

A NOISE WITHIN'S THEATRE SEASON

STUDY **GUIDE**

William Shakespeare's
**ALL'S WELL
THAT ENDS WELL**

DIRECTED BY Nike Doukas

February 6–March 6, 2022



STUDY GUIDES FROM **A NOISE WITHIN**

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A Noise Within's study guides include:

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- Scholarly articles
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All the best,

Alicia Green
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION



Pictured: Carolyn Ratteray, Evan Lewis Smith, and Veralyn Jones, *Gem of the Ocean* 2019. PHOTO BY CRAIG SCHWARTZ.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Character Map	4
Synopsis	5
About the Playwright: William Shakespeare	7
Timeline of William Shakespeare's Life	8
Historical Context: Elizabethan Society	9
A Woman's Lot: The Roles and Rights of Women in Elizabethan Society	10
William Shakespeare's "Problem Plays"	11
Common Themes: Connecting <i>All's Well That Ends Well</i> and Shakespeare's Other Works	12
A Tale Re-Told: The Source Material for <i>All's Well That Ends Well</i>	13
Themes.	14
Flawed Heroes: Helen and Bertram in <i>All's Well That Ends Well</i>	16
<i>All's Well That Ends Well</i> : Too Hot to Handle? By Dr. Miranda Johnson-Haddad	18
Interview with the Director: Nike Doukas.	19
Try Your Hand at Shakespeare	20
Words Coined by Shakespeare.	21
The Art of the Shakespearean Insult	22
Pre-Show Preparation: Research	23
Pre-Show Preparation: Activities	24
Essay Questions.	25
Additional Resources	26

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CHARACTER MAP *ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL*



Duke of Florence

The ruler of Florence. Bertram, Parolles, and Dumaine among other French Lords volunteer to fight for him.

Steward

A servant of the Countess.

Clown

Another servant of the Countess. He is a messenger.

Parolles

A companion of Bertram. He frequently lies, brags, and asserts himself as a qualified soldier when he is, in fact, quite a lacking one. Eventually, he is exposed for the fraud that he is.

Lafew

An old French nobleman. Lafew counsels the King. He is friends with the Countess and resembles her in character. He is similarly wise and judicious. He is acutely aware of the shortcomings of Helen and Parolles.

Countess of Rosillion

Bertram's mother and Helen's guardian. She is an old, judicious woman with lots of wisdom. She is Helen's guardian and caretaker and is pleased to see her marry Bertram. Once he hurts Helen, though, she is the first to scrutinize his actions.

Bertram

Lost his father. He is now the Count of Rosillion. He is the Countess' only son. He is also a generally well-liked young man, but he cheats Helen out of a true relationship with him after marrying and then leaving her.

King of France

Bertram is his subject. At the start of the play, he is extremely sick, until Helen cures him using her father's medicine. Like the Countess, he is extremely protective of Helen and loves her immensely, making him similarly critical of Bertram's behavior.

Helen

Helen is the heroine of the play. She is an orphan and was the daughter of a great doctor. She is the ward of the Countess of Rosillion and is also madly in love with Bertram, the Countess' son. She is very well-liked by the other characters in the play. She repeatedly proves herself to be extremely driven and resourceful. She doesn't give up without a fight.

First Lord

An affable French nobleman named Dumaine who is friends with Bertram. He serves in the Florentine army. He and his brother plan to reveal Bertram's true character.

Diana

A young, innocent woman who Bertram attempts to seduce. She helps to trick Bertram into sleeping with Helen, his lawful wife.

Second Lord

The First Lord Dumaine's brother who is also friends with Bertram.

Widow

Diana's mother.

Mariana

A woman of Florence.



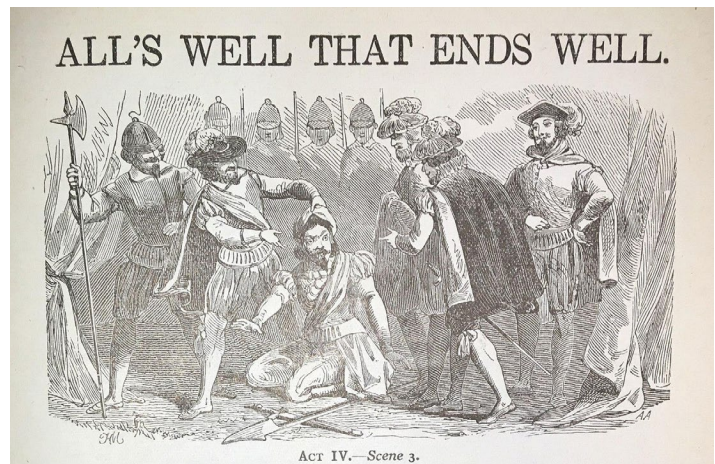
SYNOPSIS

The play opens in Rosillion, in southern France. The widowed Countess of Rosillion and her ward, Helen, bid farewell to the Countess's only child, Bertram, who is leaving to become the ward of the King of France. Travelling with Bertram are his friend Paroles and Lord Lafeu. The Countess and Lafeu discuss the King's failing health. Helen, who is secretly in love with Bertram, grieves at his departure, but as the orphaned daughter of the Countess's former physician, Helen knows that she lacks the social standing to marry Bertram.

At Court, the gravely ill King considers how to respond to the conflict in Italy between the Florentines and the Sienese. Bertram arrives, and the King welcomes him warmly and reminisces about Bertram's father, and Helen's. Meanwhile Helen devises a plan to travel to the French Court and attempt to cure the King by using the medical skills that her father had taught her. The Countess discovers Helen's plan and gives Helen her blessing.

Several Frenchmen decide to join the Italian wars in hopes of winning honor, but the King does not permit Bertram to leave, and he chafes at this restraint. Helen arrives at Court and offers to cure the King. Although initially reluctant, the King is persuaded by Helen's confident proposal that if she fails, she should be executed, but if she succeeds, she may choose her husband from among the lords at Court. Helen does succeed, and she chooses Bertram, who strongly objects, citing Helen's inferior social status. The King, furious, insists that Bertram marry Helen. Bertram does so, but he immediately sends Helen to Rosillion, saying he will join her within two days. Instead, he and Paroles leave for Italy to enlist with the Duke of Florence.

In Rosillion, Helen and the Countess receive letters from Bertram, who states that he will never recognize Helen as his wife until she obtains from him a ring that he never takes off his finger and presents him with a child of hers that he has fathered. Helen, horrified that Bertram may die in battle, resolves to leave France so that he may return, and she sets off on a pilgrimage. Her journey takes her to Florence, where she encounters a Widow and her daughter, Diana. Helen learns from them that Bertram is there and has been wooing Diana. Helen takes them into her confidence, and eventually they agree to help Helen fulfill Bertram's conditions by means of a "bed trick." Helen sleeps with Bertram, who believes her to be Diana.



A lithograph image depicting a scene from *All's Well that Ends Well*, c 1600's, artist unknown.

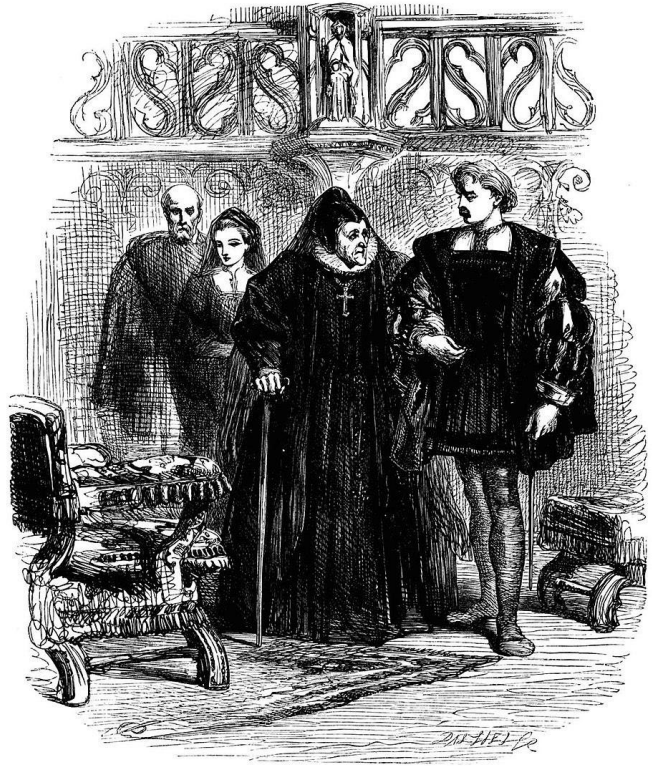


Helen, 1837, London, J. W. Wright

SYNOPSIS CONTINUED...

Afterwards, Helen starts a rumor that she has died, and she then departs with the Widow and Diana for France. Bertram, believing her dead, also decides to return to France. Before departing, Bertram watches his fellow soldiers play a trick on Paroles that reveals Paroles's true character.

In Rosillion, the King joins Bertram, the Countess, and Lafeu to formalize Bertram's betrothal to Lafeu's daughter. When Bertram presents Lafeu with the ring that Helen (whom he believed to be Diana) gave him, the King recognizes it as one he gave Helen, and he accuses Bertram of murder. Bertram's claims about how he obtained the ring are proven false when Diana and the Widow arrive, and Diana accuses Bertram of seducing and abandoning her. Bertram continues to lie desperately until finally the Widow presents a pregnant Helen, who explains how she has fulfilled Bertram's conditions. Bertram gratefully accepts Helen as his wife, and all seemingly ends well. ♦



All's Well That Ends Well Act I Header, 1867, London, Illustrated by John Gilbert.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT: **WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE**

William Shakespeare, a poet, playwright, and actor, was born on April 23, 1564, in Stratford-upon-Avon in England to John Shakespeare and Mary Arden. While Shakespeare's plays and poetry have endured the test of time and are of the most well-known works in Western literature, very little documentation of Shakespeare's life exists beyond public records of his birth, death, marriage, and financial transactions.

Shakespeare's education began at home. The fact that Shakespeare's mother was the executor of her father's will suggests that she was literate. Shakespeare would have grown up hearing fairytales and fables from her and his father. He also would have learned to read the Bible at home. In addition to his home education, Shakespeare most likely attended the King's New School, a grammar school in Stratford, where his studies would have been almost exclusively in Latin.

When Shakespeare was 18, he married Anne Hathaway, who was 26 years old. The two had a rushed marriage because Anne was already pregnant at the time of the wedding. The couple welcomed their first child, Susanna, six months after the ceremony. Anne later gave birth to twins Hamnet and Judith; however, Hamnet died when he was just eleven years of age.

From 1585-1591, not much is known about Shakespeare's life, and this period is often referred to as the "lost years." However, it is clear that he moved to London to pursue theatre at some point during this time (probably around 1587). In 1592, Shakespeare had established his reputation as an actor and playwright in London. During that year, it is believed that the Lord Strange's Men, a prominent acting company at the time, performed one of Shakespeare's plays—most likely *Henry VI, Part I*. Shakespeare later became an original member of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, one of the two theatrical companies legally approved to perform within London city limits at the time. As a member of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, Shakespeare wrote many of his most prolific works.

In 1599, Shakespeare became the chief shareholder in the Globe Theatre, a newly-built performance space in London. His plays were regularly performed there until 1613, when a fire that began during a production of Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* burned the theatre down. The Globe was rebuilt by 1614 but was destroyed again in 1644, two years after the Puritan English government closed all theatres.



William Shakespeare associated with John Taylor, c. 1600-1610.

Over the course of about twenty years, Shakespeare created a staggering body of work, including 154 sonnets, three narrative poems, and 38 plays that continue to be performed around the world today. Sometime between 1610 and 1612, Shakespeare retired to Stratford-upon-Avon, where he died in 1616 at the age of 52. It is believed that he died on the same day he was born, April 23rd. He is buried in the Church of the Holy Trinity in Stratford-upon-Avon. ♦

TIMELINE OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S LIFE

- 1564** William Shakespeare is born on April 23 in Stratford-upon-Avon to John Shakespeare and Mary Arden.
- 1582** William Shakespeare marries Anne Hathaway. Their marriage license is issued on November 27th.
- 1583** Shakespeare's first child, Susanna, is born in May, just six months after the wedding of Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway. Susanna is baptized on May 26th.
- 1585** Anne Hathaway gives birth to twins, Hamnet and Judith. They are baptized on February 2nd.
- 1585-1591** "The Lost Years." No records of Shakespeare's life during this period exist. At some point, he moves to London.
- 1590-1592** Shakespeare begins to write plays during this time. His earliest works are *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Henry VI, Parts I, II, and III*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *Richard III*. The exact dates these plays were written and first performed is unknown.
- 1592** While it is unclear when Shakespeare left Stratford-upon-Avon, by this time, Shakespeare has established a reputation in London as an actor and a playwright. A plague breaks out in London and theatres are closed.
- 1593** Shakespeare writes *Venus and Adonis*, a long, narrative poem based on Book 10 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.
- 1594** Theatres re-open after the plague. Shakespeare becomes a founding member of The Lord Chamberlain's Men. *The Comedy of Errors* is performed for the first time.



The Original Globe Theatre, artist unknown.

- 1596** Shakespeare's son, Hamnet, dies at age 11.
- 1599** The Globe Theatre opens in London. Shakespeare becomes a shareholder of the theatre.
- 1600-1610** Shakespeare writes several of his most prolific tragedies including *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*.
- 1603** Queen Elizabeth I dies and King James I ascends the throne. He becomes the patron of Shakespeare's theatre company, The Lord Chamberlain's Men, who change the name of their company to The King's Men in honor of King James I.
- 1604** Shakespeare writes *Othello*, which is performed for the first time in court on November 1st by the King's Men. Richard Burbage—the leading actor of the company—originates the role of Othello, presumably wearing blackface makeup to indicate Othello's race.
- 1609** Shakespeare's sonnets are published. Shakespeare is believed to have written the sonnets at some point during the 1590s.
- 1613** The Globe Theatre burns down during the first performance of Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*.
- 1614** The Globe Theatre is rebuilt.
- 1616** Shakespeare dies at the age of 52 in Stratford-upon-Avon. It is believed he died on April 23rd. He is buried in the Church of the Holy Trinity.
- 1623** John Heminges and Henry Condell collect and publish Shakespeare's plays in *Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies*. This publication is also known as The First Folio.



Shakespeare's Birthplace in Stratford-upon-Avon.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: ELIZABETHAN SOCIETY

All's Well That Ends Well is set in France and Italy during the Italian Wars (a period of violent wars involving much of Europe for Italy's control that lasted from 1494- 1559). However, the social structures and hierarchies of the French court and the Italian army both seem to draw upon the social structures and hierarchies of Elizabethan England.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Shakespeare was a prominent playwright during the late Elizabethan Era. This historical era began in 1558 when Queen Elizabeth I became the ruling monarch of England. During this period, the structure of English society was rigid and provided little opportunity for social mobility for members of the lower classes. Opportunities for social advancement for women and people of color were even more limited. In Elizabethan society, a person's birth often determined their social status. During this period, many people believed and operated according to The Great Chain of Being. This concept is rooted in the idea that all things have a proper place in an overarching social hierarchy—from the smallest grain of sand up to the highest angel. The tiers of Elizabethan social structure can be broken down as follows from highest to lowest status:



"Queen Elizabeth I" (The "Darnley Portrait") by an unknown artist, c.1575..

The Queen

The Court—Made up of the English Nobility.

Merchants—Well-off citizens without royal connections. Individuals in this social class often took positions in town councils and local government.

Livery Companies—Institutions that controlled what was bought and sold. Companies specialized in certain products such as wine, cloth, and jewelry.

Apprentices—Young men who paid workers in Livery Companies in exchange for experience learning trades.

The Poor—The lowest status of citizens.



"Civitates Orbis Terrarum" Map of London by Georg Braun, Frans Hogenberg, and Joris Hoefnagel, c. 1600-1623.

ART AND CULTURE

The Elizabethan Era is considered a "golden age" of art and culture in English history. During this time, there were two trends in art and communication that caused significant shifts in the country's cultural landscape—the popularization of printed materials and the popularization of live entertainment. While Johannes Gutenberg, an inventor who was politically exiled from Germany, had invented the Gutenberg Press over one hundred years before the start of Elizabeth's reign in England, printed materials were among the most important commodities actively produced and sold in Elizabethan London. Advances in printing technology made it possible to churn out printed pamphlets, sermons, plays, poems, proclamations, and diatribes at a remarkable rate. The increased popularity and accessibility of printed materials allowed for stories and ideas to circulate among English urban centers faster than ever before. Live entertainment proved to be a cultural staple in Elizabethan society. In fact, despite the disparity that existed among social classes in the era, live entertainment provided members of all social classes the opportunity to gather and experience anything from stories to songs to sports. Theatre proved to be particularly popular with members of all social classes. From the poor, who stood on the ground level of theatres throughout theatrical productions and who were thus called "groundlings," to the nobility who sat in the higher tiers of seats, theatre was accessible to people from all ranks of society.

Edited from:

Picard, Liza. "The Social Structure in Elizabethan England." The British Library, The British Library, 17 Feb. 2016, www.bl.uk/shakespeare/articles/the-social-structure-in-elizabethanengland. and Rasmussen, Eric, and Ian DeJong. "Shakespeare's London." The British Library, The British Library, 2 Oct. 2015, www.bl.uk/shakespeare/articles/shakespeares-london.

By 1569, a welfare system was in place in the City of London to help the able poor find food and work.

A WOMAN'S LOT: THE ROLES AND RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN ELIZABETHAN SOCIETY

Queen Elizabeth I made history when she famously decided not to marry and instead rule England as the sole monarch. Before Elizabeth I, no woman had ever ruled the country alone. While Elizabeth's radical decision to rule without a husband heralded some degree of hope and progress regarding the rights allowed to women at the time, women in Elizabethan England at large were not granted the same liberties as men.

The disparity between men and women began with the limited amount of education available to young girls. While some girls, typically girls of higher social status, could attend grammar school, they were not allowed to attend university or work in any professional field. Much of a young woman's education centered on how she might be a proper wife and mother.

Women were not able to own or inherit property. These laws, which regulated property ownership and inheritance at the time, fundamentally excluded women from achieving any kind of financial independence. A woman's financial status and stability depended entirely on the men in her life. In childhood and adolescence, girls relied on their fathers for financial backing, and in marriage, women depended on their husbands. Any property belonging to a woman's family would be passed down to the family's eldest son, regardless of the eldest son's age—a family could have a 20-year old daughter and an infant son, and the son would still be the sole inheritor of the family's property. Should a family have no male heirs, the eldest daughter would be allowed to inherit her family's property. However, even if the circumstances were such that a woman was legally allowed to inherit, a woman inheriting anything was often deemed socially unacceptable. In many cases, families went out of their way to procure male heirs to prevent the eldest daughter from inheriting.

Because of the laws preventing women from owning and inheriting property, nearly all women in the Elizabethan Era married. Because marriage was an essential aspect of society, many social and legal codes surrounding marriage practices existed. However, during the Elizabethan Era, marriage laws and practices began to shift slightly, allowing for a bit more marital freedom. For example, in 1604, a law was passed that allowed a man and woman to marry without the consent of either's parents. Before this period, marriages often functioned solely as alliances between families in order to protect or advance a family's wealth and social status.



Left to Right:
"Portrait of a
Woman and
Child" by Anthony
van Dyck, 1620-1

"Portrait of a
Woman" by
Imitator of
Gonzales Coques,
circa 1650

While marriages still often functioned like this in the Elizabethan Era, the new law appealed to the growing trend of placing affection and love at the core of a marriage.

WOMEN IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

The women in Shakespeare's plays, particularly in Shakespeare's comedies and romances, tend to challenge what it meant to be a proper woman in Elizabethan England. In *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, we see heroines crossdress as they travel through a forest or to a new land. When they do so, they adopt an appearance and manner so precise that they trick nearly everyone they encounter. In presenting as men, these comedic heroines contradict the social expectations assigned to them by their gender and social status, even if only for the time that they present as male.

Other comedic and romantic heroines in Shakespeare's canon use language and wit to defy social expectations. Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing* engages Benedick in frequent battles of wit and wordplay, often outshining him while also embodying a fierce sense of independence. Similarly, Helen in *All's Well That Ends Well* uses wit and grit to take ownership of her life. Breaking away from the expectation that a woman of lower status be content with the lot she is given, Helen constructs and pursues ambitious plans to realize her dreams.

Sir Walter Raleigh, a contemporary of Shakespeare and a poet, notes how the women in Shakespeare's plays, particularly comedies and romances, "are almost all practical, impatient of mere words, clear-sighted as to ends and means. They do not accept the premises to deny the conclusion, or decorate the inevitable with imaginative lendings." ♦

Edited from:

McManus, Clare. "Shakespeare and Gender: The 'Woman's Part'." The British Library, The British Library, 10 Feb. 2016, www.bl.uk/shakespeare/articles/shakespeare-and-gender-the-womans-part

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S "PROBLEM PLAYS"

Most of Shakespeare's canon of plays can be roughly divided into three basic genres: tragedies, comedies, and histories.

Seven years after Shakespeare's death, John Heminges and Henry Condell published the First Folio, the first published collection of Shakespeare's plays. The official title of the First Folio printed on the title page of the collection is "Mr. William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies." This collection was the first time that Shakespeare's works had been grouped by genre. Since the publication of the First Folio, interpretations of Shakespeare's plays have evolved. New interpretations and analyses of the plays have led to the creation of two additional categories for the few Shakespeare plays that do not seem to entirely fit the traditional archetypal mold of a tragedy, a comedy, or history—romances and problem plays.

Shakespeare's romance plays are a mix of tragedy and comedy. The mark of a Shakespearean tragedy is that the play ends in a number of deaths, onstage and off, while Shakespearean comedies characteristically end in marriages. Romances typically begin as tragedies but do not end that way. Because of this, romances are often referred to as "tragi-comedies." The plays that fall into this particular category include:

- *Pericles* (written in 1608)
- *Cymbeline* (written in 1610)
- *The Winter's Tale* (written in 1611)
- *The Tempest* (written in 1611)

Like romance plays, Shakespeare's problem plays are often a mix of tragic and comedic conventions, however, these plays are characterized by a more complex and ambiguous tone that shifts quickly between dark psychological drama and more lighthearted, comedic material.

The term "problem-play" was originally coined by Frederick Samuel Boas, a scholar of early modern drama, in his work *Shakespeare and His Predecessors* in 1896. Boas uses the term to describe plays in which justice does not appear to be completely restored. While Shakespeare's problem plays tend to end on happier notes, darker issues in the plays are often left unresolved. Boas describes this category of play:

"Throughout these plays we move along dim untrodden paths, and at the close our feeling is neither of simple joy nor pain; we are excited, fascinated, perplexed, for the issues raised preclude a completely satisfactory outcome, even when, as in *All's Well* and *Measure for Measure*, the complications are outwardly adjusted in the fifth act [...] Dramas so singular in theme and temper cannot be strictly called comedies or tragedies. We may therefore borrow a convenient phrase from the theatre of to-day and class them together as Shakespeare's problem-plays."

There are three plays that fall into this category:

- *Troilus and Cressida* (written in 1602)
- *All's Well That Ends Well* (written in 1603)
- *Measure For Measure* (written in 1604)

Despite the title, the ending of *All's Well That Ends Well* is not quite a happily-ever-after. While Helen succeeds in what she set out to achieve, the ending is brought about by manipulation and deception. Helen leverages her medical knowledge and wit to carefully create a scenario where Bertram must either marry her or be cast out of the King's favor, discounting that her feelings for Bertram may not be reciprocated. Once married, Bertram refuses to truly accept Helen as his wife unless she accomplishes two nearly impossible tasks. In response, Helen tricks Bertram into inadvertently fulfilling the conditions he set forth and fakes her own death in order to lure Bertram to court. There, she proves that she has secretly met his conditions, and Bertram agrees to accept her as his wife. Throughout the play, both Helen and Bertram place their individual desires above all else and consistently disregard each other's ambitions. ♦

Edited from:

http://www.self.gutenberg.org/articles/eng/Shakespearean_problem_play?View=embedded%27

What do you think? Does *All's Well That Ends Well* have a happy ending? Why or why not?

COMMON THEMES: **CONNECTING ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL AND SHAKESPEARE'S OTHER WORKS**

***A Midsummer Night's Dream* | UNREQUITED LOVE**

Both Helen in *All's Well That Ends Well* and Helen in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are madly in love with men who do not (initially) love them back. Undeterred, both relentlessly pursue the men they love, and both are ultimately successful in winning over the object of their affections.

While Helen in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* consistently attempts to woo Demetrius herself, her words and actions alone are not enough to sway Demetrius's heart. The pair's marriage eventually happens, in large part, because Oberon and Puck decide to use magic to sway Demetrius to fall in love with Helen.

Helen in *All's Well That Ends Well* takes a more active role in pursuing the man she loves. In this play, Helen uses her wit and resourcefulness to build an alliance with the King such that Bertram is obligated to marry her. When Bertram goes through with the marriage ceremony but refuses to treat Helen as his wife unless she meets a set of conditions, Helen embraces the challenge. Upon learning Helen has been successful, Bertram agrees to accept her as his wife.

***Macbeth* | AMBITION**

Ambition drives much of the plot of both *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Macbeth*.

In *Macbeth*, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth have grand ambitions to seize the Scottish throne. After hearing a prophecy that Macbeth is expected to be King, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth become increasingly fixated on the prospect of power. The obsession with gaining and maintaining power ultimately leads to their downfall.

In *All's Well That Ends Well*, Helen's desire to marry and live happily with Bertram drives the action of the play. As a member of the merchant class, this is an ambitious goal—one that involves climbing the social ladder.

***Romeo and Juliet* | ADVANTAGEOUS MARRIAGES**

In both *Romeo and Juliet* and *All's Well That Ends Well*, marriage is viewed as a way to fortify alliances between families and solidify a family's social status.

In *Romeo and Juliet*, Lord and Lady Capulet arrange for Juliet to marry Paris, a wealthy nobleman and close relative of the Prince. The Capulets view this as an advantageous match—one that would strengthen their ties to the Prince and boost their status. Juliet rejects this match and instead conspires with Friar Laurence to devise a plan she hopes will allow her to be with Romeo. That plan is ultimately unsuccessful.

In *All's Well That Ends Well*, Bertram's initial hesitation about marrying Helen stems from his belief that Helen's social status is beneath him—the marriage would be of no social advantage to him. Because he does not see his marriage to Helen as advantageous, Bertram refuses to fully accept Helen as his wife.

***Hamlet* | DECEPTION AND DISGUISE**

Both Helen and Hamlet are expert deceivers. They each weave intricate and deceptive plots that fool even those closest to them.

As Hamlet tries to gather evidence against Claudius, he decides to feign madness to draw attention away from his otherwise suspicious behavior. In essence, he uses madness as a disguise while he plots to avenge his father's death.

In order to follow Bertram to Florence, Helen disguises herself as a pilgrim traveling on a religious pilgrimage. There, she deceives Bertram into inadvertently helping her meet his conditions for treating her as his wife. Once she has secretly met Bertram's conditions, Helen lures Bertram back to France by spreading a rumor that she has died. Once Bertram returns to France, Helen's deceptive actions come to light.



A TALE RE-TOLD: THE SOURCE MATERIAL FOR *ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL*

Shakespeare was notorious for using extant texts and stories as the inspiration for his plays. *Othello* is based on a short story by Giovanni Battista Giralaldi called “Disdemona and the Moor.” *Romeo and Juliet* draws inspiration from Arthur Brooke’s 1562 poem titled “The Tragicall Historie of Romeus and Juliet,” which itself is based on a story well-known in French and Italian literature. *Much Ado About Nothing* has its roots in Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*. Similarly, *All’s Well That Ends Well* is not an entirely original narrative. Critics have long regarded *All’s Well That Ends Well* as a play, in large part, derived from Giovanni Boccaccio’s *The Decameron*.

Giovanni Boccaccio was an Italian poet and scholar who lived from 1313 until 1375. Written sometime between 1348 and 1353, *The Decameron* is considered to be Boccaccio’s masterpiece and a classic work of early Renaissance literature. *The Decameron* begins when a group of ten young people flees from a plague in Florence to the countryside. There, over the course of ten days, the group decides to let each member take a turn as the group’s leader for one day. Each day’s leader is allowed to decide how that day will be spent and is permitted to tell ten stories of their choice to the group to pass the time. *All’s Well That Ends Well* follows the same plot as the ninth story told on the third day.

While the plot of *All’s Well That Ends Well* matches that of a story in Boccaccio’s masterpiece, it is unlikely that Shakespeare read *The Decameron*. In the mid-sixteenth century, William Painter translated many of the stories from *The Decameron*, including the ninth story of the third day, from the original Italian into English. Painter included these translations in his work, *The Palace of Pleasure*, a collection of translated classic Italian tales. In 1575 (not long before Shakespeare, himself, began to write), the second edition of *The Palace of Pleasure* was published. It is the translated version of the ninth story of the third day from *The Decameron* included in Painter’s work that Shakespeare most likely turned to for inspiration when writing *All’s Well That Ends Well*.

In *The Palace of Pleasure*, William Painter summarizes the action of the story as follows:

Giletta a Physician’s daughter of Narbon, healed the French King of a Fistula, for reward whereof she demanded Beltramo Counte of Rossiglione to husband. The Counte being married against his will, for despite fled to Florence and loved another. Giletta his wife, by policy found means to lie with her husband, in place of his lover, and was begotten with child of two sons: which known to her husband, he received her again, and afterwards he lived in great honor and felicity.

While Shakespeare appears to have lifted the core of the plot for *All’s Well That Ends Well* directly from this story, he did alter some elements of the narrative as he transposed the tale into a play. Some of the alterations, such as changing Giletta’s name to Helen and Beltramo’s name to Bertram, are relatively surface-level. Others such as adding characters like the Countess and Parolles add depth and complexity to the overarching story. These added characters give us additional perspectives and context to frame Bertram and Helen’s actions. From Parolles, we learn that, in the world of the play, one’s perceived masculinity is intrinsically linked to one’s success and ferocity in war. Through the lens Parolles provides, Bertram becomes a more sympathetic character—we can see that his decision to run off to war may not have entirely been based on his disdain for Helen, but also on his desire to prove his masculinity and his worth. On the other hand, the Countess’s overwhelming approval of Bertram and Helen’s marriage despite Helen’s lower status indicates that despite her deceptive actions, Helen is good at heart. She has only turned to deception and trickery out of necessity. ♦

THEMES

GENDER AND CLASS EXPECTATIONS

"A poor physician's daughter my wife? Disdain
Rather corrupt me ever!"—Bertram Act II, scene iii

The world of *All's Well That Ends Well* like Elizabethan England, is a world of where a person's position in the social hierarchy dictates nearly all aspects of their life—the amount of education they can receive, the type of work they can do, the amount of money they earn, and who they can marry. Helen, the daughter of a physician born into the middle class, initially has no hope of marrying Bertram, a Count, despite the fact that she and Bertram were raised in the same household. The class difference between them is too significant. In Act I, scene i, as Helen mourns Bertram's departure to the King's court, she compares the class distance between her and Bertram to the distance between the earth and a star:

"'Twere all one / That I should love a bright
particular star / And think to wed it, he is so
above me."

Helen's status as a woman positions her even lower on the social ladder. Despite her medical knowledge, the King is initially hesitant to allow Helen to treat him—he does not believe that a woman would be able to treat his illness, especially when many other male doctors have failed to find a successful antidote. It is only once Helen successfully treats the King's illness and gains the King's trust that she begins to have more social mobility and agency. In essence, by appealing to the King—the highest figure on the social ladder—Helen uses the social hierarchy to subvert it.

After healing the King, Helen is able to choose the man she would like to marry, a novelty at a time when it was the norm for a man to choose his wife or for marriages to be arranged. Through her marriage, she is then able to step up to a higher status on the social hierarchy.

While Helen subverts gender expectations and climbs the social ladder, Bertram struggles to assert his independence and his masculinity. After Bertram's father dies, it would be expected for Bertram to assume his father's position as the Count of Rosillion. However, instead of stepping into that role, Bertram becomes a ward of the King. As a ward, not only is Bertram forbidden to go to war (a rite of passage for many young men), he is also forced into a marriage against his will—an experience that was more common for women. In many ways, Bertram is denied experiences common

to young men of his social standing. It is perhaps Bertram's frustration with continuing to be denied "masculine" experiences that prompts him to disobey the King's orders, abandon Helen, and join the war effort in Italy, where he may prove himself a man.

DECEIT AND TRICKERY

From white lies to the execution of elaborate, deceptive plots, characters consistently turn to deceit and trickery in *All's Well That Ends Well*. In a sense, Helen tricks Bertram into marrying her—in setting up a situation where Bertram must either marry her or be cast out of the King's favor, Helen essentially forces Bertram's hand. Bertram follows suit by deceiving Helen revealing after the marriage ceremony that he has no intention of treating Helen as his wife unless she meets two ostensibly impossible conditions and sends her back to Rosillion while he secretly sets off to join the war in Italy.

Bertram's initial deceit and conditions are the catalyst for Helen's subsequent tricks and lies. Following Bertram to Florence, Helen pretends to be on a religious pilgrimage. Once in Florence, she conspires with the widow and Diana to trick Bertram into fulfilling his own conditions for accepting Helen as his true wife. Helen then lures Bertram back to the French court by spreading the false rumor of her death.

One of the reasons the resolution of *All's Well That Ends Well* has consistently sparked mixed reactions from audiences over the course of its performance history has to do with the fact that neither Bertram nor Helen face any real consequences for their repeated lies and tricks. Rather, both are ultimately rewarded for their deceptive tactics. After seeing that Helen has managed to meet his conditions, Bertram whole-heartedly accepts Helen as his wife, and despite Bertram's initial disdain of her, Helen does not hesitate to welcome Bertram back into her life as her husband. All ends "well" despite the tricks and lies.

The only character who faces any real repercussions for his deceit is Parolles, who divulges war secrets to men he believes have captured him. While his "captors" turn out to be fellow French soldiers playing a trick on Parolles, his willingness to betray his allies causes Parolles to be cast out of favor with many French noblemen.

THEMES CONTINUED...

LOVE AND MARRIAGE

"Th'ambition in my love thus plagues itself:
The hind that would be mated by the lion,
Must die for love." —Helen, Act I, scene i
"Hind" means deer

The action of *All's Well That Ends Well* centers on the marriage between Helen and Bertram. However, Bertram and Helen's marriage is far from conventional. From the way it is brought about—Helen being allowed to choose Bertram as a husband from a group of the King's wards as a reward for saving the King's life—to Bertram only truly accepting Helen as his wife once he realizes that she has tricked him into giving her his heirloom ring and fathering a child with her, the marriage is anything but smooth.

Throughout the play, love is consistently compared to war—a comparison that reinforces the idea that, in the world of the play, women are viewed as a commodity to be conquered by men. What is more, marriage is viewed as a transaction, a method to strategically create alliances and solidify a family's place in the social hierarchy. So when Helen takes action and seeks out a husband, herself, for love rather than solely for social advantages, it is radical. Despite Helen's radical actions, she is aware of the transactional nature of marriage. When she chooses Bertram to be her husband, she describes the transaction:

"I dare not say I take you, but I give
Me and my service ever whilst I live
Into your guiding power." —Helen Act II, scene iii

A large point of contention in the couple's relationship, at least initially, is that their marriage is not built on mutual love. While Helen and Bertram grew up in the same household and Helen has pined after Bertram for quite some time, Bertram has never shared her feelings. The one-sidedness of the love in their relationship creates a great deal of tension between the pair.

While Bertram does agree that he will acknowledge Helen as his wife at the end of the play, it is not entirely clear if he does so to keep his word (despite the fact he did not take issue with breaking his word and abandoning Helen after their marriage ceremony), to stay in the King's good favor, or to demonstrate that he has had a change of heart and now reciprocates the love that Helen feels towards him. While the title of the play suggests that the play ends happily for all, the question of how much love exists in Helen and Bertram's marriage remains.



FLAWED HEROES: HELEN AND BERTRAM IN *ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL*

“The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together.” First Lord, *All's Well That Ends Well* Act IV, scene iii

Although *All's Well That Ends Well* does not fit neatly into the categorization of a comedy, the central plot, like many of Shakespeare's comedies, revolves around the relationship between a young man and a young woman. However, unlike the heroes and heroines of Shakespeare's other comedies, Bertram and Helen are not entirely likable characters. They consistently trick, deceive, and betray each other. While the end of their story is technically a happy one (Bertram ultimately accepts that Helen is his wife and the two prepare to welcome a child), neither Helen nor Bertram face any serious consequences for their deception

and lies. This lack of consequence ultimately validates the pair's questionable actions. Because Bertram and Helen are essentially rewarded for their behavior, it is easy to dismiss them as unsympathetic characters. While both characters are flawed, considering the social customs both Bertram and Helen must navigate throughout the play gives an important context to their actions and highlights that neither character is entirely good nor entirely corrupt.

In a world where it was not common for women to have any significant agency in determining who they will marry, Helen ambitiously and strategically leverages her medical knowledge to create a scenario where she can choose her husband. Helen's opportunistic attitude given the constraints women faced is commendable. In essence, Helen sees an opportunity to reclaim agency over her life and takes it. Helen's active role in determining her own future contrasts with the legacy her name bears. In some versions of the *All's Well That Ends Well* text, Helen is referred to as Helen—a name that alludes to the mythological figure, Helen of Troy. Famously, Helen of Troy was the object of all male desire. However, Helen in *All's Well* faces the opposite issue: the plot of the play centers on the fact that Helen is *not* desired by Bertram. In the face of Bertram's lack of interest, Helen (unlike Helen in her marriage with Menelaus) is the one who takes all initiative in furthering the relationship. As Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine note in the Folger edition of the text, “[s]uch a task is a hard one in a culture that, like Shakespeare's, consigned women to the passive role of yielding to the male desire.” While the tactics Helen employs in pursuing Bertram may be deceptive and her advances may be (initially) unwanted, Helen's unwavering grit to ensure the success of the marriage is remarkable.

While Bertram's decision to disobey the King's orders and abandon Helen may appear as selfish and rash, the play does provide some additional context for Bertram's actions. The context does not absolve Bertram's actions completely. However, it creates some space for sympathy for the character. Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine describe the context behind Bertram's behavior and the rites of passage denied to him:

“As the play opens, Bertram's father, like Helen's, has just died. Yet Bertram does not, as we might expect in a comedy, come into his inheritance and assume the rights and responsibilities of an autonomous male. Instead, he becomes a



Helen and the King, 1880, London, Illustrator Unknown.

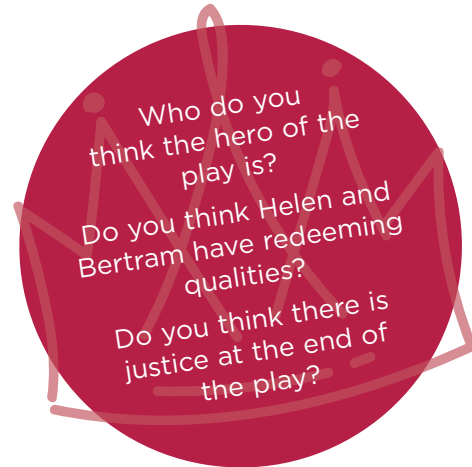
FLAWED HEROES: HELEN AND BERTRAM IN *ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL* CONTINUED...

ward to the French king, who severely restricts Bertram's opportunities to find his own way in the world. When his young friends go off to war to seek fame, Bertram is obliged to maintain his attendance at the King's court. When Helen cures the King, the King makes Bertram available to her quite against Bertram's will. When Helen selects him, he is powerless to resist openly. To exert any control over the course of his life, he must flee the King and his native land and go to war in Italy, thereby incurring the displeasure not only of the King but also of his mother the Countess and the rest of the older generation, all of whom disapprove of his treatment of Helen and his flagrant disobedience of the King."

Bertram is consistently denied experiences and agency over his life that he would naturally expect given the social norms in the world of the play. While we are given reasons to understand why Bertram is compelled to act in the way he does (especially with Parolles egging him on), Bertam tends to strike more as an obstacle Helen must overcome than a hero of the play, in his own right. In fact, in rising to incredible challenges and overcoming numerous societal and interpersonal obstacles, Helen positions herself as the hero of an arduous physical and emotional journey. Helen's dreams, not Bertram's, come to fruition at the end of the play—though few today would consider the ending neatly resolved since, despite the oppressive contexts within which Bertram and Helen operate, both characters perform morally dubious actions in order to ensure their preferred conclusion. ♦

Edited from:

About Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well* by Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine, editors of the Folger Shakespeare Library Editions <https://shakespeare.folger.edu/shakespeares-works/allswellthatendswell/about-shakespeares-allswellthatendswell/>



ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL: TOO HOT TO HANDLE?

BY DR. MIRANDA JOHNSON-HADDAD

For a play that is concerned with many of the same challenges that society continues to grapple with today, William Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well* is performed surprisingly seldom. Some of the hesitation may be due to the fact that the play defies easy categorization: although *All's Well* follows Shakespeare's comic and Late Romance formulas, at least to some extent—the heroine overcomes many challenges to win the man she loves, and the play ends with forgiveness and redemption—the play is usually referred to as a “problem play” because it doesn't fit smoothly into any of these more familiar literary genres. Also troubling are the concerns that *All's Well* may raise for audiences: we can't help but feel uneasy about this couple's prospects for future happiness, largely because it can be difficult to see Bertram as anything other than a complete cad who doesn't begin to deserve the love that Helen, a truly superior woman, bestows upon him.

Yet many of Shakespeare's male characters don't really seem to deserve the women who love them, and this holds true across dramatic genres; whether in the comedies, the tragedies, the Late Romances, or the problem plays, Shakespeare's men seldom strike us as being good enough for the smart, proactive, emotionally generous women who love them. But this apparent unworthiness may, in fact, be Shakespeare's point. Most of the playwright's heroes, from Orlando to Orsino, and from Claudio to Leontes, come to love and appreciate the marvelous women who love them, and the fact that the men do so, with gratitude and humility, is enormously to their credit.

Bertram arguably belongs to this group too, and much of the uneasiness that we may feel about *All's Well* can be addressed and resolved in performance. All of Shakespeare's plays are, in the end, scripts, and though we can enjoy reading the plays and benefit from studying them, none of them is ever fully complete until it is performed. In the hands of a thoughtful director, cast, and creative team, even a play as challenging as *All's Well* provides a vehicle for exploring the difficulties that every society confronts, in the twenty-first century as in the sixteenth. The central themes of *All's Well*—women who defy patriarchal norms, what constitutes acceptable feminine behavior, class inequality—continue to speak to us forcefully today. Whether we're theatre makers or audience members, embracing this play in all its complexity can offer a way forward to a better understanding of ourselves and of each other. ♦

INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR: **NIKE DOUKAS**

What is your role as the Director?

I see the director's job most importantly as the person who guides the story. Right now, I'm talking with designers about the feel of the play and how we can tell that visually and aurally. When the actors arrive, we'll sit around the table and make sure we have a literal understanding of the text and begin to tease out what that means in terms of relationships and character and story. Then, when the actors get on their feet and begin to respond more instinctively to the words, I'll be there to make sure the dynamics of the play are working: is the arc of the story clear? What is the main event of each scene? Where is the crisis in the story, where is the resolution? Are the relationships and how they develop vividly portrayed? Can we take bigger risks, or should a particular moment be a quieter one? Then, during technical rehearsals, I'm responsible for making sure that the technical elements support the actors and the story we're trying to tell. For example, do we need a sound cue there, or is that moment better in silence? Finally, the audience arrives, and I'll sit in the theatre and try and gauge if all the work we've done is landing, or if, during previews, what adjustments need to be made to make the experience even better.

How do you approach the script as a Director?

It varies from play to play. With *All's Well* (and really with every play I direct or act in), I read the play as many times as I possibly can. I've directed this play before, but I'm still making new discoveries as I read it. I'm also influenced by the actors playing the roles, and as we've just started making offers, it's inspiring to reimagine each scene with each of them. I'm thinking a lot about how the physical space will work: because the set won't be realistic, but suggestive, I'm trying to imagine how we can make clear all the various locations with what elements we do have in place. I'm thinking about the themes of the play and how we make them clear, where they show up. I really try to arrive at any rehearsal feeling as if I have a fairly specific understanding of what the play is about, what it will look like, and how the story will progress; and then a lot of that gets thrown out the window as the play and the actors teach me things I don't know!

Why this play right now?

When Geoff and Julia, the Co-Artistic Directors of A Noise Within, spoke to me about directing, this was the first play I had in mind. I talked to them about the journey from dark to light, from despair to hope, from the need to escape to the need to embrace. *All's Well* is a play that deals with the loss of loved ones and impending death and demonstrates that even within the sadness of loss, joy and hope can permeate our lives. It explores how we influence each other for good or evil. After the time we've been through, it seems very relevant.

Who is your favorite character in the play and why?

Oh my goodness, here's how I have to answer that question: I love Helen's tenacity and loopy hope. I love Bertram's insistence on leading his own life. I love the King's heart and vulnerability. I love the Countess' sense of mischief and her fiery temperament. I love Parolles' unfettered imagination. I love Lafew's principled mind. I love the Dumaine brothers' kindness, loyalty and diplomacy. I love the Widow's joie de vivre. I love Diana's gutsiness, and how game she is. I love the Clown's unflinching honesty, and I love Rinalda's romanticism. I love the rest of the characters, too! Shakespeare, as always, creates this huge cast of personalities that bounce off each other, and he keeps creating new dynamics between them that never fail to delight or horrify. It's one of the ways he most impresses me: he's able to keep so many balls spinning in the air.

*The following expressions are a result of William Shakespeare's creativity with words.
You may have heard some of them used. Or perhaps you have used them yourself.*

make a virtue of necessity
tower of strength
elbow room
merry as the day is long
vanish into thin air
for goodness sake
my own flesh and blood
what the dickens
foul play
not a mouse stirring
without rhyme or reason

Try your hand at using some of these phrases to create your own short story or poem.

[illegible]

WORDS COINED BY SHAKESPEARE

Accused—*Richard II*, Act I, Scene I

How Shakespeare used it: To describe the person being charged with a crime or offense. This is the word's first known use as a noun. In this case Henry Bolingbroke and Thomas Mowbray are the accuser and the accused—Bolingbroke (the accuser) argues that Thomas Mowbray (the accused) is "a traitor and a miscreant."

"Then call them to our presence; face to face,
And frowning brow to brow, ourselves will hear
The accuser and the accused freely speak:
High-stomach'd are they both, and full of ire,
In rage deaf as the sea, hasty as fire."—King
Richard II

Modern Definition: someone charged with a crime or offense (particularly relating to a criminal case).

Addiction—*Othello*, Act II, Scene II

How Shakespeare used it: meaning a strong preference for or inclination towards something. The herald encourages everyone to take pleasure in whatever most delights them or in whatever they are most inclined towards (their addictions).

"It is Othello's pleasure, our noble and valiant general, that, upon certain tidings now arrived, importing the mere perdition of the Turkish fleet, every man put himself into triumph; some to dance, some to make bonfires, each man to what sport and revels his addiction leads him."—Herald

Modern definition: noun—an intense and destructive need to have or do something excessively.

Assassination—*Macbeth*, Act I, Scene VII

How Shakespeare used it: The word assassin was already known, but Shakespeare used assassination to describe a murder, or deed done by an assassin. In this soliloquy, Macbeth contemplates the murder or assassination of Duncan.

"If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly. If the assassination
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
With his surcease success; that but this blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all here,
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
We'd jump the life to come."—Macbeth

Modern Definition: The act of assassinating someone, where assassinate means to kill someone who is usually famous or important, often for political reasons.

Bedazzled—*The Taming of the Shrew*, Act IV, Scene V

"Pardon, old father, my mistaking eyes, that have been so bedazzled with the sun that everything I look on seemeth green."—Kate

Dwindle—*Macbeth*, Act I, Scene III

How Shakespeare used it: In this scene from *Macbeth*, the First Witch tells the other two witches that she has been torturing a sailor whose wife was rude to her and explains to them how she will "drain him dry as hay" until he "dwindle, peak and pine". Dwindle in this sense is used to mean waste away.

"I myself have all the other,
And the very ports they blow,
All the quarters that they know
I' th' shipman's card.
I'll drain him dry as hay.
Sleep shall neither night nor day

Hang upon his penthouse lid.
He shall live a man forbid.
Weary sev'n' nights nine times nine
Shall he dwindle, peak and pine." —First Witch

Modern Definition: to gradually become smaller.

Fashionable—*Troilus and Cressida*, Act III, Scene III

How Shakespeare used it: Ulysses describes time through a series of metaphors and similes. One of the comparisons he makes is with a fashionable host. In this context, fashionable means a host who abides by the most current etiquette—who follows customs that are of the current fashion.

"For time is like a fashionable host that slightly shakes his parting guest by the hand, and with his arms outstretch'd, as he would fly, grasps in the comer: welcome ever smiles, and farewell goes out sighing."—Ulysses

Modern definition: Representing a popular trend or influence, particularly regarding personal styles.

Inaudible—*All's Well That Ends Well*, Act V, Scene III

"Let's take the instant by the forward top; for we are old, and on our quick'st decrees the inaudible and noiseless foot of Time steals ere we can effect them."—King of France

THE ART OF THE **SHAKESPEAREAN** INSULT

When we think of Shakespeare, we usually think of his plays and poetry. However, Shakespeare has also penned some of the most amazing insults. Far more interesting and colorful than the curse words we usually hear in modern conversation, the witty and acerbic Shakespearean insult is truly an art form. Next time you feel additional color is required in your conversation, try something Shakespearean! Go ahead!

Below are a few of Shakespeare's well-known insults:

"Thou art a boil, a plague sore, an embossed carbuncle in my corrupted blood."

"Heaven truly knows that thou art false as hell"

"I do desire we may be better strangers"

"I am sick when I do look on thee"

"Poisonous bunch-backed toad!"

"Thou lump of foul deformity"

ACTIVITY

Make Your Own Insult! Combine one word from each of the three columns, then preface your combination with "Thou" to create your own Shakespearean Insult!

COLUMN 1

Artless
Bawdy
Bootless
Churlish
Clouted
Craven
Currish
Dankish
Dissembling
Droning
Errant
Fawning
Fobbing
Forward
Frothy
Gleeking
Goatish
Gorbellied
Infectious
Jarring
Loggerheaded
Lumpish
Mammering
Mangled
Mewling
Paunchy
Pribbling
Puking
Puny
Qualling
Rank
Reeky
Roguish
Ruttish
Saucy
Spleeny
Spongy
Surlly
Tottering
Unmuzzled
Vain
Venomed
Villainous
Warped
Wayward

COLUMN 2

Base-court
Bat-fowling
Beef-witted
Beetle-headed
Boil-brained
Clapper-clawed
Clay-brained
Common-kissing
Crook-pated
Dismal-dreaming
Dizzy-eyed
Doghearted
Dread-bolted
Earth-vexing
Fat-kidneyed
Fen-sucked
Flap-mouthed
Fly-bitten
Folly-fallen
Fool-born
Full-gorged
Guts-gripping
Half-faced
Hasty-witted
Hedge-born
Hell-hated
Idle-headed
Ill-breeding
Ill-nurtured
Knotty-pated
Milk-livered
Motley-minded
Onion-eyed
Pottle-deep
Pox-marked
Reeling-ripe
Rough-hewn
Rude-growing
Shard-borne
Sheep-biting
Spur-galled
Swag-bellied
Tardy-gaited
Tickle-brained
Toad-spotted
Urchin-snouted

COLUMN 3

Apple-john
Baggage
Barnacle
Bladder Boar-pig
Bugbear Bum-bailey
Canker-blossom
Clack-dish
Clotpole
Coxcomb
Codpiece
Death-token
Dewberry
Flap-dragon
Flax-wench
Flirt-gill
Foot-licker
Fustilarian
Giglet
Gudgeon
Haggard
Harpy
Hedge-pic
Horn-beast
Hugger-mugger
Lewdster
Lout
Malt-worm
Mammet
Measle
Minnow
Miscreant
Moldwarp
Mumble-news
Nut-hook
Pigeon-egg
Pignut
Puttock
Pumpion
Ratsbane
Scut
Skainsmate
Vassal Whey-face

PRE-SHOW PREPARATION: **RESEARCH**

Purpose:

These research prompts will help students develop an understanding of the social and historical context of William Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well*.

Prepare:

To prepare for seeing *All's Well That Ends Well*, have students break into small groups to research the following topics either in their groups or individually. When they are ready, have students present their findings to the class.

The Elizabethan Era:

- The social structure hierarchy
- Social norms and morals
- The role of women and women's rights
- Theatre and its role in society
- Prominent theatre companies and playwrights
- Prominent political figures
- Marital laws
- Popular art and entertainment

Problem Plays:

- Their characteristics
- Their subject matter
- Examples of other Shakespearean Romance plays

***All's Well That Ends Well*:**

- Shakespeare's source material for the play
- Performance history

William Shakespeare:

- His life
- His work
- His legacy

PRE-SHOW PREPARATION: **ACTIVITIES**

Purpose:

These activities will prompt students to think critically about the themes in *All's Well That Ends Well*.

TRANSLATIONS

In this activity, students will use their creative writing skills to engage with the text of *All's Well That Ends Well* by translating a speech from the play into contemporary language.

1. Have students read Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well*, or provide students with a contextual overview of the events in the play.
2. Distribute the text of a speech from the play to students. Possible speeches include the following:
 - a. Helen - Act I, Scene I Line 121
 - b. Parolles - Act I, Scene I Line 79
 - c. King - Act II, Scene III Line 104
3. After reading the speech, begin a group discussion about the greater meaning and themes in the speech.
4. Break students into groups and translate the speech line by line using contemporary language.
5. Give students the opportunity to present these translations.
6. Discuss how the changes affect the meaning of the text
 - a. What is added or lost in the translations?
 - b. Is the meaning of the speech still clear? Did the translation help to clarify its meaning?
 - c. How did translating the text affect your understanding of it? What parts were useful?

LOVE TRIANGLES

In this activity, students will explore the complexity of love in *All's Well that End's Well* by creating a visual map to track the love triangles.

1. Begin a group discussion about love
 - a. How do you define love?
 - b. How has the definition of love changed over time?
 - c. What are different types of love?
 - d. Should love be difficult? Why or why not?
 - e. How is psychology related to love?
2. Divide students into groups and have each group create a poster with all of the characters in the play.
3. After reading each act, allow students to connect the characters with lines to indicate a relationship
4. Allow groups to present their completed board as if they were presenting a case.
5. Ask students to discuss the following:
 - a. Why are the characters together?
 - b. What role did other characters play in bringing these characters together/apart?

ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. What is the role of gender in the play? How are men and women in the play held to different standards and how do these compare to gender roles today?
2. What does marriage represent in the play? Is marriage an act of love or an act of pragmatism? How has the symbol of marriage changed over time from Shakespeare's time to now?
3. What is the role of Parolles in the play? Is he evil? Must someone have power in order to do evil unto others?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

PLAYS:

Ibsen, Henrik. *A Doll's House*. United Kingdom, Dover Publications, 1992.

Shakespeare, William. *Measure for Measure*. United Kingdom, Macmillan Education UK, 2010.

Shakespeare, William. *Romeo and Juliet*. United States, J.B. Lippincott, 1913.

BOOKS:

Boccaccio, Giovanni. *The Decameron*. United Kingdom, Oxford University Press, 1998.

Garber, Marjorie B. *Shakespeare After All*. Anchor Books, 2005.

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare*. The Bodley Head, 2016.

Lawrence, William Witherle. *Shakespeare's Problem Comedies*. United States, Macmillan, 1931.

McDonald, Russ. *The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare: an Introduction with Documents*. Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001.

Shapiro, James. *Shakespeare in a Divided America: What His Plays Tell Us about Our Past and Future*. Penguin Books, 2021.

ARTICLES:

Schoff, Francis G. "Claudio, Bertram, and A Note on Interpretation." *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1959, pp. 11-23. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/2867018.

FILMS:

Dove, John, director. *All's Well That Ends Well*. IMDb, Globe Theater, 2012, www.imdb.com/title/tt2534684/.

Styan, J. G., *Shakespeare in Performance series: All's Well That Ends Well*, 1985.

SONGS:

William Linley. "Was This Fair Face." Samuel Wesley, London.

ONLINE RESOURCES:

Van Dusen, Chris. "Bridgerton." Netflix, 2020.

ABOUT THEATRE ARTS: KEY THEATRICAL TERMS

Today, movies and television take audiences away from what was once the number one form of amusement: going to the theatre. But attending a live theatrical performance is still one of the most thrilling and active forms of entertainment.

In a theatre, observers are catapulted into the action, especially at an intimate venue like *A Noise Within*, whose thrust stage reaches out into the audience and whose actors can see, hear, and feel the response of the crowd.

After this *A Noise Within* performance, you will have the opportunity to discuss the play's content and style with the performing artists and directors. You may wish to remind students to observe the performance carefully or to compile questions ahead of time so they are prepared to participate in the discussion.

blocking: The instructions a director gives actors that tell them how and where to move in relation to each other or to the set in a particular scene.

character: The personality or part portrayed by an actor on stage.

conflict: The opposition of people or forces which causes the play's rising action.

dramatic irony: A dramatic technique used by a writer in which a character is unaware of something the audience knows.

genre: Literally, "kind" or "type." In literary terms, genre refers to the main types of literary form, principally comedy and tragedy. It can also refer to forms that are more specific to a given historical era, such as the revenge tragedy, or to more specific sub-genres of tragedy and comedy such as the comedy of manners, farce or social drama.

motivation: The situation or mood which initiates an action. Actors often look for their "motivation" when they try to dissect how a character thinks or acts.

props: Items carried on stage by an actor to represent objects mentioned in or implied by the script. Sometimes the props are actual, sometimes they are manufactured in the theatre shop.

proscenium stage: There is usually a front curtain on a proscenium stage. The audience views the play from the front through a "frame" called the proscenium arch. In this scenario, all audience members have the same view of the actors.

set: The physical world created on stage in which the action of the play takes place.

setting: The environment in which a play takes place. It may include the historical period as well as the physical space.

stage areas: The stage is divided into areas to help the director to note where action will take place. Upstage is the area furthest from the audience. Downstage is the area closest to the audience. Center stage defines the middle of the playing space. Stage left is the actor's left as he faces the audience. Stage right is the actor's right as he faces the audience.

theme: The overarching message or main idea of a literary or dramatic work. A recurring idea in a play or story.

thrust stage: A stage that juts out into the audience seating area so that patrons are seated on three sides. In this scenario, audience members see the play from varying viewpoints. *A Noise Within* features a thrust stage.

ABOUT A NOISE WITHIN

A NOISE WITHIN A Noise Within produces classic theatre as an essential means to enrich our community by embracing universal human experiences, expanding personal awareness, and challenging individual perspectives. Our company of resident and guest artists performing in rotating repertory immerses student and general audiences in timeless, epic stories in an intimate setting.

Our most successful art asks our community to question beliefs, focus on relationships, and develop self-awareness. Southern California audiences of all ages and backgrounds build community together while engaging with this most visceral and primal of storytelling techniques. ANW's production of classic theatre includes all plays we believe will be part of our cultural legacy. We interpret these stories through the work of a professional resident company—a group of artists whose work is critical to their community—based on the belief that trust among artists and between artists and audience can only be built through an honest and continuing dialogue. Our plays will be performed in rotating repertory, sometimes simultaneously in multiple spaces, and buttressed by meaningful supporting programs to create a symphonic theatrical experience for artists and audience.

In its 30-year history, A Noise Within has garnered over 500 awards and commendations, including the Los Angeles Drama Critics' Circle's revered Polly Warfield Award for Excellence and the coveted Margaret Hartford Award for Sustained Excellence.

More than 45,000 individuals attend productions at a Noise Within annually. In addition, the theatre draws over 18,000 student participants to its Education Program. Students benefit from in-classroom workshops, conservatory training, subsidized tickets to matinee and evening performances, post-performance discussions with artists, and free standards-based study guides.

Study Guides

A Noise Within creates study guides in alignment with core reading, listening, speaking, and performing arts standards to help educators prepare their students for their visit to our theatre. Study guides are available at no extra cost to download through our website: www.anoisewithin.org. The information and activities outlined in these guides are designed to work in compliance with the California VAPA standards, The Common Core, and 21st Century Learning Skills.

Study guides include background information on the plays and playwrights, historical context, textual analysis, in-depth discussion of A Noise Within's artistic interpretation of the work, statements from directors and designers, as well as discussion points and suggested classroom activities. Guides from past seasons are also available to download from the website.

Study Guide Credits

Alicia Green	<i>Education Director and Editor</i>
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Rachael McNamara	<i>Author</i>
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