attention from the play's comedy to its romance. This time, the parts of Parolles and Lavatch were whittled down and renewed prominence was given to Helena's all-consuming passion for Bertram. Kemble's productions in 1794 and 1811 (a revival of his script by his younger brother, Charles) were poorly received, though, and when *All's Well* returned to the stage at Covent Garden in 1832, it had been transformed again—this time into an opera. The play had one final nineteenth-century staging in 1852 at Sadler's Wells, but Victorian audiences were scandalized by the overtly sexual elements in the plot, and *All's Well* was not staged again until a fitful group of productions between 1916 and 1935, mostly for the Stratford-upon-Avon festivals.

The first breakthrough in the theatrical treatment of *All's Well* came in the 1950s. Tyrone Guthrie began and ended this busy decade of *All's Well* performances with productions for the 1953 festival at Stratford, Ontario, and the 1959 season at Stratford-upon-Avon. Both of Guthrie's productions were marked by elegant set pieces and formal costumes. Rather than having Helena and the King dance the energetic Elizabethan coranto, Guthrie opted for the dignified grace of the waltz, subtly suggesting that Helena is worthy of a husband who is a count.

During the post-World War II era of the 1950s, the British experienced a renewed devotion to home and family, no longer living in fear of the profound losses of the war years. Happy-ever-after endings were the order of the day. For his 1953 production at the Old Vic in London, Michael Benthall emphasized the fairy tale elements in the play. Claire Bloom was a doe-eyed, flaxen-haired heroine and the entire cast wore costumes emblazoned with symbolic representations of their social status and the nature of their characters.

By the 1960s, the times had finally caught up with Shakespeare's 400-year-old sexy subject matter. Joseph Papp, the producer of the New York Shakespeare Festival, directed a dark version of *All's*

Well for Central Park's open air theater in 1966, which emphasized the play's seamy side. The following year, John Barton, who considered Helena's sexuality central to the plot, directed *All's Well* for England's Royal Shakespeare Company. In Barton's view, the central actions of the plot rest upon Helena's sexual attraction to Bertram and the decisions it drives her to make. His Helena, played by Estelle Kohler, emphasized her sexual assertiveness by knowingly flirting with Parolles, with her potential husbands in the French court, and even with the King. Barton placed the intimate scene in which Helena cures the King in his bedroom. Kohler sat playfully at the side of the bed as she persuaded him that she could make him better, and concluded her "treatment" with a coy kiss.

British director Jonathan Miller returned to the Elizabethan period for the design of his 1975 production at the Greenwich Theater, and focused on Bertram and Parolles as the play's bad boys. Determined to depict Parolles as a bad influence on Bertram, Miller cast actors of approximately the same age and physical characteristics in the two parts and dressed them in identical costumes. Making Bertram and Parolles carbon copies of one another certainly puts a different spin on the Florentine scenes in the play, when, according to the Widow, Parolles does Bertram's wooing for him. Perhaps Miller's Parolles was hoping to be mistaken for Bertram by some lovely young Italian woman!

An important aspect of the play is the contrast between the youth of Helena, Bertram, Parolles and Diana with the age of the Countess, the King of France, Lafew, Lavatch and the Widow. David Jones emphasized this distinction in his 1977 production at Stratford, Ontario not merely by his casting choices, but also by the setting and the activities of the characters on the stage. In this production, Lavatch was played as an aging gardener and the play opened with him alone on the stage, slowly sweeping dead leaves from the top of a sundial. Played as overtly sympathetic to Helena's passionate plight, the Countess seemed to grow younger as she became more invested in the younger woman's situation.

By the 1980s, the trend in theater generally was toward gritty realism and honest confrontation with social issues. In 1980, director Trevor Nunn followed this trend in his production at the Royal Shakespeare Company, using costumes and stage business to emphasize the class difference between Helena and Bertram. The King of France was confined to a wheelchair, making his frail condition obvious and his recovery dance with Helena all the more dramatic.

This same device was used by Chicago's own Court Theatre in 1989.

In that production, directed by Nicholas Rudall, the King sat in a throne modeled on a wheeled, enclosed chair for transporting an invalid. The windows on the enclosure had curtains which the King could draw to shut out (or attempt to shut out) unpleasantness. Rudall used the King's confining chair (known backstage as "the Kingmobile") to demonstrate Helena's unique persuasive and healing powers. Though the King tried to avoid Lafew's announcement of Helena's arrival by hiding behind the curtains, she managed to lure him out of the chair to examine him by the end of the scene.¹

Across the ocean, Barry Kyle directed *All's Well* for the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1989, too. His production saw the play as a journey from childhood to maturity and began with two young actors, intended to represent the youthful versions of Helena and Bertram, playing with wooden soldiers under a tree house. The adult versions of the two main characters entered the scene as the children left, taking up similar positions. Kyle returned repeatedly to this "playhouse" imagery to suggest an almost incestuous connection between Helena and Bertram, which served to mitigate the seeming callousness of Bertram's rejection of her.²

In 1992, *All's Well* appeared in two significant productions on opposite sides of the globe: Henry Woronicz's version for the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and Sir Peter Hall's staging at the Royal Shakespeare Company. Sir Peter Hall founded the current incarnation of the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford-upon-Avon. He had already retired by 1992, and this production marked the first time he had directed a show in the Swan Theatre, a performance space similar in many ways to Chicago Shakespeare Theater (see "Courtyard Theater" essay).

Like Barbara Gaines at Chicago Shakespeare Theater, both of these directors worked from the 1623 first Folio text of the play. Woronicz relied on the symbolism associated with rings and kisses to lead the audience through his version of the play. In parting from Bertram in the first scene, the Countess gave a ring to Bertram, in the second act the King gave

Helena a ring, Bertram gave his mother's ring to

¹A detailed description of this performance can be found in David Bevington's essay "All's Well That Plays Well" in *Subjects on the World's Stage: Essays on British Literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, University of Delaware Press, 1995. Bevington served as a consultant on this production.

²For a fuller account of this production, see Robert Smallwood's article, "Shakespeare at Stratford-upon-Avon, 1989" in *Shakespeare Quarterly* from Winter 1990, 491-499.

Diana in Act IV and, by Act V, Bertram had the ring the King had given Helena for the denouement. Bertram's kisses – in parting from Helena at Rossillion and to go to the wars after their marriage in Paris, when making his appointment to meet Diana and when reunited with Helena in Act V—traced his progress from brotherly to awkward to cocky to mature and penitent.

In an effort to make the class difference between Bertram and Helena comprehensible as a bar to their marriage, Woronicz cast Helena as a woman of color. Luck Hari, a native of Calcutta, India, played the heroine. Since modern audiences are more attuned to racial differences as a bar to successful relationships than to the problems posed by class distinctions, this choice served to render the social gap separating the two more clear by making Bertram a bigot rather than a snob.³

During the 1995-96 theater season, *All's Well* appeared at The Shakespeare Theatre in Washington, D. C. and at the Goodman Theatre here in Chicago. Director Laird Williamson took the fable of "Beauty and the Beast" as a model for his production at The Shakespeare Theatre. He focused on the way in which the play grapples with the difficult realities of human relationships, yet manages to bring them to a peaceful resolution by the last act.

Director Mary Zimmerman took a similar approach. Her production at the Goodman suggested that Bertram really had come to love Helena by the final act. Helena's costume singled her out from the rest of the characters and set her apart from Bertram throughout the play. She wore a severe black dress with a book hanging from the waistline and glasses perched on her nose until the final scene, when she appeared in a vivid red dress to claim her penitent, newly appreciative husband.

Does all "end well," or does it "yet seem well"? Directors have wrestled with the play and its many meanings for centuries, and will undoubtedly continue to do so for years to come.

►To think about...

1. Directors often have to cut lines or even entire scenes to keep Shakespeare's plays as close as possible to two-and-a-half to three hours' running time. Modern theater companies often achieve this by cutting lines that refer to religious and political issues of Shakespeare's own day, which their audiences would not "get" anyway. Such

jokes are seldom central to the plot, so cutting them actually reduces confusion, rather than creating it! Can you think of any lines that you would cut from the play if you were directing it? Why would you cut these lines? Would you need to make any changes in the lines preceding or following the lines you cut to preserve the logical flow?

2. Many of Shakespeare's plays involve large numbers of characters, many of whom are only onstage briefly. To keep costs down, theater companies often double-cast parts, so that a single actor can take on two or more roles. Theater companies in Shakespeare's era followed this practice not only to cut costs, but also to make it easier to take shows on the road for tours of the countryside. Court Theatre opted to double cast the roles of the Countess of Rossillion and the Widow in their production of *All's Well*. This meant that the final scene had to be rearranged a bit, since the actress playing her could not be on the stage as two people at once! The rearrangement was more than compensated for by the way that this double casting reinforced the importance of supportive women in Helena's life, and her quest for Bertram. Pretend that you are the director of a production in which the roles of the Widow and the Countess are double cast. What would you do to negotiate the final scene? How would you direct the actress taking this role to differentiate her two parts?
3. Chicago Shakespeare Theater's production of *All's Well* inaugurates the play's presentation in the twenty-first century. Can you make any predictions about the direction in which societal attitudes toward issues of significance in this play—including class, gender roles, interpersonal relationships and war—will go in the new century? How do you think these shifts might be reflected in future productions of this play?

³For further discussion of Woronicz and Hall's productions, see Alan Dessen's article "Taming the Script" in *Shakespeare Bulletin* from spring of 1993, pgs. 34-37.



A Conversation with Director Barbara Gaines

Chicago Shakespeare Theater Director of Education and Communications Marilyn Halperin and intern Gina Buccola talk with Barbara Gaines, Artistic Director and founder of Chicago Shakespeare Theater, about her upcoming production of *All's Well That Ends Well*.

Q: You haven't chosen to direct *All's Well* before. It's not a play that's often staged. What drew you to it now?

A: I'm looking forward to directing this play because the characters are each so complex. Each is frail. Each contains so many contradictions. There's a profound, complex nature within all of them. In Helena, you have an outstanding heroine. Very smart. Great activist. But she's in love with someone who'll never honor her or cherish her. Someone she's bound to be unhappy with, and yet she pursues him—and blames herself for everything that goes wrong. She has all of Shakespeare's greatest heroines' attributes, except that she thinks she can make someone fall in love with her. She pursues him and won't let go—this isn't a wise choice.

There's one point when Helena says to the King, "Let it be." If only the play could end there, it would be better for Helena. But instead she recapitulates, and starts saying something else. "I'll make this happen. I'll pursue him." I think the thing that touches me most about the play is that they're both so young, Helena and Bertram—young enough to believe that they can change someone's mind about loving. We've all felt this way. If I give him enough presents... If I hang around the football field... If I send her roses—*whatever* it is I do that will make him or her fall in love with me.

All of us have tried to bend like a pretzel to make someone care about us. It's just human nature. I did all of that stuff that Helena's doing. I didn't go so far, I didn't chase anybody into a war zone! But I think that once you reach a certain age—hopefully—you're not actually doomed to repeat your old mistakes, because you finally see that love has to be mutually given or it will never be. You can't talk anyone into loving you. You can't trick anyone into loving you. You can't seduce anyone into loving you. Love just is.

Q: Why do you think Helena specifically chose Bertram?

A: It wasn't long ago that I thought Bertram was only a vain and shallow young man. But the more I'm living with the play, the more I realize that if someone told me I had to marry a person I didn't love, I'd run away, too. His behavior with women is irresponsible, but then I remind myself of how young a man he is. This is probably the first time he's been away from home—like a college freshman tasting freedom for the first time and going just a bit crazy! So it's easy to forgive most of what Bertram does because he's so young. And I have sympathy for him because any arranged marriage has three strikes against it from the beginning.

Q: *All's Well* is usually grouped among Shakespeare's comedies, but is it a comedy? Does the ending seem like a happy one to you?

A: It's an ironic ending. You say one thing, and you mean another. Shakespeare wrote ironically all the time. *All's well that ends well*. Well, she wanted it and now she's stuck with it. It's a totally ironic twist. And I think that's how we'll play the last moments of the play. Everybody's happy. The King makes his speech, and then the band starts playing. You see this fabulous waltz and gowns swirling everywhere. Then, right in the center of the stage, the couple stops and they just look at each other. And that's it.

There are scholars who would say, "Oh, he's changed." Many scholars insist it's a happy ending. I can't buy that. In my opinion, nobody who's ever loved and lost could buy that. Nobody who's honest about their feelings can say that this is going to be a happy ending. Even the happiest of relationships are difficult to maintain, hard to nourish. Relationships just take so much work, from both people. Will Bertram and Helena work at this together? I wonder.

What is the world of your production going to be like?

I want it to be a very social world—a very structured, class-rooted world. We've placed it in the 1860s in France and Italy—with the big hoop skirts of *Gone With the Wind*, but simpler and even more elegant. We're starting it out at the funeral of the Countess' husband. So everybody will be on stage, everybody will be saying goodbye. Everything will be draped in

black. Midway into the first act, there will be a great gathering at the King's palace. Then there's the ballroom scene at the end. I want to create the social whirlwind of the culture of that day. The war seems not to be very important—it seems like a petty war. It will be snowing at the beginning of the play, and we will move through the seasons, and at the end it will be snowing again. I feel like this is a story which begins in the cold and it ends there.

Q:

You started to talk a bit about the characters, but could you speak specifically about some of them, like Parolles? He's such a complex character and he's been seen and portrayed as everything from Bertram's bad angel to an absolute comic delight.

A:

I think Parolles is both. I think he is a weak, vain person who is always imposing himself. He's conceited without cause. He loves life. He loves intrigue and always wants to be a hero and the center of attention. And he's a great big liar. He makes up all these heroic tales about himself, and then he gets caught. Though he's absolutely terrified, it's hilarious to watch.

But Parolles changes at the end of the play. When he's humiliated, he sort of accepts his lot in life. He's not a leader nor particularly special. He's lucky (and he knows it) that Lafew takes pity on him and lets him into the household. He actually comes off better to me than Bertram. He's phony and a braggart. That's a good word for him: a braggart. But Bertram, on the other hand, will take a woman's chastity and then dump her. Bertram will lie and cheat and hurt other people.

Is he oblivious to their pain—or is he too young to be empathic? I don't see that in Parolles—he's just self-aggrandizing. But Bertram seems to be a user. Bertram leaves a lot of spurned bodies in his wake without accepting responsibility. In front of the entire court—after pursuing Diana and promising her marriage—he calls her a slut

So in the end, my feelings are quite ambivalent about that boy. If only he had said, "Okay, you're right—I shouldn't have done it... That would have shown some self-knowledge and some growth, the way Parolles

says, "You're right—I can't pretend anymore." Parolles says, "I am the thing I am." There's some real wisdom there. "I'm just going to be me," which is probably not very talented, and not very interesting, but it is an acceptance of who he is. But we're left wondering about Bertram.

Q:

What about Helena? She's also been seen across an entire spectrum . . .

A:

She has her own frailty. She chases a man whom she knows doesn't love her. She asks the King: "If I cure you, will you give me my choice among the noblemen?" And I don't blame her. That's right—I would've done the same thing. But then when he runs away—I'd have accepted it. I might have cried for several months and eaten a lot of chocolate. But she, in a way, is ruthless in her pursuit—completely ruthless. And this gives me pause. I don't think Helena's the perfect heroine, as many critics think.

Q:

Do you think you, or Lia Mortensen (the actress playing Helena) will have trouble getting the audience to like Helena?

A:

No, Lia is a winning and strong actress—she's easy to love. She'll be very funny with Parolles, and that's her first big scene. She asks him all these very leading questions: "How may we, sir, lose it"—virginity—"to our own liking?" And he says, "Hmmm. Let me see." I think the interaction there is fun. And then the early scene with the Countess is very moving. Helena's heart is breaking. Shakespeare is introducing his characters to us slowly, and you have to see the tapestry that is being woven. And then, ultimately, it's my job to balance it all.

Q:

Helena seems so much in her own orbit. There's something that sets her apart from everyone.

A:

She sets herself apart. She has got one thing on her mind from the first time we see her. She says in her first line, "I have forgot my father"—who died just six months ago—"and these great tears grace his remembrance more than those I shed for him. What

was he like? I have forgot him. My imagination carries nothing in it but Bertram.” [gasps] “I am undone,” she says. So right away we know the woman is totally obsessed.

Q: One critic said that if a man pulled the bed trick stunt that Helena pulls, he would be considered “a villain of the deepest dye.”

A: I think that scholar was right. Because it’s the woman who’s finally in control. You see, women have no power at all in the world of this play. The fact that women take control over the bed trick as a response to male dominance is, for me, not a bad thing. Scholars talk about the convention of the bed trick, sort of like in a soap opera. I like the way that Shakespeare uses the convention, both in this play and in *Measure for Measure*, because his women find a way to expose the males’ duplicity. But to be entirely fair, the women have been duplicitous, too.

Q: The respective roles of the sexes are not played out in the “right” way in *All’s Well*, with a woman imposing her will on a man—and upon one who is her social superior.

A: No, that’s right. That’s the point. So Helena has to cure the King in order to be socially accepted. And when she does cure him, then she becomes worthy or acceptable as a match for a nobleman. But, like any of us, it’s completely inappropriate to force love down anybody’s throat. When I was last in England, I remember seeing all these beautiful horses in the meadows. If you don’t know a horse—I know this sounds ridiculous—but if you don’t know a horse personally, you just have to stand there and look at them, and sometimes I talk to them. They’ll come up to you just to see if you’re a friend. They’ll feel it. They’ll start nuzzling you, and you can start nuzzling them back. But you just try and put one move toward that horse, and that horse will fly. It’s a good thing to remember when you’re going after a man or woman in your life. Just be still—if it was meant to be, it will be.

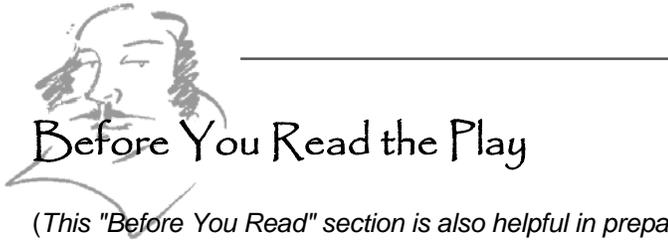
Q: Why do you think that Shakespeare wrote this play that’s so strange, so atypical of a “true” love story?

A: I don’t know why Shakespeare did it. I just think the theme of this play is about love. It’s *all* about it: mother-son love, sexual love, self love, obsessive love. All different kinds of love, and much of it is neurotic and distorted. There are so few really good relationships, and so many people flailing around in the universe. You know what I mean by flailing? Reacting from a bad choice, heading into a worse choice, and then to live as a hermit for years because you’ve been hurt in the past.

I do believe that Shakespeare was rejected in love—the sonnets especially suggest this. I believe that he pursued people who were very wrong for him. I believe that he may have gone out on a limb, just like Helena. His “magic potion” was not exactly Helena’s, but he could write as if he had a magic potion. I bet he wrote sonnets, poems, and even perhaps his plays, for people he wanted to impress and seduce, and I believe that no one fell in love with him just because he did.

I think he was Helena. He may have been Bertram, too. But look at his relationship with his wife. He gets her pregnant, marries her, leaves her and Stratford to go to London, and rarely comes home. He seems to have made a lot of those same mistakes of love in his own life. I think that it was Shakespeare who needed to say, “Life is a mingled yarn, the good and the bad together. Our virtues and our faults. . .”—that wonderful speech of the Lord’s. I think perhaps he needed to forgive himself. Or maybe he just needed to get the mess out on paper because there’s really no solution to loving. Helena used her power unwisely. Bertram used his power unwisely. And the King also used his power without wisdom, because you can’t force people to love. And though kings and fathers tried to do it all the time, psychologically, it probably wasn’t any more right 400 years ago than it is now.

Classroom Activities



(This "Before You Read" section is also helpful in preparing students who will not be reading the play.)

► As a Class

1. Tossing Lines: *Divide the entire class in half and give each member of one group an index card with one of the lines below printed on it. All of these lines are taken from Act I, scene i.*

Plunging directly into the script can be a good way to get ready to read or watch a play. Here are some lines from a conversation between a man and a woman:

What was he like? / I have forgot him.
If I can remember thee, I will think of thee at court.
Virginity, like an old courtier, wears her cap out of fashion
You go so much backward when you fight.
Now shall he -- / I know not what he shall.
'Save you, fair queen!
'Twas pretty, though a plague, / To see him every hour.
My imagination / Carries no favour in't but Bertram's.
But now he's gone, and my idolatrous fancy / Must sanctify his relics.
And yet I know him a notorious liar.
I will stand for't a little, though therefore I die a virgin.
Answer the time of request.
A mother, and a mistress, and a friend
Man is enemy to virginity; how may we barricado it against him?
That you were made of, is metal to make virgins.

Read your card silently and circle any words you don't know. Put these words on the board and come to a class consensus about their pronunciation and meaning. Memorize the line on your card. Now, half of the class stands in a circle. One person takes an object (like a bean bag or a rubber ball) to toss. The person who has the object first reads or recites her line with as much feeling as she can muster. Then she tosses the object to any student she wishes. He, in turn, reads or recites his line aloud and tosses off to the next reader. Repeat this exercise until everyone has read or recited their line several times.

Now repeat this process with the rest of the class with a new set of lines. Again, before you "toss" the lines, discuss any words you don't know and come to an agreement about what these words mean. Here are some possible lines:

Keep him out.
Virginity by being once lost may be ten times found.
There shall your master have a thousand loves.
There's little can be said in't; 'tis against the rule of nature.
Unfold to us some warlike resistance.
Is there no military policy how virgins may blow up men?
There is no living, none, / If Bertram be away.
Th'ambition in my love thus plagues itself.
Loss of virginity is rational increase, and there was never virgin got till
virginity was first lost.
Virginity breeds mites, much like a cheese. . .
When thou hast leisure, say thy prayers.

Classroom Activities

'Tis a commodity will lose the gloss with lying; the longer kept, the less worth.
Keep it not; you cannot choose but lose by't.
Are you meditating on virginity?
The fated sky/Gives us free scope.

Spend some time discussing both sets of lines—what sort of scene do they suggest? Who are these people? What is the relationship between them? What are they like? Let your imaginations have free reign.¹

2. Devote a bulletin board in the classroom to *All's Well* and invite students to bring in images from magazines, newspapers, advertisements, catalogs, etc. that they associate with the play. Ask them to write the line or lines that made this image seem appropriate on the picture, or on a piece of paper which they can attach to the image. Invite them to add to the bulletin board as they read. You might want to get the ball rolling by putting up images of provincial France or photoscapes including long-standing structures in Florence, like the *Duomo* and the *Uffizi* (*National Geographic* and *Travel and Leisure* are excellent sources of rich images).

► In Small Groups or Pairs

3. In small groups, read through the first 35 lines of the play. Pretend that you are television reporters. What pieces of information do these lines provide about the courts at Rossillion and Paris? Write a news broadcast based on this information, and then choose one person from the group to present it for the class. After all of the groups have presented their “broadcasts,” work as a class to compile a list of all of the information known at this point about the main characters.²



As You Read the Play

ACT I

► As a Class

4. Shakespeare scholar E. A. J. Honigman notes, “From the first stage-direction Shakespeare signals to the audience that *All's Well* is to be an unconventional comedy: the characters enter ‘**all in black**,’ and black was the colour of tragedy.”

Parolles's entry and the bawdy conversation that he has with Helena alleviates the sense of tragedy in this first scene of the play; are there any ways of alleviating the sense of tragedy before he comes on stage? How would you direct the actors playing this scene to behave? What are the advantages to having the play open in sadness if the intent is to have it end “well”? What might be disadvantageous about such an opening?

5. Class issues prove to be of great importance in the first act of *All's Well*. Helena likens Bertram to a star well out of her reach, and Lavatch asks the Countess's permission to marry Isabel, making frequent reference to their poverty.

Print the names of all of the characters in the play on large pieces of paper. Arrange the names in hierarchical order on the basis of what you have learned about the characters so far. Tape the names on the wall or chalkboard in ascending order, and return periodically to this ranking as you read the play. Do any characters change places over the course of the play? How, and why? Besides the lines that refer to a character's class status, how might you convey to an audience the class position of a particular character? Costumes? Stage business?

¹This exercise is adapted from similar heuristics described in *Shakespeare Set Free*, edited by Peggy O'Brien, published by Washington Square Press, 1993

²This exercise is based on one described in the Cambridge School Shakespeare edition of *All's Well That Ends Well*, edited by Elizabeth Huddleston and Sheila Innes, published by Cambridge University Press in 1993.

Classroom Activities

6. Isbel is an absent presence in the play. Lavatch talks about her, but she does not appear in the *dramatis personae*, she has no lines and there are no stage directions to suggest that she is present. This is also true of the changeling boy in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, however, and many productions represent him among the fairies on the stage. Consider whether or not you would cast an Isbel. Would she be on the stage while Lavatch talks about her and asks permission to marry her? Would she be with him, or in the background? How would she react to the things that he says? Several different students in a row should come to the front of the room and react to Lavatch's lines (I.iii.12-43) as another student slowly reads them. The rest of the class plays director. Direct one of the people playing Isbel to respond angrily, another to play it for laughs, etc. How do these different responses affect the mood of this scene, when the Countess learns of Helena's love for Bertram?

► In Small Groups or Pairs

7. Duologues: Given the sexual nature of Helena's ultimate plot to catch Bertram, it seems significant that Shakespeare shows Helena engaging in lewd punning with Parolles in the very first scene of the play. **Work in pairs** on Act I, scene 1, lines 95-186 (there is a brief interruption by a page which you can ignore). How should this scene be played? Is Helena a slut? Is she serious in the views she expresses on sexuality? In pairs, go to the front of the room and deliver the scene after you have had a chance to work through it. Discuss the various stagings and what they reveal about the characters.

FOLLOW-UP: This "duologue" is preceded and followed by soliloquies from Helena. **On your own**, examine either Helena's soliloquy at Act I, scene 1 lines 68-93 OR her soliloquy at Act I, scene 1 lines 187-200. What light do these private lines shed on her interaction with Parolles? Does Helena's tone shift at all between the first soliloquy and the second? If so, how, and what do you think motivated the change? *Begin class discussion the next day by asking for the students' thoughts.*³

8. An **oxymoron** is the contradictory pairing of an adjective and a noun, such as "humble ambition" (I.i.146). Why does Helena lapse into oxymoron when she talks about Bertram (I.i.141-148)? **Work in pairs** to write a series of at least five oxymorons about either Helena or Parolles. Read your oxymorons aloud in pairs, one person reading the adjective and one person reading the noun. Why did you choose these terms to describe Helena or Parolles? What have you learned about them so far in the play that made you describe them in this way?

9. The first entrance of a character is an important moment. We know a great deal about the King of France before he enters the play in Act I, scene ii. On the basis of what is known about him, **work in small groups** to decide how you would stage that scene. (The essay on stage history and its suggestions about various ways the King and his illness have been played might help here.) Present your idea for the class and discuss what the various approaches convey to an audience about the King's character. Next, repeat this exercise for the King's exit at the end of the scene. How does he leave the stage? Remember—you must strive for continuity. If the King came on stage using a crutch, it might not make sense to have him leave the stage in a wheelchair!

10. Rinaldo enters Act I, scene iii with Lavatch, but has no lines throughout Lavatch's lengthy bawdy exchange with the Countess. **Work in pairs** to decide how Rinaldo behaves while this conversation is going on. Is he amused by Lavatch? Scandalized? What does he do to convey these responses to the audience? Several students can stage their physical reactions while their partners read portions of the scene's first 75 lines. **HINT:** Look at Rinaldo's conversation with the Countess about Helena (I.iii.78-95) to determine what kind of character he seems to be, and how he would likely respond to Lavatch.

Remember these two exercises as you begin every scene. Only one character is talking onstage at a time (usually). What are the rest of them doing? **When you attend the production** at Chicago Shakespeare Theater, pay attention to all of the actors on the stage and not just the ones who are talking. What are they doing? How do their actions impact our understanding of the scene?

³The follow-up portion of this exercise is derived from an activity suggested in the Cambridge School Shakespeare edition of *All's Well That Ends Well*.

Classroom Activities

11. Get in **groups of three** and assign everyone the following parts: one person will be the director and the other two will be the actors portraying Helena and the Countess. Don't worry if boys need to play the women's parts—all the female parts in Shakespeare's theater were taken by boy actors anyway. Block out the reactions, gestures and movements to accompany the lines in Act I, scene iii, lines 112-166. First go carefully through these lines, since Shakespeare includes a number of "stage directions" in them, like Helena's line, "Here on my knee. . ." (I.iii.164). Stage your version of this scene for the class and discuss each performance.⁴

► On Your Own

12. Rinaldo recounts an overheard monologue from Helena that does not exactly match either of the two soliloquies that we have heard from her. Use what he says (I.iii.83-94) to script the soliloquy that he overheard. **EXTRA CREDIT:** Write the soliloquy in iambic pentameter (lines consisting of ten syllables each, an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable).⁵

13. Before you move on to Act II, for homework make a list in your notes or reading journal of all of the significant characters you have met so far. Add a second column in which you describe as specifically as you can what each of these characters wants. In a third column, note the scene and line numbers which created this impression. Discuss your conclusions as a class. Which characters get what they want? How did they manage it? Does it seem likely that they will retain it? Why or why not? *This is a good exercise to revisit at the end of the play.*

ACT II

► As a Class

14. When she is trying to "sell" the King on the idea of accepting her treatment, Helena says: "He that of greatest works is the finisher / Oft does them by the weakest minister" (II.i.131-132). Discuss **as a class** what renders Helena a weak minister in this society. **HINT:** Lafew's remarks in Act II, scene I, lines 78-81 may be helpful here.

15. Consider the significance of line delivery. *Write on the board the phrase: "I pray you stay not"*—the first half of Bertram's parting line to Helena. **As a class**, read this line aloud slowly, emphasizing a different word each time you read it. How does the tone of the line shift depending on the words emphasized? Which way of reading it do you find best, and why?

► In Small Groups or Pairs

16. Parolles's name is derived from the French noun for "word," or "speech." In **small groups**, dissect Parolles's terribly wordy speech in Act II, scene I, lines 48-54. Boil his bombastic rhetoric down to as few words as possible while retaining the same basic meaning. Now, beef it back up! Imagine a really verbose person whom you know. How would they say the same thing that Parolles is trying to say? Perform your "modern" version of Parolles's wordiness for the class.

17. In Act II, scene I, lines 166-170, Helena agrees to quite a gamble in the challenge of curing the King. Work in **groups of three** to make a list of all of the things she risks if she fails in her attempt to heal him. Next, pretend that

you are updating this play for a production set in the late 1990s. What would modern, equivalent risks be? Are any of them the same? What might that suggest about the status of women in our society?⁶

18. The end of Act II, scene v is extremely painful. Helena begs Bertram for a kiss before he leaves and the text is ambiguous about whether or not he gives it to her. Discuss the options for staging this scene **in small groups**. You should consider the position of Helena and Bertram on the stage—are they close to one another, or far apart?

⁴This exercise appears in an abbreviated form in the Cambridge School Shakespeare edition of *All's Well That Ends Well*.

⁵This exercise is derived from the Cambridge School Shakespeare edition of *All's Well That Ends Well*.

⁶The first portion of this exercise appears in the Cambridge School Shakespeare edition of *All's Well That Ends Well*.

⁷The options for staging suggested in this exercise are taken from the Cambridge School Shakespeare edition of *All's Well That Ends Well*.

Classroom Activities

Remember, too, that there are other options besides just kissing her or not kissing her. Discuss the options as a class and consider the impact the staging of this scene has on the play as a whole.⁷

19. Get in **groups of 9-10** and select people to play director, Bertram, Helena, Lafew, Parolles and the lords from whom Helena chooses a husband in Act II scene iii. How are the lords arranged as Helena makes her choice? Are they lined up? Does she approach them? Do they come up to her? The King invites her to sit by him at the beginning of this scene—does she stay there? What is Bertram doing? Do you want his behavior to anticipate his negative response to her offer of marriage to him? Lafew's lines (II.iii.73-93) suggest that he can't hear what Helena is saying. Where would he and Parolles be in relation to the action? Stage your versions of this important scene and discuss them as a class.

20. In Act II, scene iii, Helena is, according to the stage direction, the only woman on the stage. At first she is the center of attention, but once she chooses Bertram, she has very few lines. What would you have her do while the King is angrily ordering Bertram to marry her? Is she angry, too? Upset? Embarrassed? Work in **the same groups** as in the preceding exercise to block out the action for this scene. Watch a few versions and discuss the messages they convey as a class.

21. In Act II, scene v, line 47, Bertram refers to Helena as his "clog," a block of wood that would be tied to an animal's leg to prevent it from straying. He might as well have called her his ball and chain. When the King of France gives his final blessing to the French lords leaving for the Italian wars, he tells them to "take heed" of "those girls of Italy" (II.i.19). His final warning is: "Beware of being captives / Before you serve" (II.i.21-22). Parolles uses an odd, invented word to encourage Bertram to leave Helena and run away to the wars. He says: "He wears his honour in a box unseen, / That hugs his **kicky-wicky** here at home" (II.iii.256-257). Work in **small groups** to develop tableaux for these lines: freeze in poses that you think capture the meaning of these lines. Then discuss the lines and the tableaux as a class. How are these views presented in the play? Seriously? Sarcastically? Do you think they are intended to be proven true, or revealed to be false?

22. Lafew is very critical of Parolles and disappointed in Bertram for being so close to him. Work in **pairs** to examine Lafew's criticism of Parolles in Act II, scene iii, lines 229-241. Make a list of the faults Lafew identifies in Parolles. Is he right? Use the text to support your own opinion of Parolles, and then discuss him as a class.

► On Your Own

23. In most fairy tales, it is the man who wins the lady of his choice, and not the other way around. Typically, too, the lady is very glad to be won. Shakespeare reverses both conventions in *All's Well*, showing a woman who wins a very reluctant husband. Imagine the ending of *Cinderella* if she went looking for the mystery man who had her other slipper and then he ran away from her. What if Sleeping Beauty sat up and wiped her mouth after the Prince's saving kiss? What other UNhappy endings can you think of to popular fairy tales? Write a "problem" version of a popular tale, and share it with the class.

24. The surviving versions of Shakespeare's plays are usually too long to stage in their entirety, so directors make careful decisions about ways to cut the script down to a manageable length. Often, their interpretation of a character or motif in the play governs these choices. Pretend that you are a director preparing an acting script of *All's Well*. You intend to present Bertram as a sympathetic character. Are there any lines that you would cut in order to render him more appealing to the audience? **HINT:** Act II, scene iii, lines 94-175 is a logical place to start. Discuss your cuts with the rest of the class.

25. Bertram indicates that he is going to write to his mother and tell her that he hates Helena, and to the King to explain why he is defying his request that he not join the wars in Italy. Pretend to be Bertram, and write these two letters. What would he say? Why do you think he hates Helena? Why is he so firm in his refusal to sleep with her? **Text in Context:** Marriages in Shakespeare's England were not considered valid until they had been consummated.

⁸A similar exercise is included in the Cambridge School Shakespeare edition of *All's Well That Ends Well*.

Classroom Activities

ACT III

► As a Class

26. Imagine that you have some important news to convey to someone close to you and you don't want to tell them in person. Perhaps you are breaking an important date with your boyfriend or girlfriend. Maybe you are telling your parents you are moving to a distant city. How would you let them know without telling them face to face? Discuss your options as a class, paying particular attention to the pros and cons of the choices suggested. Now, discuss **as a class** why Shakespeare would choose to have so many characters report significant decisions by letter. What does it tell you about them? What does it suggest about his goals as playwright?

27. By the end of Act III, scene vii, plots have been laid to trick both Parolles and Bertram. Before you read the outcome of these plots, discuss them **as a class**. How difficult is the task that each group of tricksters has ahead of them? What are the logistics that will have to be worked out? How do you get a man to sleep with you when he is expecting someone else in the bed? What is the attitude of each of the groups toward the stunt they are trying to pull? Serious? Joking?⁸

28. Critic H. B. Charlton, quite displeased with Helena's bed trick plan, thinks that *All's Well* shows us "a nymphomaniac succeeding in her quest and the whole worthless loveless bargain sanctified by the name of marriage." Do you think that Helena is justified in tricking Bertram into bed? Think about all of the things that have happened between the two of them so far as you discuss this scene **as a class**. Why does Helena do this? Does the fact that she is legally married to Bertram make her trick acceptable? Why or why not? What do you think she will do now?

► In Small Groups or Pairs

29. Throughout Act III, scene ii, Helena continues to fixate on Bertram's letter while the conversation around her moves on to other things. Work in **groups of five** to block out the action for this scene. What does she do during the Countess's conversation with the Lords Dumaine? How do the other characters react to her? Are they absorbed in their own conversation, or do they notice that she is caught up in her letter? Examine her soliloquy at Act III, scene ii, lines 91-121. Any action that you decide upon as directors will have to logically anticipate this part of the scene.

30. Act III, scene iii is very short, but the stage directions offer the opportunity for a great deal of stage business. Remember that Shakespearean theater did not make use of many props. Using only what you have at your disposal in the classroom, work in **groups of eight** to design this scene. How would you convey the hectic environment of the battlefield with only a few actors on a confined stage space? Present your scene to the class and discuss the strengths of each.

31. The designers play an important role in the interpretation of a play. The decisions they make about costume and set design must work logically in conjunction with the director's vision of the production. The visual and tactile elements of the costumes and the sets help set the mood for the audience watching the play. Get in **small groups** and design the costumes for *All's Well*. Take several pieces of cardboard, swatches of fabric and pencils and paper with which to sketch out your ideas. It is fine for the sketches to be very rough, and you can stick the fabrics that you would use to the cardboard with staples, pins, or glue. What does Helena wear throughout the play? Remember that she is in mourning when the play opens, and that she has just traveled to France when Lafew introduces her to the

King. Is she wearing something different for the scene in which she chooses a husband? If so, what is it? Would you want it to confirm or contradict Bertram's opinion that she is unworthy of him? Helena's letter to the Countess about her planned pilgrimage to St. Jaques's shrine indicates that she is going to be barefoot. What does she wear as a pilgrim? Discuss as a class the decisions that you made in your small groups, and the impact they would have on the audience's responses to Helena. Some of these designs might make nice additions to the *All's Well* bulletin board.

Classroom Activities

32. Helena speaks and writes in sonnet form several times over the course of the play. The Shakespearean sonnet consists of fourteen lines of pentameter verse (ten syllables per line). His sonnets usually divide into three sections: 1. eight rhyming lines in the pattern ABABCDCD, 2. four rhyming lines in the pattern EFEF, and 3. a concluding couplet (GG). Helena's soliloquy in Act I, scene i, lines 187-200 is a sonnet, as is her letter in Act III, scene iv, lines 4-17.

*Reproduce individual lines from each of these sonnets on index cards and divide the class into **two groups of at least 14**, one for each sonnet.* The members of each group should walk around their half of the room, periodically reading their own line aloud and listening to the other lines. People who think their lines logically go together should start walking together in a line. Arrange yourselves as the individual lines of the sonnet. When everyone has found their place in the "sonnet line," stop, and read the sonnet you have created aloud for the other group and listen to their sonnet, too. Check yourself against the text. Did you transpose any lines? Why do you think you put them in the "wrong" place? Can you make a case for your "wrong" reading as a better one?

33. *All's Well* is a play filled with letters, and we only hear some of them on the stage. The Countess asks Rinaldo to write to Bertram telling him that Helena has left Rossillion (III.v.29-33). Remember: Rinaldo is the one who revealed Helena's love for Bertram to the Countess, and the Countess chastises him for not giving her Helena's parting letter sooner. Work **in pairs** to write the letter that Rinaldo sends to Bertram. How will he fulfill the Countess's orders? Will a private agenda of his own emerge in the letter? Read and discuss at least a few of the letters as a class. What sort of conclusions did this exercise lead you to draw about Rinaldo's character?

34. When the King makes his parting benediction to the French lords going to join the Italian wars, he warns them about "Those girls of Italy" (II.i.19). This is one of many pieces of advice about male-female relationships that appears in the play. Working in **groups of five**, look back over: the Countess's love advice to Helena (I.iii.139-228), Parolles's sexual advice to Helena (I.i.95-186), Lavatch's description of the kind of relationship he anticipates with Isbel (I.iii.10-49), Mariana's dim view of what men want from women (III.v.13-83), and Helena's (correct) assumption about Bertram's willingness to pay any price to enjoy Diana (III.vii.22-28).

What is the image of love presented in this play? Is there one vision, or many? Choose the passage to which you have the strongest reaction and act it out with the members of your group. Bring the spectacle that each of these speakers imagines or fears to life. Present your "vision of love" to the class, and discuss the performances.

35. As they are leaving the stage, Helena tells the Widow that she has a plan to discuss with her. We next see them discussing the details after they've first spoken about it. In **groups of four**, take the parts of Helena, Diana, Mariana and the Widow. In character, imagine the conversation they would have about Helena's bed trick plan. What pros and cons would each of these women see to Helena's plot? What would she say in response to their questions and concerns? Stage your imagined conversation for the class and discuss these scenes. What did you discover about the bed trick by discussing it this way? Why do you think Shakespeare did not write a scene like this?

36. Diana, Mariana and the Widow have all heard about Helena from Parolles. Work **in groups of five** to script and stage the "missing" scene in which Parolles tells the women Bertram's and Helena's story. Think about the kind of character Parolles has proven to be as you decide what he would say and how he would say it. Present your versions of this scene and discuss them. Why might Shakespeare have omitted this scene from the play?

37. Work in **the same groups** to script and stage the non-existent scene in which Parolles tries (unsuccessfully) to present Diana with gifts and letters from Bertram. How would Parolles handle himself on a love errand? Present your scenes between Parolles and the women. What effect does the presentation of this scene create? Why might Shakespeare have opted to report this event rather than showing it to the audience?

38. Both Helena and Bertram have recently lost their fathers when the play opens, and they acquire several surrogate parents or guardians by the middle of the play. Once you have read this much of the script, work **in small groups** to

Classroom Activities

develop “family trees” for Helena and Bertram. These should not be literal genealogies, but should, rather, include emotional attachments, role models and guardians. If you can, draw these trees next to each other, and note any places where the “branches” of their trees intersect—who do they share on their family trees? How much support does each of them have? Do they get the love that they deserve?

► On Your Own

39. Often, actors will try to imagine the life of their character outside of the play in order to get into the role. Pretend that you have been cast in the role of Mariana. Write your “autobiography.” How old is Mariana? Is she friends with Diana, or is she an older woman—perhaps a friend of the Widow’s? Why does she have such a cynical view of men’s attitudes toward women? Is she one of the maids who has been seduced by men’s enticements? Discuss the profile that you develop with the rest of the class.⁹

40. Many of Shakespeare’s plays have come down to us in versions that were probably not acting versions, but rather published versions of popular plays, much like the books based on movie screenplays that cram bookstore shelves today. Often, directors will cut scenes to make the play as close as possible to two-and-a-half hours’ running time. Act III, scene i is a popular scene to cut in efforts to scale down *All’s Well*. Look back through the act and decide if you would cut that scene. Why or why not? Would anything else in Act III have to be changed if that scene were removed? Why?¹⁰

41. Act III is a very busy one with numerous scenes (seven) and lots of location changes. Work in groups of three to design a production of *All’s Well*. How would you design the set for Act III to enable clear, but quick changes of location? If appropriate materials are available, you can even build a small diorama model of your set inside of a shoebox. Otherwise, sketch out your ideas and add some of them to the bulletin board. ROUGH pencil drawings are perfectly acceptable, and not at all unusual at designers’ meetings at Chicago Shakespeare Theater!

ACT IV

► As a Class

42. The new stage at Chicago Shakespeare Theater is a thrust stage, with the audience seated on three sides. Pretend to be Director Barbara Gaines and block out the action in Act IV, scene i. If possible, rearrange the classroom space so that the desks or chairs surround three sides of a “performance space.” Be sure to leave aisles, since actors can enter at Chicago Shakespeare from the back and sides of the theater as well as the traditional backstage area. How will the actors “stalking” Parolles get close enough to him to be able to hear what he is saying, but also seem far enough away that he will not hear what they say or even notice that they are there? Watch for this scene when you **attend the production**. After you have seen it, discuss how Barbara Gaines approached this scene.

43. Before you read the final act of the play, four student volunteers should take turns sitting in the “Hot Seat.” They will take, by turns, the parts of Helena, Bertram, Diana and Parolles. Each student sits in the front of the room and the rest of the class asks them questions about the things they have done. Why did they do them? What were their motivations? The students in the Hot Seat should try to explain their actions in character as well as they are able. Once you have run through the sequence, four different people can come up and sit in the Hot Seat and repeat the

process. This time, focus on what the characters are going to do next, and why. (No cheating! Anyone who has read ahead should please not give away the ending).

► In Small Groups or Pairs

44. J. L. Styan, who wrote a performance history of *All’s Well*, thinks that the few “nonsense” words in Act IV, scene i and Act IV, scene iii were only suggestions; the actors tormenting Parolles probably improvised a great deal more nonsense language to carry the scene. Get in **groups of five** and work through the portions of these scenes that

⁹The Cambridge School Shakespeare edition of *All’s Well That Ends Well* also suggests an exercise such as this.

¹⁰This exercise is derived from one described in the Cambridge School Shakespeare edition of *All’s Well That Ends Well*.

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involve nonsense language. Where would you add more words? Would the soldiers in the “background” be muttering nonsense to each other, too? Why do you think certain words get repeated in the existing nonsense text? Can you think of other nonsense words you would use in this scene?

45. While the soldiers are plotting the way that they are going to catch Parolles in a web of lies, they also discuss Helena’s “death” and Bertram’s attempts to seduce Diana. **In pairs**, read through Act IV, scene iii, lines 31-63. Then, stay in character and pretend that the servant does not enter precisely then. Continue discussing Bertram’s behavior toward Helena and Diana in character as the Lords Dumaine. What do you think his comrades in arms think of him? Discuss your conclusions with the class.

46. Do a close reading of the first 20 lines of Act IV, scene i. **In pairs**, read the passage through slowly and ask the rest of the class to respond as they notice each of the following aspects of the passage:

Images: On the first reading, ask the class to snap their fingers when a line makes a picture appear in their mind. What kind of pictures are they? Pleasant? Disturbing? Sad? Do they combine to create an overall impression of this scene? If so, what is it? Discuss these word pictures.

Metaphors: As a new pair reads the passage, ask the rest of the class to drum their fingers on their desks when they hear descriptions of things in terms of entirely different things. Discuss these comparisons. How do they contribute to the mood of the scene?

Alliteration: The next time that the passage is read, ask the rest of the class to tune their ears to listen for repeated consonant sounds. Ask them to clap once each time they hear such a repetition. What sorts of sounds get repeated? What kind of sound effect do they create? Discuss.

Assonance: This time, the pair reading should ask everyone else to do something a bit harder, and listen for repeated vowel sounds. Ask them to make the sound when they hear it repeated (i.e.—“ooooo” or aaahhhh”). What does this passage sound like? Harsh? Lilted? Discuss.

Repeated words: Finally, instruct students to raise their hands every time a word is repeated. What word do they hear the most often in this passage?

Barbara Gaines and the actors at Chicago Shakespeare Theater work through exercises such as these in their initial rehearsals. They use repeated words and sounds to trace a path through the script, relying on these repetitions to lead the way to the play’s central meanings. Using what you have learned from careful analysis of how this passage sounds, “score” these lines. Which words would be emphasized in delivery? How would that emphasis be conveyed? Raised voice? Pauses? What effect do you want this passage to have on an audience watching it be delivered, and how will you use the language to achieve it?

47. To this day, scholars refer to the original copies of play texts from Shakespeare’s era as “foul papers” because Shakespeare’s handwriting was reputed to be so “foul”—difficult to read. When Diana is responding to Bertram’s seduction attempt, she has a line that says something like “Men make rope’s in such a scarre” (IV.ii.38). No one who has studied the play has any idea what that is supposed to mean! The line was probably misread by the first printer. Work **in pairs** to come up with a clearer line. As a hint, you should know that, in Shakespeare’s day, lower-case “s” and “f” looked remarkably similar, lower-case “i” was often printed with the letter we now know as a “j,” and lower-case “u” was represented by what we now know as “v.”¹¹

48. The bed trick that Helena and Diana play on Bertram is a tricky business. He probably thinks that she will only allow him to stay for one hour because she is afraid that her mother will catch her. We know, though, that it is because Helena is afraid that *he* will catch her! Work **in small groups** to generate a list of all of the possible things that could go wrong with this plan. Discuss them as a class. Why do you think that Shakespeare chose not to stage the scene of their meeting?

49. Referring to the fact that boy actors played all of the female roles in Shakespearean drama, Josephine Waters Bennett reminds us: “we must also remember that this dialogue was written to be spoken, not by a woman or young girl, but by a boy impersonating a woman.” Conversely, today in Chicago, Footsteps Theater stages Shakespearean

¹¹The Cambridge School Shakespeare edition of *All’s Well That Ends Well* also suggests a close study of this line.

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plays with an all-female cast. Work in **same-sex pairs** through either Act IV, scene ii, when Bertram arranges his rendezvous with Diana, or Act II, scene v, when he parts from Helena. If you are a male portraying one of the female characters, how will you indicate that you are supposed to be female? Likewise, if you are a female called on to portray Bertram, how will you make it clear that you are playing the part of a man? Stage some of these scenes for one another, and discuss the results. Does your impression of the scene change at all when you see the roles played by members of the “wrong” sex? If so, why, and how?

50. Since it is far too expensive to pay individual actors to take small, walk-on parts, theater companies in Shakespeare’s day (as well as today) often “doubled” small parts. Double-casting means that one actor will play two or more roles. The servant who appears in Act IV, scene iii, line 65 is a prime candidate for double-casting. Pretend that you are the casting director for *All’s Well*. Work through the *dramatis personae* in **small groups** and develop a list of parts that could be doubled. Remember: there must be sufficient stage time in between the appearance of doubled characters to allow the actor playing them to change costumes, if necessary, and they can’t be on the stage at the same time (unless you intend to change the script—see the stage history essay). **When you see the production**, see if you notice any actors who play multiple roles. What did the actors do to differentiate the parts? Use the program to help sort this out. Were there any performances that were so convincing that you did not even notice the actor was the same?

51. Parolles does not have any lines after the soldiers remove his blindfold until all but one of them have left the stage. Get in **groups of five** and stage this snippet of a scene (IV.iii.261-269). What does Parolles do when he realizes that his friends are his “captors”? How does each of the men deliver their parting shot to Parolles? What tone of voice do they use? Do they do anything to him on their way off of the stage? Several of the groups should volunteer to present their versions of this scene for the entire class. Discuss them. How do you feel about Parolles when you see this scene staged?

52. For this exercise, **the entire class** gets to play director. One volunteer should come to the front of the room and read Parolles’ soliloquy that ends Act IV scene iii. The person reading should pause after each line and take direction from the class. The rest of the students should make suggestions about inflection, tone, pace, pauses, etc. Then the “actor” playing Parolles should reread the line, incorporating these suggestions until the class “directors” are satisfied. Once you have worked through the entire passage, ask the actor to do one more reading straight through, following the directions you gave them along the way. What is the impression conveyed by this reading? If time permits, you might repeat this exercise with a different actor and markedly different performance suggestions.

► On Your Own

53. In Act IV, scene ii, lines 17-19, Diana uses the image of a plucked rose to characterize a seduced virgin. FOR HOMEWORK: Examine one of your favorite passages dealing with lust or love in the play. What imagery is used in the scene to describe the feeling and/or its effects? What impression does Shakespeare create with the images he

chose to use? Discuss your findings in class the next day, and develop a list of images applied to lust and love in the play. If you were directing this play, how would you develop a set, costumes, acting style, sound design, etc. that captures the imagery created by the play’s language?

54. In Act IV, scene iii, lines 60-63, the elder of the two Lords Dumaine presents his opinion of human nature. Does he speak for the play? FOR HOMEWORK, think about each of the characters in the play, applying this judgment. Does it fit all of them? Use your ideas to initiate discussion about human nature as it is depicted in *All’s Well* the next day in class.¹²

¹²This is a modified version of an exercise that appears in the Cambridge School Shakespeare edition of *All’s Well That Ends Well*.

¹³This exercise is a modification of a similar one which appears in the Cambridge School Shakespeare edition of *All’s Well That Ends Well*.

¹⁴The Cambridge School Shakespeare edition of *All’s Well That Ends Well* also includes an exercise focused on this scene and its important (but tiny) prop.

¹⁵The Cambridge School Shakespeare edition of *All’s Well That Ends Well* also includes an exercise on the scapegoating of Parolles.

Classroom Activities

ACT V

► In Small Groups or Pairs

55. In Act V, scene iii, the King, the Countess, and Lafew discuss Bertram and his behavior before he makes his return appearance in Rossillion. Get **in groups of three**, each person taking one of these parts, and read through the first 27 lines of the scene (until the Gentleman speaks). Then stay in character and debate whether or not Bertram should be forgiven for his conduct. (Remember: the people back at Rossillion do not yet know about Bertram's efforts to seduce Diana). Next, in the same small groups, debate Bertram's merits and demerits as yourselves, with full knowledge of everything he has done so far. Discuss your responses as a class.¹³

56. Props are an important part of any production. Helena's ring is integral to Act V, scene iii, but a ring is a very small thing to get a theater audience to see. Look at lines 75-95 **in groups of five**. Pretend that you are prop masters and the director—how would you stage this scene? Would you use a large, gaudy ring that might be visible to the audience? Would the King, the Countess and Lafew pass it around as they remark on it? Would Bertram keep the ring the entire time, moving around the stage to get away from each of them in turn? What are other possibilities? A few of the groups should present their version of this scene before the class. One person could read all of the lines while the other four act out the movements and gestures of the characters.¹⁴

57. There are many ways that an actor can interpret Bertram's behavior in the final scene. Work through Act V, scene 3, lines 163-230 and 294-306 **in groups of five**, pretending to be the actors playing Bertram, Diana, Helena, the Countess and the King. Bertram tells a lot of lies in this scene and ends by professing his love for Helena. How does he deliver these lines? When is he being truthful? When is he saying what he thinks the King wants to hear? How can the actor delivering the lines make this clear? What do the other characters think of him? How does their line delivery reflect this? **After you attend the production**, revisit this exercise and discuss the choices that were made in Chicago Shakespeare Theater's presentation of this scene.

58. Lafew and the Countess persuade the King to forgive Bertram by citing Parolles as the motivating influence for his bad behavior. Work **in pairs** to first make a list of all of the characteristics you would ascribe to Parolles and then compare them to Bertram's lines about Parolles (V.iii.202-207). Are there any similarities? What about Bertram's behavior throughout this final scene—does his description of Parolles apply in any way to himself? How so? Once you have worked in pairs for a while, share your ideas with the rest of the class to initiate a full discussion.¹⁵

59. Actors don't just recite their lines, of course—they inject them with emotional intensity and energy. How does Helena deliver her lines at V.iii.299-304? Is she angry? Vengeful? Happy? Proud? Excited? Get **in groups of three** and consider various ways that these lines could be presented. What actions would you direct the actress playing Helena to do to accompany these lines? How might the way that Helena delivers these lines affect the way that she delivers other important lines, such as her conversation with the Widow making the plans to trick Bertram? Once you have had some time to consider these matters in your small groups, discuss them as a class. **After you see the production**, recall how Chicago Shakespeare Theater's Helena delivered these lines. How did her delivery of these lines fit in with the way that she was portrayed throughout the production?

► On Your Own

60. Parolles returns to Rossillion in Act V scene ii in bad shape. Lafew does not even recognize him at first, and Lavatch tells him that he smells bad! Pretend to be the actor playing Parolles. In order to get into the part as you would have to play it in this act, imagine what has happened to Parolles in between the time that he left Italy and his arrival in France. Why is he stinky? Why would he not even be recognizable? Write Parolles's travel journal for the trip from Florence to Rossillion either as an in-class writing project, or for homework. Share your ideas with the class, and discuss how these events would affect an actor portraying Parolles.

Classroom Activities



After You've Read the Play

► As a Class

61. If you did Exercise #5 (the first exercise in Act I) in which you were asked to arrange the central characters in hierarchical order, return to that exercise now. How would you arrange the characters in hierarchical order at the end of Act V? Discuss the characters that you feel would shift in status position. What has happened over the course of the play to change their status? Do you find the King's "motto" for Helena—virtue is the true nobility—accurate? Why or why not?

62. In 1895, William Archer wrote: "If Bertram had promised Helena marriage, even if he had betrayed and deserted her, one must still have questioned her taste and dignity in carrying her breach of promise suit to the King's Bench in such a spirit of intrigue and chicanery. But there is no suggestion that Bertram ever breathed a word of love to Helena. She simply made up her sincere and noble mind to marry him willy-nilly, and she carried her point by methods which, if used by a man towards a woman, would brand him as a villain of the deepest dye." What if the gender roles in this play were reversed? Discuss how you would react if Bertram were the pursuer, rather than the pursued. What if he did what Helena does? How would it affect your response to the play's events? Why?

63. The critic G. Wilson Knight thinks that Helena is "the supreme development of Shakespeare's conception of feminine love." Compare Helena to other Shakespearean heroines with whom you are familiar. How does her love for Bertram stack up against Juliet's love for Romeo? Desdemona's love for Othello?

► In Small Groups or Pairs

64. In designing the set, costumes and music for a play, designers think a great deal about the overall themes in it. Work **in small groups** to assess the overall themes in *All's Well*. As a prompt, bear in mind that often the themes are linked to central events in the play—including death, marriage and war in *All's Well*. Death, for instance, produces suffering, sorrow, change, and reminds us of the impermanence of everything in our lives. How might you use set and costume design to convey these themes to an audience? Are there any songs you know that you think are fitting for *All's Well*? (Contemporary music is fine). **After you see the production**, discuss which themes you think Director Barbara Gaines focused on. Try to recall specific aspects of the production that lead you to these conclusions.

65. Victorian audiences were scandalized by *All's Well*, largely because of Helena's conduct. Even today, it is rare for a woman to propose marriage to a man, as Helena basically does to Bertram. Work **in small groups** to compile a list of all of the significant actions that Helena takes over the course of the play. Then, make a second column next to this list in which you place adjectives or adverbs that you would use to describe each of these actions (i.e.—brave, bossy, dangerous). Finally, come up with an overall assessment of Helena as a character. Discuss each group's findings as a class. **After you see the production**, consider what kind of Helena Chicago Shakespeare Theater presented. How was the nature of her character conveyed? Be as specific as you can be. How did the costume choices, the actress's voice, her body language and facial expressions contribute to your impression of her?

66. Bertram is young enough when the play opens to still need the care of a guardian—he is still a teenager. His own mother and his guardian, the King of France, basically take Helena's side against him. His first solution is to run away, but by the end of the play, he is prepared to accept responsibility for Helena as his wife and for their future child. Critic Alfred Howard Carter thinks that Bertram grows up during the play. As part of this process, Carter writes,

"he must win his independence before he can surrender it." Working **in small groups**, compile a list of the ways in which you think Bertram wins independence in the play. Then, compare a contrasting list of the ways in which he

¹⁶This exercise is based on one that TEAM SHAKESPEARE participant Alice Price uses in her classes at the Latin School.

Classroom Activities

must surrender his independence. Discuss how each of the items on the two lists contributes to Bertram's maturity. Is independence always a sign of adulthood? In what ways can surrendering one's freedom be a mature act?

67. There is a site on the worldwide web which will enable you to do searches for individual words in all of Shakespeare's plays and poetry. Go to this site at <http://www.gh.cs.su.oz.au/~matty/Shakespeare/test.html> and enter as a search "virtue" (but don't put it in quotation marks). Read the passages that come up and discuss them **in groups of three**. Is Shakespeare using this term in a consistent way throughout the play? If so, how so, and if not, what are some of the differences you detect? After you have discussed this as a small group, go to the board and create a word web: put the word "virtue" in the middle of the board and then draw lines connecting this word to other terms that came up in your discussion, such as "nobility." Discuss the results as a class. What do you think Shakespeare means by virtue? Who are the virtuous characters in this play? Why?

► On Your Own

68. If you have read or seen another Shakespearean play with a leading female role, such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or *Much Ado About Nothing*, imagine that Helena meets one of them for a cup of tea and a chat. What might Helena of *All's Well* and Helena of *Midsummer* have to say to one another? Helena and Juliet? Write out the conversation you imagine them having. **FOR EXTRA CREDIT:** Prepare your scene with a partner and perform it for the class.¹⁶



Preparing for the Performance

► As a Class

69. A number of pivotal scenes in the play have been staged by different productions in a variety of ways. Some obvious ones are: Helena and Parolles' crude discussion about virginity, the scene in which Helena cures the King, the scene in which Helena chooses Bertram from the men in the French court and the final scene when Bertram is confronted with evidence of his lies. What are the possibilities for staging each of these scenes? How would each approach affect the overall impression created by the play?

70. Shakespeare critic Carol Rutter writes: "In Shakespeare's theatre words speak only half the meaning. The other half mutely resides in the performance text we work to recuperate by learning to read **all** the lines . . . as if they were stage directions. A woman—I, for one—who wants to know what Shakespeare makes of women might usefully begin by watching where he puts them." Look at scenes such as Helena's virginity debate with Parolles in Act I, her choice of a husband in Act II, the conversation among the Florentine women about the soldiers in Act III, Bertram's attempt to seduce Diana in Act IV, and the final confrontation between Bertram and Diana (and, later, Helena) in Act V. Where does Shakespeare "put" Helena and Diana and the other women in such scenes? If you read their lines with a view toward the stage action that they suggest, what do you discover? Once you have discussed these matters, try staging some of the scenes incorporating the actions, gestures, vocal tones and facial expressions that you consider appropriate. How does seeing the scene staged in this way affect your impression of these female characters and the things that they say?

71. The stage at Chicago Shakespeare Theater thrusts out into the seating area. The audience surrounds the stage very closely, in three levels of seats never more than three rows from the stage. If you are seated on one of the sides of the stage, you will be able to see the audience members seated across from you. When during the

performance do you think you will become aware of other audience members? How do you think others' reactions will affect your experience, and your own reactions?

Classroom Activities

► In Small Groups or Pairs

72. Helena has been played many different ways, ranging from nearly saint-like in her humble purity to audaciously forward in her sexy interactions with Parolles, the King and Bertram. Discuss **in small groups** how you would portray Helena. How would you use costume, movement and mannerisms to convey a sense of her character if you were directing *All's Well*? Focus your attention on all of these elements in the production at Chicago Shakespeare Theater. Does the production give you any new ideas about Helena? If so, what are they? What about her presentation motivated you to see her in a new way?

► On Your Own

73. As an audience member, you will spend some time with the set for the opening scene of *All's Well* before the play begins. Imagine that you are the set designer for *All's Well*. Examine the opening scene very carefully and decide where you would set it. Is it outdoors, or indoors? What colors would be important? Would there be any central props or set pieces? If so, what would they be, and why would they be relevant to the action of this first scene? Use magazines and catalogs for sample images that reflect the setting and mood you would like to establish from the moment the audience enters the theater. How does your vision compare with that of Barbara Gaines?

74. Often, the sound or music in a film or accompanying a play is not obvious, but it is there! Imagine that you are the sound designer for *All's Well*. What sorts of sounds would you use at key moments in your production? Can you think of any special sound effects, or certain kinds of music to accompany the scene in which the soldiers trick Parolles into thinking he is kidnapped? The King enters in Act II scene iii dancing with Helena—what sort of music is playing then? What kind of dance are they doing to this music? Are there certain points when you would make the sound more noticeable than others? What sort of sound accompanies Bertram's parting from Helena, for instance? Are there places where you think total silence would be effective? Why?

75. The lighting design is also a key component in a theatrical production. Can you think of any significant scenes in which lighting would be important? What might the lights be like when Helena chooses a husband in the French court? Intimate and low? Full and bright? What about when Bertram arranges his meeting with Diana? How would you set the lights to convey the sense that it is nighttime in the scene in which the soldiers spring their trap on Parolles? **After you see the production**, discuss the ways in which Chicago Shakespeare Theater used lights to achieve important effects in these and other scenes.



Back in the Classroom

► As a Class

76. Several Shakespeare critics, including E. M. W. Tillyard and Kenneth Muir have claimed that *All's Well* is better on the stage than on the page. They think that the play is more successful when acted than when read. Now that you have seen it, do you agree with that assessment? Why,

or why not?

77. You probably imagined in your own mind what Bertram and Helena looked like before you saw the production at Chicago Shakespeare Theater. R. B. Parker thinks that the text supports depicting Bertram as a pretty boy: "As Helena's raptures over his 'hawking eye,' his curls, and so forth indicate, one of Bertram's problems is that he is so good-looking that people are ready to make excuses for him and eager to see a potential for nobility in him that he does not really possess." Barbara Gaines cast the attractive Tim Gregory as Bertram, but a good-looking exterior does not necessarily indicate the kind of empty superficiality Parker finds in Bertram's character! What kind of a person did you find Chicago Shakespeare Theater's Bertram to be? Did you find the kind of potential in him that

¹⁷This exercise is based on the array of visually-based exercises which appear in the *Shakespeare Set Free* series.

Parker thinks his character lacks? Or did you find him a piece of lead under a gilt exterior?

► In Small Groups or Pairs

78. Helena fakes her own death, tails Bertram disguised as a religious pilgrim, sleeps with him under the pretence that she is the woman he really wants, Diana, and then astounds him by revealing not only that she is alive, but that she is pregnant with his child! Whether you watch soap operas (including prime-time ones like *Beverly Hills 90210*) or not, you have surely seen commercials for them. **After** you see the Chicago Shakespeare Theater production of *All's Well*, **work in groups of six** to design either a poster or a radio advertisement for the production that highlights the play's intrigue. The radio spot should be no more than a minute long, and you can perform it for the class. Display the posters in the classroom.¹⁷

79. A fun website appeared in conjunction with Baz Luhrmann's film version of *Romeo and Juliet*. Go to <http://www.romeoandjuliet.com/author/times.html> and explore the "tabloid" *Elizabethan Times*. Now, **work in small groups** to design your own tabloid cover based on *All's Well*. What shocking headlines and photo opportunities can you imagine for such a cover? **FOR EXTRA CREDIT:** On your own, write one of the stories that would appear in the tabloid version of *All's Well*.

► On Your Own

80. Write a letter to Director Barbara Gaines and to Chicago Shakespeare Theater expressing your opinions about the production. What was your favorite part? What part, if any, didn't you like? Tell us your responses to the following things:

*Did seeing the play performed change your ideas about any of the characters or scenes?

*How close was Chicago Shakespeare Theater's production design to your own vision of the play? What would you have changed?

*Was there any point during the performance at which the sound design particularly affected you—or distracted you? What kind of mood did it create for you?



Techno Shakespeare

There are enough Shakespeare sites on the worldwide web to be caught in the undertow and never resurface! We've done some preliminary surfing so that you can go directly to sites that have information and material pertinent to the kind of study you are doing. Dive in!

1. The Complete Works of William Shakespeare
<http://tech-two.mit.edu/shakespeare/works.html>
As its name suggests, this site offers full texts of all of Shakespeare's works. Students can click on highlighted words and go to a glossary entry which defines them. The site also offers links to a discussion area and to Bartlett's familiar Shakespeare quotations.
2. Mr. William Shakespeare and the Internet
<http://daphne.palomar.edu/shakespeare/>
A fabulous site featuring biographical information on Shakespeare, links to Shakespeare criticism, historical information on the British Renaissance period and links to other recommended sites, including current Shakespeare Festivals. Find out where else in the world one can see a current production of *All's Well*.
3. The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Official Homepage
<http://www.shakespeare.org.UK/>
Unlike many writers who achieve star status only long after their deaths, Shakespeare was renowned as a writer in his own day. Therefore, places like the house where he was born and his final home in Stratford-upon-Avon were well preserved. His birthplace is now a museum. The Trust's gorgeous site includes historical information about the Shakespeare family and rural life during Shakespeare's lifetime complimented by beautiful, animated photos of the properties owned by the Trust, as well as still-shots from Royal Shakespeare Company productions at the two theaters in Stratford-upon-Avon, which serves as the company's home base.

4. Resource Central – Shakespeare
<http://www.ulen.com/shakespeare/>
This site features something for everyone. Students can roam through biographical information, play summaries and reading hints, while teachers may find the sample lesson plans helpful.
5. Shakespeare's Globe Theatre
<http://www.rdg.ac.uk/globe/>
Visiting this site can serve as an excellent companion to reading the essays on the "Shakespearean Theater" and the "Courtyard Theater" in this handbook. This well-maintained site features lush photos of the reconstructed theater with concise, clear descriptions of the research behind the reconstruction. The site is easy to navigate, allowing you to take a virtual tour of the theater space. (See exercise based on this site at the end of the "Courtyard Theater" essay).
6. The Shakespeare in Performance Data-Base
<http://www.rdg.ac.uk/AcaDepts/In/Globe/Data-base.html>
In conjunction with the Globe Theatre site, this spectacular database is devoted to all aspects of Shakespearean performance in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, as well as contemporary efforts to reconstruct the costumes, staging and theatrical attributes of Shakespearean-era productions. A fantastic site to browse through, this database offers many sumptuous images accompanied by well researched and clearly presented commentary. For a fun and informative introduction to Shakespearean-era clothing, for example, click on the "Costumes and the Globe" link on the bottom of the homepage, scroll midway down the page you jump to, and click on "Elizabethan Costuming." Imagine how early you'd have to get up every day to put all of those clothes on!
7. The Elizabethan Theater
<http://www.rrz.uni-koeln.de/phil-fak/english/shakespeare/spear.html>
An illustrated lecture on Shakespearean theater by Hilda Spear. The text, which is clearly and casually written, is presented in a user-friendly site, enabling visitors to go directly to material on specific topics, like "Inn-Yards" and view slides of the spaces Spear discusses.
8. Shakespeare Search Engine
<http://www.gh.cs.su.oz.au/~matty/Shakespeare/test.html>
This site enables you to conduct word or phrase searches in individual play texts or in the entire body of Shakespeare's work. (See the exercise accompanying Act V which makes use of this search engine).
9. *King Lear* On-Line
<http://www.library.upenn.edu/etext/furness/lear1619/index.html#TOC>
This site provides an excellent way to get a sense of how the printed texts of the plays appeared in Shakespeare's own day. This site provides a photographic representation of every page in the 1619 quarto edition of *King Lear*. Whether you have read that play before or not, skipping through the pages of this edition offers a sense of the cramped typefaces and unusual and inconsistent spelling that marked early publication.
10. Shakespeare (Nagoya University)
<http://elmo.lang.nagoya-u.ac.jp/~matsuoka/Shakespeare.html>
This site offers extensive links to other Shakespeare sites, plus to on-line references, such as concordances.

Especially for teachers...

1. Teaching Shakespeare
<http://www.csuohio.edu/shakespeare/>
Offers on-line syllabi, assignments, tutorials and lecture notes, as well as interactive resources for those teaching students at the ninth-grade through college levels.
2. Shakespeare Magazine
<http://www.shakespearemag.com>
Resources and suggested lesson plans for all of the plays, as well as an excellent archive of past issues of the magazine. It costs \$12 to subscribe to all portions of the site, but it is free to explore the "lesson of the month" and the archive.
3. Teaching Shakespeare
<http://www.teachersfirst.com/shakespr-f.htm>
Offers on-line assignments, plus useful links to other Shakespeare-related sites.
4. Penguin's Teacher Guides
<http://www.penguinputnam.com/academic/resources/guides/shakes3/>
Teacher's Guides to *Julius Caesar*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Othello*, *Richard III*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *The Tempest*. Includes introductions, bibliographies and class activities.



Suggested Readings

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