

# 'Wicked' meanings in 'lawful' deeds: Reinterpreting Helena's plots in *All's Well That Ends Well*<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Let us assay our plot; which, if it speed,  
Is wicked meaning in a lawful deed,  
And lawful meaning in a lawful act,  
Where both not sin, and yet a sinful fact.  
(3.7.44-47)<sup>2</sup>

Helena in Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well*, explaining the nature of (and perhaps also justifying) her bed-trick, utters the above riddling verse. Bertram, her estranged husband who ran away immediately after their marriage, has been attempting to seduce the maiden Diana, but Helena makes an arrangement with her and secretly substitutes herself in the 'wicked' (immoral) bed<sup>3</sup>. By doing so, she not only succeeds in consummating their hitherto unconsummated marriage, but also makes her husband's sexual misconduct 'lawful' without his knowledge. Subsequently Helena hatches another plot, this time making Diana sue Bertram for 'illicit sex'. As a result he is interrogated and his sexuality is thoroughly investigated as if he had been brought before the real criminal court of the time.

In critical commentary *All's Well That Ends Well* has long been the target of censure, and been generally perceived as problematic (as is the case with *Measure for Measure* and *Troilus and Cressida*). Certainly, it does not seem to fit into the convention of the happy comedy even though it was categorised as a comedy by the First Folio editors. One critic considered the play 'one of Shakespeare's worst'<sup>4</sup>. Another critic thought he would never be able to come to terms with the main characters<sup>5</sup>. G. K. Hunter, the editor of the Arden Shakespeare, complains that the ending of the play is 'too much complication leading to too little resolution' (Introduction xxiv). Some compromised and concluded that it is Shakespeare's most 'experimental' piece (Riemer 53-54), but the play does not seem to have much popularity, and its reception may not always be favourable.

The main plot of the play is mostly based on its source, the ninth novel of the third day in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, which Shakespeare probably knew through the translation in the thirty-eighth novel of *The Palace of Pleasure* (1566, 1569, 1575) by William Painter (Hunter xxv). The original is in fact a combination of a folkloric tale of 'the healing of the king' and a fairy-tale-like story of 'the fulfillment of ... impossible tasks' (Lawrence 68). The bed-trick motif itself is taken from the source. Personalities are also derivatives from the source story as Chun-pai Hsieh

explains: '[a] number of Helena's controversial qualities – such as audacious forwardness and scheming deception – are ... from the source' (3). The play further falls within the dramatic subgenre of the prodigal-son/husband paradigm, which may justify Bertram's much-criticised problematic personality and his involvement in misconduct (see below).

Shakespeare, however, tends to alter his source materials to 'point to a core principle of his art' (Hsieh 4; see also Honigmann 147 and Bate 326). The old tale of a humble girl's expedition to win an aristocratic husband is transmuted into 'the experience of a world of entirely different mood and coloration' (Hsieh 4). It seems particularly noteworthy that in *All's Well That Ends Well*, one of the chief additions is focused on sexuality and related matters (sexual transgression and sexual regulation) that were topical in his time<sup>6</sup>. The aim of my article, therefore, is to reinterpret the meanings of Helena's plots, especially by considering them within their historical context and the literary convention of the subgenre of prodigal plays.

In order to distance readers from the modern understanding of the subject, the first part of the article will be a brief introduction to the history of prostitution in Shakespeare's London and, because I shall argue later that Helena's bed-trick in particular is analogous to prostitution in Shakespeare's England (rather than in Italy), an explanation of the contemporary structure of the sex trade.

My attention will then turn to Helena's actions, which are not simply represented as more sensual than those of her counterpart Giletta in the source but are also, at every step of her activity, represented as dubious (or even whorish). In fact, from the very beginning of the play, Helena is constantly subjected to images of sex, sexual transgression and related matters, and I shall first show how the play gradually creates an erotic atmosphere surrounding the heroine through the characters' discourse. Intriguingly, Shakespeare's additional characters to the source story (Parolles, Lafew, the Clown, and the Countess) are invariably willing participants in such 'bawdy' talk, and their discourse (even the most seemingly trivial sexual banter) not only makes the story more pertinent to its time (late Elizabethan or early Jacobean) but also succeeds in creating a social ethos which will gradually affect the thought and actions of the young heroine (as well as the hero later on).

As I shall show, the play's tone changes dramatically when Bertram refuses to wed/bed Helena and flees to Florence, where he participates in a war and attempts an illicit sexual affair. To better understand Bertram's much-discussed problematic personality and his misconduct, I shall argue the importance of placing the play within the dramatic subgenre of the prodigal-son/husband paradigm. It is noteworthy that the Florentine women with whom Bertram becomes acquainted are given names and have significant roles to play in Shakespeare, unlike in the source. Their sexual honesty is revealed to the audience, but, because of the establishment (an inn) in which they live, their morality is also represented as suspicious in the eyes of the hero and Parolles. Taking advantage of this situation, Helena orchestrates her bed-trick. Because of the situation created by Shakespeare and the means that the heroine adopts in dealing with the trick, it seems that Shakespeare's heroine is procuring her own bed with a woman that her husband *believes* to be a common prostitute. If this is so, the bed-trick ceases to function simply as a tool for Helena to fulfill her tasks and comes to represent something more complex and more dubious – something more 'wicked' and 'sinful' as in Helena's riddle, although the deed itself is 'lawful'

because they are married – and my chief aim in this article is to explore the unique aspects of the bed trick.

In the final trial scene (Act 5 Scene 3) Bertram's 'illicit sex' is investigated and exposed, as I shall observe closely in the final section of the article. Especially as this is wholly an addition to the source, it seems reasonable to assume that Shakespeare must have had an active interest in displaying the prodigal's sexuality. Public humiliation and punishment are the normal outcome in such a situation in the prodigal convention, but what is unique about Shakespeare is that, as I have mentioned briefly above and shall observe in more detail below, Bertram has been brought before what very closely resembles the real criminal court of Shakespeare's own London (represented by the French King's court). Only after Bertram's 'illegal' involvement with 'Diana', whom he falsely accuses of being a common whore, has been fully confirmed does Helena reappear and disclose the whole truth. My argument here will be that, even though the bed-trick itself may have appeared suspicious and deceptive, and even though prosecuting her own husband and humiliating him may seem excessive, Helena has to take a course in which her actions can be acknowledged as 'lawful', and that Helena's final actions as a pregnant woman – her absence from the trial scene and her delayed entry – are justifiable in the light of the theatrical and historical context.

## I

The recorded history of 'prostitution' in England can be said to go back as early as 50 AD: under Roman occupation, female slaves are believed to have served the sexual needs of Roman soldiers in the Southwark area (Salgado 37). From at least the twelfth century brothels were called mainly 'stews' ('vapor', *OED*), which could be a legacy from the Roman conquest because of the common association between such baths and bawdy houses in Rome (Salgado 37).

In pre-Medieval and Medieval England, prostitution seems to have developed under the social perception that male sexual desire was a natural drive and premarital or extramarital sexual intercourse on the part of men should be tolerated. Of course, the fundamental notion (reinforced by ecclesiastical preaching) was that sexual pleasure was basically wicked and all sex outside marriage was considered sinful; however, it was believed that, if a man had to commit non-procreative sex acts, it was preferable to commit them with an already corrupt woman rather than to corrupt another's wife. By suppressing prostitution, it was believed that 'capricious lust [would] overthrow society' (Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 8, 7): prostitution was therefore a necessary evil in Augustine's theory. In early Medieval England, however, municipal brothels did not seem to be as common as in many other European societies, where prostitution both within and outside city walls was permitted, regulated and institutionalized. It was only in 1161, in an Act of Henry II, that the English prostitution industry was legislated possibly for the first time by a King<sup>7</sup>.

The enactment has detailed instructions for the activities of stewholders and 'common women' (prostitutes) in the eighteen licensed 'stews' or 'stewhouses' on Bankside in Southwark as well as about how clients and also officers/constables had to deal with them. The fact that the King enacted a law and segregated the trade indicates that organised and recognised bawdry

already existed in society, and shows how ubiquitous the trade was: the Act itself says that ‘the olde custumes’ had been there since ‘oute of tyme of mynd’.

The licensed stew houses were located in Bankside, Southwark – and by this time, a large part of this area had already come under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Winchester<sup>8</sup>, who is believed to have obtained large sums in rent from the brothels (Shugg 307) and this is the reason why the ‘common women’ who worked in these establishments had come to be known as ‘Winchester Geese’<sup>9</sup>.

Henry’s act was not very effective, and the Middle Ages saw a whole series of further acts and decrees by monarchs and the City authorities to purge such sin and pollution from within the City walls: while one King would try to prohibit ‘whores’ from dwelling within the City of London<sup>10</sup>, another attempted to completely abolish the stews within the City, all of which ironically attests to the continued thriving of brothels both in and outside the City. Even Southwark’s official brothels were threatened with demolition: in 1506, under Henry VII, the brothels in Southwark were temporarily ‘closed upp’ possibly because of the spread of syphilis; however, ‘it was not long or they sett opyn agayn’, although the appointed stew houses were reduced from eighteen to twelve (Stow ii 55).

Repeated attempts to restrict prostitution show the ineffectiveness of the authorities and the failure of legislation. It had become almost impossible to suppress the growth of prostitution in and outside the City. Southwark itself was becoming an increasingly lawless place, partly because of the stews. Crime and disorder had grown so much that Henry VIII finally issued a proclamation aimed at closing down all the stews in April 1546<sup>11</sup>.

The era of public prostitution was thus over, but it continued illicitly and covertly during the long reign of Queen Elizabeth, and now came the era of private prostitution, as John Taylor, the Water Poet, describes succinctly:

The Stewes in England bore a beastly sway  
til the eighth Henry banished them away:  
and since these Common whores were quite put downe  
a damn’d crewe of privat whores are growne.  
So that the diuell will be doing still,  
Either with publique or with priuate ill.

(*All the works* 110)

Because of Henry VIII’s official ‘plucking down’ of the London brothels, prostitution was a criminal offence during the long reign of Queen Elizabeth as well as under James I. Officially speaking there were no ‘prostitutes’ or their associates in the society. Nevertheless, the people who had been in the industry simply practiced their trade in inns, taverns, and alehouses or in hothouses behind the scenes. This covering-up of their business is depicted clearly in Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure*:

Ms. Overdone ... shall all our houses of resort in the suburbsbe  
pulled down?

Pompey        To the ground, mistress.  
Ms. Overdone ... What shall become of me?  
Pompey        Come: fear not you: good counsellors lack no  
                  clients: though you change your place, you need  
                  not change your trade.

(1.2.93-100)

In fact, transacting their bawdy business behind the scenes in this way had long been the tradition for *unlicensed* traders since the Middle Ages. Alehouses, taverns and inns seem to have been the most convenient places for private prostitutes to meet potential customers and they carried out their bargain in the private rooms at the back of the establishments or at houses of assignation outside. Many such private prostitutes are considered to have acted alone, but in some cases they would have special arrangements with tavern employees, innkeepers, landlords and owners of bathhouses and would pay them a share (Karras 71, 72-73).

Such houses of ill fame, although illicit, seem to have been situated in specific quarters, districts or streets; however, the total prohibition might have ironically caused an influx and spread of former public prostitutes and their associates into the City, and the sex trade seems to have become even more prevalent in alehouses, taverns and inns throughout London. Thus, commercial prostitution had managed to survive in a different way and was even boosted by the end of the 1580s – according to Ian Archer, there were at least 100 such ‘bawdy houses’ in London (19 inside the wall, and over 76 around) (215). There were establishments so close to Guildhall that on one night even ‘my lord mayor hard the noyse’<sup>12</sup>. It is clear, as Archer says, that the closure of the Bankside stews had a minimal effect on commercial sex in the capital, which flourished in a different way.

‘Bawdy houses’ could be any public places: taverns, alehouses, inns, lodgings, private houses, or hothouses, and they were often not distinguishable at first sight (Dabhoiwala 93). In most cases such places were kept by older women or, particularly, by widows, but for them, acting as a bawd was only a part-time supplement to their original occupation as the mistresses or hostesses of the above-mentioned public houses.

As for the prostitutes themselves, some were still full-time even after the ban and lived in the bawdy houses or nearby, but like the bawds and pimps, most of them seem to have been part-time or amateur and they practiced their business in the rooms of alehouses and inns (Archer 213). It was this ready access to premises where they could conduct business combined with the poverty of urban life that drove many women of different backgrounds, both married and unmarried, to take up this rare money-making opportunity (Griffiths 50-52; Linnane 15).

People must have been well aware of the fact that prostitution was a criminal offence both under secular and ecclesiastical law; however, its flourishing attests to the heavy demand for the industry. Paul Griffiths’s analysis shows that the clientele for such bawdy houses were from many different social backgrounds, occupations, nationalities and age groups, whether married or single<sup>13</sup>. There are no wealthier clients in his analysis (such as merchants and ambassadors) but such people seem often to have enjoyed immunity from prosecution by bribing constables.

The arrangements of clients and whores would vary – in some cases, bawds and pimps

would act as go-betweens and arrange rooms, fees and so forth. Some prostitutes and clients would meet in public places such as theatres, gardens, baiting houses, alehouses, taverns and inns and make deals themselves. The reward could be negotiated between the parties and it did not have to be hard cash.

Thus, prostitution was very widespread in Shakespeare's London and the structure was rather different from that of the modern understanding. It was not a marginalized institution, but one deeply integrated into the social, economic and occupational structure, and it certainly had a clear place in the 'fabric of London society'<sup>14</sup>.

The Court Books of Bridewell Hospital<sup>15</sup> are the basic source of all the above information on the sex industry in Early Modern England<sup>16</sup>. They survive only patchily but the records of the court interrogations provide access to the voices of sex offenders in general (prostitutes, bawds, pimps, customers, adulteresses, rapists, sodomites, paedophiles, etc) as well as witnesses, and also give us the names of offenders, places where the illicit conduct took place, and detailed amounts concerning payments, etc. Bridewell's responsibility overlapped with other institutions such as the sessions and church courts (Archer 218). The latter, in particular, had long been involved in the punishment of moral offenders and were still functioning as such at the time, but they were criticised especially by reformers and puritans as 'relics of the popish past' (Ingram 4), and Bridewell was taking over the role as moral reformer and becoming the main policing quarter to maintain social order.

While Bridewell officers were renowned for their tough attitudes and strict punishments, the institution also had its own notorious aspects. Although its reputed cruelty and malpractice may have largely resulted from fictional accounts – dramatists and balladeers certainly poked fun at Bridewell – their tolerance of certain groups of people, false charges, and corruption on the part of governors were real problems. As mentioned earlier, people from the higher and wealthier social milieux seem to have enjoyed immunity from prosecution by bribery. Also, unfair judgments, or misjudgments were always likely. Suspects were dragged off to Bridewell on the slightest of pretexts – just by being in the wrong place or the wrong street, or just by behaving suspiciously in the eyes of the constables, people could be driven into the Hospital as a 'whore', a 'bawd', a 'pimp' or a 'client'.

Such was the society where Shakespeare's *All's Well* was composed and performed. The play is located in France and in Italy but its underlying setting is London, mirroring the City's issues of the time. In active pursuit of gaining her husband, putting her virginity at stake, Helena may suffer sexual 'slander', often with the images of 'whore' (as I shall observe in section II). As the play proceeds, however, she will step into the sex trade herself, and her actions will be juxtaposed to sexual transgression (section III); finally, the hero's illicit sexuality will be assessed severely (section IV).

## II

The first two acts are situated in France (Rossillion and Paris) under the dark shadow of death and disease of the older generation (the deaths of the fathers of the hero and heroine and the

critical illness of the French King); the characters' black mourning habits at the very beginning of the play (cf. stage direction: *all in black* [Folio]), in particular, may effectively create an appropriate atmosphere, displaying their sexual inhibition (sexual purity during mourning or even infertility). At the same time, such mourning habits may equally display the stereotypical image of the sexual availability of widows (e.g. the Wife of Bath in Chaucer, Lady Gray in *Henry IV Part 3*, Ann in *Richard III*) and the relative sexual discretion of maids (Olivia in *Twelfth Night*, Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*). The first line of Lafew in our play already suggests the possibility of marriage between the King and the Countess who has just lost her husband: 'You shall find of the king a husband' (1.1.6).

Helena's 'great tears' (1.1.78) and 'excessive grief' (51-52) in her mourning habit are also perceived to be for her late father (as expressed in the dialogue between the Countess and Lafew [44-54]); however, she subsequently confesses in her first soliloquy that she does not even recollect her father's face and her preoccupations are solely with Bertram, her unrequited love. The same first soliloquy of the heroine in fact discloses to us her 'ambitious' sexual desire – the somewhat erotic metaphor she uses of the copulation of a hind and a lion (89-90), although explaining the impossibility and unnaturalness of such mating, verifies her hopeless sexual fantasy about herself and Bertram.

Helena's subsequent amusing conversation about virginity with Parolles, where the heroine is a willing participant in the witty sexual banter (which is quite unlike her counterpart Giletta in the source but not unusual for Shakespeare's female characters: cf. Desdemona and Emilia in *Othello* and the Countess here in *All's Well*), is not a mere comic interlude to amuse some segment of the audience but in fact awakens the suppressed sexuality of the heroine and transforms the passive desperate lover into a director of action.

Now this additional character Parolles, despite his pompous manner and flamboyant clothing representing a superficial (French) courtier, is the familiar foul-mouthed swaggerer taken from a stock of persona in Early Modern London akin to Falstaff, Sir Toby Belch, Iago and Lucio, and his discourse is full of sexual slander and innuendo. It is noteworthy then that, in Parolles' initial address to Helena, the humble daughter of a doctor, she is addressed as 'Queen' (Folio). As some critics argue, this joking form of address may be because of the name she shares with Helen (Helene, Helena), Queen of Troy, although the two are quite the opposite in that Helen of Troy was an object of lust, whereas our heroine is someone who is fiercely refused the marriage bed by her husband and who must use tricks to legitimise her marriage rights, wholly unlike the Queen of Troy (as Susan Snyder also points out [Snyder, *Text and Subtext* 70-72]).

In fact, Shakespeare's renaming of his heroine from something such as Juliet or Julietta, which would be the simple anglicised version of Giletta in the source (Hodgdon 48), to Helena has generated much critical comment. Barbara Hodgdon points out that the name signals 'particular sexual, as well as social and metadramatic, connotative possibilities' (ibid). She argues that the name evokes both the 'adulterous Helen of Troy and the lonely, virginal, left-out Helena of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, strongly locked on a single object of desire' (ibid). She concludes that 'the name embraces a paradox ... his heroine encompasses her sexual awareness, her obsessive desire and her virginity' (ibid). Mary Trull's recent study on Helena's name

enables us to understand the naming in the contemporary context – in short, she argues that Helena's social and sexual ambitions and her exposure in public places are the very same elements seen in the 'fallen' heroines of ballads, such as Helen of Troy and Cressida, whom our Helena will be associated with directly in the lines of the Clown and Lafew later on in the play (Trull 134-135)<sup>17</sup>.

Returning to the term 'Queen' itself, *The English dictionary: or, An interpreter of hard English words* by Henry Cockeram (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1650) catalogues certain adulterous ancient mythical queens (such as Cleopatra, 'Helena' of Troy, Mesalina, Leda, Panthea, Rhodopis, and Omphale) under the heading 'Women Queans and Queens' (page Ya)<sup>18</sup>. The origin of the punning ('quean/queen') is not known, but the significant fact is that the term was frequently used as a general form of sexual slander in Shakespeare's England (as Martin Ingram explains, often with the spelling 'quean', meaning 'whore')<sup>19</sup>. Here in *All's Well*, the slanderous Parolles may be foretelling the coming journey of the upstart virgin, and jokingly quibbling about her sexual/social ambition as a 'quean/queen', which she disclaims immediately (1.1.107).

The following dialogue on, firstly, how to defend virginity against the enemy – 'assailing' men – contains many sexual allusions in the form of bawdy puns on erection, ejaculation and pregnancy using the imagery of warfare. Parolles explains the impossibility of women 'barricading' their virginity even with their 'warlike resistance' since '[m]an ... will (nevertheless) undermine [virgins] and blow [them] up', i.e., they will make virgins pregnant (1.1.111-117)<sup>20</sup>. We can observe how Parolles' decadent discourse gradually begins to infect Helena's language too: her next question is, rather surprisingly (even though it could have been uttered innocently), on how a virgin might 'blow up' men (119-120). Parolles explains to Helena that men will be 'blown up' (sexually stimulated [footnote, Snyder]) once virginity is lost – he then insists that she give up her virginal defence and lose her 'city' (123).

Commercial metaphors are also brought into Parolles' arguments about the surrender of chastity. 'Loss of virginity', according to him, 'is rational increase' (1.1.125). He compares virgins to 'mettall(s)' (Folio; meaning 'coins') – if virginity is once lost (invested), ten times profit (interest) will be gained (by producing ten [virgin] children [footnote, Snyder])<sup>21</sup>. Virginity is a 'commodity' (149) which she should trade within season – he insists that it will 'lose the gloss by lying' (149). It should be sold while it is fresh: 'The longer kept, the less worth' (149-150), since it gets too dry just as French pears wither (156-157). He tries to persuade her to sell it as soon as she can: 'Off with't while 'tis vendible; answer the time of request' (150-151).

Such ideas as Parolles expresses (a form of the *carpe diem* motif) appear frequently in Shakespeare's works. For instance, Viola, as Cesario in *Twelfth Night*, criticizes Olivia for 'usurping' herself, because, she asserts, 'what is yours to bestow is not yours to reserve' (1.5.189-190). She also tells Olivia that if she will take her graces to the grave and 'leave the world no copy', she is 'the cruell'st she alive' (244-246). Bertram in *All's Well* also insists that Diana give up her virginal guard and follow in her mother's footsteps, i.e. lose her virginity and beget offspring (4.2.9-10); however, his proposal, being adulterous, is of a more sinister kind, covering up his carnal desire – his more epicurean spirit – under the *carpe diem* theme. Parolles' 'preaches' on virginity nevertheless sound the most extreme, more similar to the attitudes



towards virgins of the Bawd and Boulton in the brothel in *Pericles*, where virgins are a sheer commodity – not valuable if not vendible<sup>22</sup>. The commercial metaphors Parolles introduces, especially his comparison of the loss of virginity with finance and a breeder of children and money in particular, are the sort usually found in the context of prostitution (and usury)<sup>23</sup>.

It is in fact quite remarkable how Parolles reasons out his arguments about the matter. According to him, preserving virginity is totally against the norms of society: it is 'against the rule of nature' (1.1.133-134); against their mothers (which is 'most infallible disobedience') (135); and against Christianity because it is 'peevisish, proud, idle, made of self-love, which is the most inhibited sin in the cannon' (141-143). As is often the case with the bawdy characters whose discourse and concepts are a complete inversion of popular ethics, Parolles' ideas are also antipodal and preach reverse morality to Helena: he admonishes her that such virgins are the 'desperate offendress[es] against nature' (137-139) and firmly believes that they should be 'buried in highways out of all sanctified limit' (which was in reality the fate of prostitutes in particular).

Helena's joking discussion of virginity with Parolles was received very unfavourably by some early critics (most famously by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch). They wished that the scene did not exist, and even concluded that it must have been inserted by a possible collaborator; however, the intricate metaphors and the humour are undoubtedly Shakespearean. The conversation is significant to the whole play in that it serves to awaken the heroine's suppressed sexuality. Helena's lines just after this clearly display her transformed character:

Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie,  
Which we ascribe to heaven. The fated sky  
Gives us free scope.

(1.1.208-15)

In pursuit of Bertram, the defence of her virginity (which she has initially asked Parolles about) is no longer uppermost in her thoughts – she is ready to accept Parolles' instruction on the beneficial 'use' of her possessions and situation. Helena later confesses to the Countess that, had it not been for Bertram, 'Paris and the medicine and the king ... [h]ad been absent' from her thoughts (1.3.227-230). For the upstart virgin, her father's legacy and the King's disease are both means to achieve her sexual and social ambitions and, throughout the play, she will continue trading her 'commodity' 'to her own liking' (1.1.147), even when her virginal reputation is at stake.

Parolles does not stand alone when it comes to obscene discourse. The Countess's Clown also has a sarcastic tongue and is an advocate of further reverse morality on popular issues associated with sex, marriage, cuckold husbandry, etc<sup>24</sup>. In addition, and rather unexpectedly, the supposedly virtuous characters (the elderly Countess and Lafew, the old lord) also take a willing part in such bawdy conversations, which have not merely the dramatic purpose of entertaining the audience while filling in time (where the passing of time is expected in the main story), but also seem to lend a certain decadent atmosphere to the scenes and to influence covertly the

actions of the heroine. (And it is worth mentioning again that these characters are Shakespeare's creations and additions to the source.)

It is particularly noteworthy that the encounter of Helena and the King is placed in an obscene context by the sexual allusions that the noble Lafew makes in Act 2 Scene 1. In persuading the bedridden King to receive treatment from a 'Doctor She' (78), Lafew presents Helena more as a potential healer of impotence than as a skilled physician (as Snyder also points out [Snyder, *Displacement and Deferral* 24]):

O, will you eat  
No grapes, my royal fox? Yes, but you will  
My noble grapes, and if my royal fox  
Could reach them<sup>25</sup>. I have seen a medicine  
That's able to breathe life into a stone,  
Quicken a rock, and make you dance canary  
With sprightly fire and motion; whose simple touch  
Is powerful to arise King Pippen, nay,  
To give great Charlemaine a pen in's hand  
And write to her a loue-line.

(68-77)

The last three lines in particular are explicitly sexual, as Snyder explains: Charlemagne's 'pen' and also 'Pepin', she points out, are associated with the penis, which 'Helena's powerful touch will *arise* - raise from the dead, but specifically excite to an erection' (footnote, Snyder). Authentic medical practice in Early Modern England had come to be dominated by licensed male doctors (physicians who were trained at medical college and surgeons and apothecaries trained in guilds). There were midwives under ecclesiastical jurisdiction, other ecclesiastical practitioners and astrological healers but, partly because of the licensed doctors' attempt to protect themselves against unaccredited practitioners, unlicensed medical practice, based merely on experience and experiment, tended to be disregarded as 'empiric'. Women's involvement in the field (which was often equated with witchcraft when Shakespeare's source was written) was not uncommon in Shakespeare's time (there were 60 unlicensed female 'doctors' in London between 1581-1600 [Hoeniger 30]). Although Helena's father was a famous established physician, Helena's cure is associated more with the heretical 'miraculous' cure (Hoeniger 17-31) and its focus is on the patient's sexual potency.

In her entrance to the King's chamber, Helena suffers further moral insults from Lafew, being associated with sexually loose women: 'traitor' (95, a synonym of 'whore' in Renaissance English<sup>26</sup>) and 'Cressid' (96):

Nay, come your ways.  
This is his majesty; say your mind to him.  
A traitor you do look like, but such traitors  
His majesty seldom fears; I am Cressid's uncle

That dare leave two together. Fare you well.

(93-97)

One of the reasons for her being referred to thus could be that, because Helena is incognito (cloaked or veiled), she may appear suspicious to the presenter (who does not recognize her despite their brief meeting at the very beginning of the play). It is interesting that, in leaving Helena and the King alone, Lafew goes so far as to call himself the notorious go-between in a famous illicit affair ('I am Cressid's uncle', i.e. Pandarus<sup>27</sup>). If he is Pandarus, Helena is certainly 'Cressid', a disreputable whore, a 'traitor'. The encounter of Helena and the King is thus made to sound illicit and the sexual implications of the scene linger on.

The disclosure of her identity as the heir of the famous deceased physician, Gerard de Narbon, does not have the expected persuasive power over the King. He obstinately refuses to surrender himself to the remedy of 'the unlearned virgin': he considers it utterly immoral – it is a 'stain' on his judgment, a 'corrupt[ion]' of his hope, and it is to 'prostitute' the treatment of 'the most learned doctors' (2.1.114-123). Here, the verb 'to prostitute' is of course used in the figurative sense of 'to dishonour', but his use of a word with such a strong sexual connotation is worth noting (*OED* v. 2); and it is Helena herself who subsequently juxtaposes her bold attempt with extreme immorality:

*King.* Upon thy certainty and confidence

What dar'st thou venture?

*Helena.*

Tax of impudence,

A strumpet's boldness, a divulged shame,

Traduc'd by odious ballads; my maiden's name

Sear'd otherwise; ne worse of worst, extended

With vildest torture, let my life be ended.

(2.1.168-183)

Gilletta in the source simply suggests that she be burned in case of failure – the general fate and punishment for witchcraft. In Helena's case, her sexuality appears to be more emphasised in her cure, and failure would incur sexual accusations and slander, i.e. a prostitute's punishment ('public shame for immodesty and sexual boldness' [*Snyder, Text and Subtext* 68-69]), none of which is in the source. One may be especially surprised at the highly sexualized nature of her language but it is only when she offers to put her sexual reputation at stake (meaning she will no longer be vendible in the marriage marketplace) that the King finally yields and agrees to try her 'physic' (184).

Departing also from the source, where the King puts forward the idea of rewarding Gilletta with a husband, Shakespeare's Helena is bold enough to '[set] the terms of the bargain herself' (Hodgdon 52). She trades her ability, or her 'art' as the King puts it, and she herself demands her reward: her future husband. Most intriguingly, as soon as she closes the deal with the King – when the deal is made 'even' – she shifts her discourse from the conventional 'you' to 'thou', which is highly unusual when addressing a monarch. If we recall, a whorishly depicted Joan la

Pucelle in *Henry VI Part 1* also enjoys the privilege of using 'thou' to the Dauphin. Likewise with Helena, her use of 'thou' with the King may be intended to imply their intimacy. (In the 1980 BBC production directed by Elijah Mojmisky, for instance, Helena kisses the bed-ridden King on the lips, which implies an even greater degree of intimacy.)

After the cure, both the recovered King and Helena are highly sexualized again in old Lafew's speech. The King's regained sexual ability is specifically emphasised in his report: he compares the King to the 'lusty' 'Dolphin' (2.3.26)<sup>28</sup>, and describes him as 'Lustique' (41). The King, according to him, is 'able to lead (a maid) a coranto' (43): his ability to do a lively dance, as usual, connotes sexual energy; and the maid's treatment is reported and reputed thus to have restored the King's virility.

Helena in Lafew's description seems to emit a 'strong sexual aura' (Parker 110) for even he himself wishes to marry her, were he young enough (59-61, 78-79). The female wooer, in selecting her husband, turns from one gentleman to another, which may remind us of Cressida in Act 4 Scene 5 in *Troilus and Cressida*, in which she receives kisses from numerous Greek lords to whom she is traded over. Helena and Cressida are poles apart in their characters, but the boldness of the former has been equated to Cressida-like immorality; they are also equatable in that their sexuality is exposed in a public place, alluring numerous gentlemen and 'desired' by many – except by the one, Bertram, whom Helena chooses.

### III

The happy festive mood (after the cure of the King) suddenly alters into a more sombre one when Bertram declines to wed Helena and confronts his guardian the King. His adamant refusal may appear ruthless and his implication of having no sexual desire for Helena ('I cannot love her nor will I strive to do't' [2.3.145]) is certainly bitter. His strong objection that the marriage will be a 'bringing down' for him (i.e. a social and sexual decline) in exchange for the King's 'raising' (from bed, but connoting sexual potency) is contrary to Parolles' theory of 'blowing up' all men with virginal surrender.

Susan Snyder explains the hero's fierce refusal as due to his fear of demasculisation – she suggests that it is almost like public humiliation to be chosen by a woman (Snyder, *Text and Subtext* 74) even when Helena struggles to dismiss it by saying 'I dare not say I take you, but I give / Me and my service, ever whilst I live, / Into your guiding power' (2.3.102-104). Marriage itself is certainly described as effeminisation in Parolles' lines to Bertram:

He wears his hour in a box unseen  
That hugs his kinky-wicky here at home,  
Spending his manly marrow in her arms,  
Which should sustain the bound and high curvet  
Of Mars's fiery steed.

(2.3.275-279)

A young man married is a man that's marr'd.

Such an explanation as Snyder's seems to be widely accepted as a convincing reason for Bertram's actual flight from his forced marriage. However, it does not seem to explain his almost unreasonable actions that follow – his attempt at an illicit liaison, his participation in an unkind sport and his sequence of lies in the final Act. The hero's enigmatic personality and wild behaviour seem to need further explanation.

If we are fair to Bertram, and return to the scene where Helena is to select her husband, we shall see that the element of enforcement in their marriage is undoubtedly very strong. One may notice that Helena's 'unattractiveness' is mysteriously emphasised too when Helena chooses: her whispers to and the responses of the respective gentlemen-candidates do not seem to reach the others and it may appear as if Helena is refused by them one after another, while it is in fact the other way round (which Lafew misunderstands: 'Do all they deny her?' [2.3.86]). Such seeming 'reluctance' and 'refusals' by the other lords might have the effect of downgrading her in Bertram's eyes and making her look 'most base' to him – it is understandable if he feels a strong resentment about marrying an unwanted woman.

Some critics conclude that Bertram's almost nauseated reaction to the idea of marrying Helena indicates that 'the red light' of 'the Incest Taboo' is 'blinking' (Hsieh 106). Not only they were brought up in the same household, but Helena's intimate association with Bertram's mother (the latter being almost like a mother to her: 'You know, Helen, / I am a mother to you' [1.3.133]) is a 'put-off' for Bertram; and now, the same French King is the 'father' figure to both the hero and the heroine. Bertram's disgust at the idea of marrying his 'sister' Helena may make some sense if seen in this light.

Still, Bertram's chief excuse for refusal (explicitly mentioned in the text) seems to lie in Helena's humble social background: 'A poor physician's daughter my wife! Disdain / Rather corrupt me ever!' (115-116). Her newly-granted high rank and wealth do not suffice to attract Bertram who only values the long-established aristocracy (and thus is willing to take the hand of Maudlin, Lord Lafew's daughter, later on in the play). The King in the source is in fact more sympathetic to the Count's reluctance to marry the socially inferior Gilletta. Here in Shakespeare, the King is willing to accept the rising class and criticises such social discrimination: 'Strange is it that our bloods, / Of colour, weight, and heat, pour'd all together, / Would quite confound distinction, yet stands off / In differences so mighty' (118-121).

This eventually turns into more of a dramatic battle between the unwilling Bertram and the overly persistent King. Helena even tries to withdraw her proposal but the King says *his* 'honour is at the stake' and marrying them is to display *his* power (2.3.149-150). He even chastises Bertram that, as his ward, it is not his place to choose his own wife: 'Thou wrong'st thyself if thou should'st strive to choose' (146) – Bertram has only to obey and 'love' Helena. Bertram's flight to Florence and his subsequent misbehaviour, then, may perhaps be better explained as rebellion against the King of France, triggered by his enforced marriage to Helena. Earlier on in the play Bertram has in fact already hinted at his dissatisfaction with the restraints that the King has imposed on him – especially with his guardian's prohibition about participating in the war because of his immature age<sup>29</sup>. It is also possible that Bertram has felt envious of the divers

young Lords taking leave for the Florentine war and was tantalized on hearing the King's joking warning to 'take heed of' 'those girls of Italy'<sup>30</sup>. Bertram's 'escape' to Italy – and his involvement in what is prohibited to him (war and Italian women) – is therefore a direct result of his revolt against the King.

Before proceeding any further, it seems significant to emphasise that Bertram's disobedience towards the older generation, his almost groundless icy manner towards Helena and his attempt at an extramarital affair – his every move that Dr Johnson and many other scholars have dismissed as unreasonable and irreconcilable<sup>31</sup> – are in fact typical characteristics of the prodigal in one of the literary conventions of the time, i.e. the prodigal-husband/son paradigm. This genre has in fact a long literary history: with the parable of the Prodigal Son in the New Testament (Luke: 15, 11-32) as its origin, it came into fashion after the sensation of John Lyly's prose drama *Euphues The Anatomy of Wit* in 1578, and remained popular well after *All's Well*. *Euphues* seems to derive its plot from certain Latin school plays which are based on the parable, but the Elizabethans and Jacobean seem to have been more interested in the rebellion of prodigals and their punishment than in the paternal forgiveness in the parable (Richard Helgerson 2).

*All's Well* was, in fact, one of the four known plays in the repertory of the subgenre which Shakespeare's company were performing at the time (the other three being *The Fair Maid of Bristow* [Anon., c.1605], *The London Prodigal* [Anon. (Shakespeare?), c.1605] and *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage* [by George Wilkins, c.1607]) (W. David Kay 108, 111)<sup>32</sup>. Other theatrical companies also had plays in this category around the same time, such as *How a Man May Choose a Good Wife from a Bad* (by Joshua Cooke?, Worcester's Men, c.1602) and *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon* (Anon., Queen Anne's, c.1604?). The presence of numerous such works in the repertory must indicate the great interest of the theme to the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean audience (as Kay points out, 110).

As Richard Helgerson argues, studying one prodigal story is not quite the same as studying another – the paradigm neither supplied the structuring principle for all Elizabethan fiction, nor can it be explained solely in terms of such fiction (Helgerson 2). Nevertheless, there is an affinity in the type and details of the stories: the young(ish) prodigals (sons/husbands – mostly gentlemen) rebel against their fathers or father-like figures (uncles, brothers, guardians, or even teachers) and try to experience what is forbidden to them. The conflict between the two generations is a commonplace and the temporary departure of youth from old established values (filial and marital) is very typical.

The causes of prodigality vary but enforced marriage seems to be one of the commonest reasons, as with Bertram here and with Scarborough in *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage* (where he is forced to wed his rich uncle's daughter Katherine, despite his previous engagement to his sweetheart Clare Harcop; Scarborough's downfall accelerates after Clare commits suicide because of a broken heart). The prodigality typically runs out of control until finally burning itself out.

During this period the prodigals will normally mingle with seniors of ill-repute (most famously Prince Harry with Falstaff in *Henry IV*), who lead them into various kinds of misconduct (such as dicing, excessive drinking, theft, money-lending, wrangling, brawling, swaggering, squandering, begging, sporting, whoring, and sometimes even murder)<sup>33</sup>. It is

Parolles in *All's Well* who has the role of inciting Bertram – he not only supports Bertram's idea of going to the Tuscan war<sup>34</sup> but it is also he who seems to introduce the world of transgression to the young Count: he 'leads' him to 'these places' (3.5.83) which, in Diana's critical tone, sound like places of ill repute (most likely bawdy houses); and also acts as a go-between in Bertram's illicit affair with Diana.

The prodigals often have in common a heartbreakingly ruthless manner towards their original family. Their prodigality could often cause trauma to the family because of their cold attitude, lying, self-justification and false oaths, as well as financial difficulty because the prodigals would normally overspend on gambling, whoring, and so forth.

Involvement in illicit sexual affairs, often with prostitutes (and their associates), is also a typical motif in prodigal literature. In most cases the courtesans are depicted as an evil influence that would mislead a youth (as Florence in *The Fair Maid of Bristow*, Mary in *How a Man May Choose a Good Wife from a Bad*, Francischina in *The Dutch Courtesan*, etc). Thomas Lodge, for example, in *Catharos*, explicitly criticises the harm of 'harlotry' through one of his characters, his satiric moralist Diogenes, as follows: 'we ought to call to mind that sensuality and lust destroyeth and dissipateth a man's goods in such sort as it handled the prodigal child, who consumed all his substance with harlots' (Gosse, 55)

Their misdeeds are generally observed (without the prodigals' knowledge) by close and affectionate supporters (their immediate family, friends, wives, and sweethearts, often in disguise) and tricks are often introduced and carried out as a necessary means to protect the prodigals from actually violating the most severe laws (which could often lead to capital punishment); and however deceptive the tricks are (to the prodigals), as long as they are within legal sanction, their morality never seems to be questioned or contested but rather receives a favourable reception as an inevitable or unavoidable solution. The plotters of the tricks do acknowledge the deceptive nature of their tricks – their 'wickidness' and their 'sinfulness' – but their legality seems to matter the most, as in Helena's couplets above: 'lawful deed/act' (3.7.45-46). The Widow's line in *All's Well*, 'deceit so lawful' (38) and the Doctor's line 'And that deceit is lawfull kind and just, / That doth prevent his murder and his lust...' in *The Fair Wives of Bristow* also coincide with this idea. Similarly, the Duke and Isabella in *Measure for Measure* admire the nature of their bed-trick as 'virtuous' (208) and 'most prosperous perfection' (261) (the premarital sexual intercourse between Angelo and Mariana could be tolerated by the Duke's court but not under Angelo's severe law).

The protagonists themselves will often suffer the consequences of their own prodigality – even though they may repent, punishment (imprisonment) and public humiliation will follow. Only after their prodigality is fully revealed in public will they be saved from the worst punishments by tricks. An almost automatic reconciliation will follow, with the prodigals' perfunctory repentance and apology. The plays often conclude with their being welcomed by their parents and forgiving family (mostly by their loyal wives)<sup>35</sup> and they are expected to return to their original values with renewed appreciation<sup>36</sup>.

Shakespeare's *All's Well* seems consistent with the above pattern of the subgenre, as Kay points out (110) – Bertram, as we have seen, turns into a conventional prodigal after his

marriage, and his heartless attitude (and sexual impotence) towards his wife is a very typical feature that he shares with his fellow prodigals<sup>37</sup>. Helena is also represented as a typical prodigal's wife. She may differ from most of the wives (and sweethearts) in that she is an active pursuer and a woman of action<sup>38</sup>, and her social and sexual ambition may seem unconventional. However, her Griselda-like perseverance and wisdom (which Boccaccio and Painter tried to embody in their Giletta) are still intact and she aligns herself with 'the loyal, self-effacing wives of prodigal-husband plays', as Kay says (112).

What is unique about Bertram is that, while his fellow prodigals would indulge in a wide variety of misconduct, his 'indulgence' is focused on seducing a maid, as I shall observe below. What is also atypical about him is that, while many of his fellow prodigals involve themselves with their lovers more profoundly (sometimes until their wealth dries up), he abandons his 'love' immediately after sex, rendering it nothing more than a one-night stand. Seducing the girl seems to be something that he wants to achieve all the more when he is prohibited from it by his guardian the King, but his attitude towards her becomes increasingly demeaning as the play proceeds. What is it that makes him consider her as 'none', 'impudent', and a 'common gamester to the camp' (as he later argues in the trial scene: 5.3.168, 186, 187)? If he truly believes her to be such a common woman, what might the substitution of the illicit bed indicate? Now, based on the ideas I have just introduced, I would like to observe the prodigal's misbehaviour in Florence and reconsider Helena's bed trick.

In Act 3 Scene 5, we can see a merry crowd of women (the old Widow of Florence, her daughter Diana, Violenta, and Mariana) who are expecting the army to make a triumphant march. The first line of the Widow, 'Nay, come; for if they do approach the city, we shall lose all the sight' (1-2) suggests that they are outside the city. We will be informed later on that the Widow is an inn-keeper and it is interesting that Shakespeare seems to introduce into this foreign land a local touch of Southwark, where there were inns, alehouses, and bawdy-houses around his own theatre, all outside the City of London<sup>39</sup>. In fact, Helena is going to stay at this inn, not at a 'poor widow's house' where Giletta, her counterpart, stayed.

Actually, the Count in the source is 'marvelouslye' in love with this poor widow's *neighbour, a gentlewoman*, who 'dwelte with her mother, that was a wise and honest Ladye' (G. Bullough 2:393; Painter 222). Shakespeare has made this Lady into an inn-keeper (of the Saint Francis of Florence [Southwark]) and, according to her, the 'amorous' Count is trying to 'corrupt the tender honour' of her virgin daughter (3.5.72) – he is in fact trying to 'broke' (71, *OED* to bargain; to negotiate; to traffic) and 'solicit (Diana) / In the *unlawful* purpose' (3.5.69-70, italics mine).

This intentional departure from the source is significant because, in Shakespeare's London, illicit affairs were chiefly conducted in such places as inns, lodging places, alehouses and taverns, as we saw in the first section above. Because of the prevalence of immorality in such establishments, suspicion must always have existed even when the people there were honest. Sheer 'suspicion in that kind' could mislead things 'as if for surity', as Iago explains in *Othello* (1.3.388-389). Diana's mother's occupation as an inn-keeper, therefore, *can* add an element of suspicion not only to herself as a *possible* procuress but also to her daughter's sexuality,



regardless of her name Diana (taken from the goddess of chastity) and of her much renowned honesty and virginity<sup>40</sup>. Shakespeare thus renders their situation liable to be misconstrued, and the male characters in the play (Bertram and Parolles) certainly do misunderstand her as a sexually available woman, as we shall see in due course.

The audience, however, will be informed that the women are by no means of the dubious sort. Their discussion of the importance of guarding their honesty (a counter-argument to Parolles' ideas on virginity earlier)<sup>41</sup> and their clear disapproval of the soliciting of Bertram and Parolles<sup>42</sup> confirm their honest nature. So far, Bertram has met Diana once and found her 'wondrous cold' (3.6.109) and Parolles has been soliciting between them (as a 'ring-carrier', i.e. a go-between or a bawd [3.5.91]): according to Mariana and Bertram, Diana has received numerous tokens and letters from Bertram through Parolles (as well as promises, enticements, and oaths, all of which according to Mariana are 'engines of lust' [3.5.19]) but she has rejected him and sent everything back to him.

Helena comes to know of this, takes advantage of the situation and plans a bed-trick with the help of the Widow and Diana. To Helena's initial proposal, however, the Widow rejoins:

Though my estate be fall'n, I was well born,  
Nothing acquainted with these businesses,  
And would not put my reputation now  
In any staining act.

(3.7.4-7, italics mine)

These lines support my point above that the Widow's occupation is too easily associated with such illicit 'businesses' in people's minds. Helena has to insist that even though what she is planning may appear 'a wicked act', it is substantially 'a lawful deed' because she will 'fill the time' in bed while Diana herself will be 'most chastely absent (from it)' (33-34). The widow sees 'the bottom of her purpose' and is delighted by 'the deceit so lawful' (30, 38). The deal is completed and Helena utters the couplets that I quoted at the very beginning: 'Let us assay our plot...' and iterates the legality of the trick.

The women's team-work in the project is sometimes over-beautified as female bondage or sisterhood. It is certainly a 'friendly help'; however, it is something that Helena purchases with hard cash as she herself clearly states: 'let me *buy* your friendly help' (3.7.15, italics mine). It is also true that the Widow shows an initial interest in Helena when she sees her 'great ... fortune' (14). Helena pays both the Widow and Diana handsomely with 'a purse of gold' as a 'deposit' and then promises to give them three thousand crowns for their cooperation (as a dowry for Diana). Godshalk comments on the scene as follows:

[It] may be played comically, but the Widow's fears and Helena's use of hard cash to buy her conscience increase our own dubiety about the morality of the 'bed trick'.

(Godshalk 65)

Their aid in the bed-trick certainly 'kepst'st a wife herself, [Diana] a maid' (5.3.324) and

Bertram a husband – it is transforming an illicit intention into lawful conduct; however, in a strict sense, Helena is a whoremaster, ‘brokering’ to have sex with her own husband.

The further innovative addition to the source is that Helena spreads the rumour of her own death – Bertram is already ‘widowed’ at the time of his assignation with Diana/Helena – thus reducing the illegality of her husband’s deed from the more serious offence of adulterous conduct to ‘petty’ whoring. Whether the conduct is still illegal ‘whoring’ or the generally-tolerated premarital sexual intercourse between true lovers (like Claudio and Juliet in *Measure for Measure* and many real cases of premarital sexual intercourse appearing in Bridewell Court Records) would be judged in criminal court by the existence of mutual affection between the lovers and their intention to marry. Before the assignation, Bertram ‘(has) sworn to marry (Diana) / When his wife’s dead’, but his promise and oath, we find out later on, are the simple consequence of ‘his idle fire’ (3.7.26).

In fact, if we look at the text carefully, Bertram’s attitude towards Diana has been rather disdainful from the very beginning (despite the Widow’s remarks about his enthusiasm). Bertram refers to her in a conversation with a gentleman as a ‘lass’, with the implication of ‘dishonest’: ‘Now will I ... show you / The lass I spoke of’ (and the gentleman replies ‘But you say she’s honest’ [3.4.106-107]). Also, her name does not seem to matter so much to him – he misaddresses her with the Italian-sounding name ‘Fontybell’ (4.2.1), which could sound like a pseudonym for an Italian courtesan<sup>43</sup>.

At least Count Beltramo in the source seems more genuine about the love he has for the gentlewoman. He has no hesitation in giving his ring which ‘he loveth very dearly’ (G. Bullough 2:394; Painter 224), while Shakespeare’s Bertram hesitates to give up his and it requires some persuasion (that the prices of his ring and her virginity are equally valuable in that both are ‘honour’ and a ‘jewel’ and both are ‘[b]equeathed down from many ancestors, / Which were the greatest obloquy I’t’h world / In (them) to lose’ [4.2.42-49]).

The briefness of the assignation between Bertram and Diana may also confirm his disdainful attitude towards Diana. The affair of the Count and the gentlewoman in the source is ‘rather well-mannered and genial..., repeated often and with affection’ (Adleman 153): even after the assignation, in the morning, Count Beltramo uses many ‘courteous and amiable words’ and gives her ‘divers fair and precious jewels’ (G. Bullough 2:395; Painter 225). In Shakespeare’s *All’s Well*, as Janet Adleman points out, ‘the potentially curative affectionate mutuality of the source is utterly absent’ (153).

It is interesting that Bertram’s ill-will towards Diana is clearly revealed to the audience before the assignation takes place: it is shown in the secret letter to Diana from Parolles, who also thinks of her as a woman of suspicious profession. According to Parolles, it is important for her to get the money first, as Bertram has no intention of paying (as was often the case with prodigal sons/husbands):

*Dian, the count’s a fool, and full of gold.*

.....

*When he [Bertram] swears oaths, bid him drop gold,  
and take it;*

*After he scores he never pays the score.  
Half-won is match well made; match, and well make it;  
He ne'er pays after-debts; take it before.  
And say a soldier, Dian, told thee this:  
Men are to mell with, boys are not to kiss;  
For count of this, the count's a fool, I know it,  
Who pays before, but not when he does owe it.  
Thine, as he vow'd to thee in thine ear,*

PAROLLES

(4.3.203, 214-224)

In any case, the 'affair' between Bertram and 'Diana' occurs only once – Bertram does not seem to have any desire to repeat it. The bed-trick is certainly set by Helena/Diana to last for only one hour, 'hurried, cloaked by night and silence' (Hodgdon 49), which of course serves to conceal the true identity of the bed-mate, but, together with Bertram's want of amorous zeal, serves also to coarsen the act: especially if he considers Diana a common prostitute throughout, it is not then a simple trick to consummate a marriage but rather an act of 'whoring' on both sides in that Helena also plays a 'whore' to serve Bertram's lust for 'a purely physical, impersonal union' (Parker 111). Helena in fact analyses the hour of assignation with Bertram, describing it as 'sweet' yet 'saucy' and deceptive:

But, O, strange men,  
That can such sweet use make of what they hate,  
When saucy trusting of the cozen'd thoughts  
Defiles the pitchy night; so lust doth play  
With what it loathes for that which is away.

(4.4.21-24)

Helena submits her body to Bertram's wanton 'use' but the paradox is that a form of sexual transgression is legalised in the seemingly illicit bed and makes the misconduct of a prodigal legal.

#### IV

After the bed-trick, in the fairy-tale source story, Giletta rewards the gentlewoman with 'five hundred poundes, and so many faire and costly Jewels', awaits childbirth in Florence, brings up their twin sons, returns to France alone, and reveals the truth to her errant husband. Showing the physical evidence – his ring and his twin children 'so lyke him' – is enough to win him back (G. Bullough 395-396). Shakespeare's Helena, however, has a further idea in mind: she persuades Diana and the Widow to serve her 'business' again to increase the 'daughter's dowry':

Doubt not but heaven

Hath brought me up to be your daughter's dower,  
As it hath fated her to be my motive  
And helper to a husband.

(4.4.18-21)

Helena asks Diana to '*suffer* / Something in [her] behalf' (4.4.27-28, italics mine). The deal is agreed and Helena, Diana and the Widow will make a journey from Florence to the French King's court, where Diana will be given a further role to play.

The final scene opens with the happy reunion of the 'family' (Bertram, his mother the Countess, the King and Lafew) and the arranged marriage between Bertram and Lafew's daughter is about to be settled when Lafew suddenly points out that the ring Bertram is wearing is Helena's. The first charge thus turns out to be Bertram's 'murder' of his wife; the delay of the arrival of Helena's party (Diana and the Widow) to the King's court is accidental yet convenient for them because Bertram will already have been arrested as a 'murderer'. His untruthfulness is also already clearly revealed by the time they arrive – he testifies falsely about how he has obtained the ring he is wearing. The audience in fact learn for the first time that the ring was originally given to Helena by the King, which she promised 'never (to) put ... from her finger / Unless she gave it to (Bertram) in bed, / Where (he has) never come, or sent it (to the King) / Upon her great disaster' (5.3.109-112). With the King as well as Lafew and the Countess as trustworthy witnesses, the fact that the ring's original owner was Helena is firmly verified before Diana comes into the court to appeal to the King.

Bertram's dishonesty becomes even clearer when Diana appeals against him to the King. Her complaint is that he broke his oath despite his 'many protestations to marry (her) when his wife was dead' (5.3.139-140). The King's investigation is in fact a close portrayal of the real criminal court of Shakespeare's time (namely Bridewell): as the head judge, he investigates the truth, with allegations from both parties (Bertram and Diana), using evidence (two rings) and testimony (from the Countess, the King himself and Parolles). Bertram claims that Diana was simply a pastime companion to him:

My lord, this is a fond and desp'rate creature<sup>44</sup>  
Whom sometime I have laugh'd with. Let your highness  
Lay a more noble thought upon mine honour  
Than for to think that I would sink it here.

(5.3.177-180)

He admits he 'lik'd her' but he says he 'boarded her' 'I'th' wanton way of youth' (5.3.209-210). The fact that he has been considering Diana as a prostitute becomes even clearer when he falsely accuses her of being a common whore: 'She's impudent, my lord, / And was a common gamester to the camp' (186-187). Diana brings forward Bertram's ring as evidence:

He does me wrong, my lord; if I were so

He might have bought me at a common price.  
 Do not believe him. O behold this ring  
 Whose high respect and rich validity  
 Did lack a parallel; yet for all that  
 He gave it to a commoner a' th' camp –  
 If I be one.

(5.3.188-194)

As in the Countess's line, the ring is 'a thousand proof' (198) of his 'intention' of marriage. Bertram complains, however, that he was deceived by her 'inf'nite cunning' (215) and handed over his precious ring in exchange for what 'any inferior might / At market-price have bought' (217-218) – he is now claiming that the deal wasn't even and is accusing Diana of fraud. As a typical prodigal, Bertram engages in a sequence of lies and false accusations to justify himself (just as Parolles did in Act 4 Scene 3), yet his evasion only 'blackens his character further' (Key 121). Bertram's refusal to marry Diana only reminds us of the attitude of Lucio to his punk Kate Keepdown in *Measure for Measure* or that of Cassio to Bianca the courtesan in *Othello*<sup>45</sup>.

In any case, a witness who can confirm the sexual relationship between Bertram and 'Diana' is required – the two rings here in *All's Well* serve only as *implicit* evidence of their sexual encounter (while they did serve as powerful evidence of 'sexual exchange' in the final scene of *The Merchant of Venice*). Parolles is thus summoned as a witness (as was often the case with 'go-betweens' in real court cases), and his testimony is more explicit about their sexual exchange: 'he did love her, ..., as a gentleman loves a woman' (5.3.243); 'he lov'd her, sir, and lov'd her not' (245); 'I knew of their going to bed and of other motions, as promising her marriage and things....' (257-259). Bertram protests at Parolles' being a witness, accusing him of being a habitual liar: 'What of him? ... [his] nature sickens but to speak a truth' (203, 206). Parolles, though, does speak the truth this once. (It is in fact vital that Bertram and Parolles should have fallen out before the final scene – Parolles must testify for Diana, and not collaborate with Bertram and calumniate her.)

The final question of how Diana obtained Helena's ring is to be investigated but her language becomes confusing: '[the ring] was not given me, nor I did not buy it. ... It was not lent me. .... I found it not. .... I never gave it [Bertram].... It might be yours or hers for ought I know' (5.3.266-274). Her additional sudden denial of not 'knowing' Bertram (and so she is 'a maid' and 'no strumpet') while Bertram thinks he 'knows [that she is] no maid' (284-286) sounds 'abusive' to 'people's ears' as in the King's complaint (286). The use of too many negatives and denials does not seem to serve positively in defence of her morality and their complexity would often be quickly labeled as 'whorish' (e.g. Desdemona's over-use of negatives: 'No [I am not a strumpet], as I am a Christian. If to preserve this vessel for my lord / From any hated foul unlawful touch / Be not to be a strumpet, I am none. .... No [I am not a whore], as I shall be saved' (4.2.83-88), which only has a counter-effect on Othello; Mariana in *Measure for Measure* denies being 'maid, widow, nor wife' but then immediately is concluded to be a 'punk' (5.1.173-181) — in fact, her lines on her 'knowledge' of Angelo echo Diana's lines above). In any case, Diana soon suffers sexual slander from Lafew and the King: 'This woman's

an easy glove, ...; she goes off and on at pleasure' (Lafew, 5.3.271-272); 'I think thee ... some common customer [i.e. prostitute]' (the King, 280).

Helena's re-entry may seem much delayed, but she can only reappear after Bertram's misconduct has been fully exposed (as is the convention in all the other prodigal literature). The final court scene of the play is, in a way, a form of punishment for the prodigal's disobedience and he has already been much humiliated by the time Helena reappears. On Helena's entry, Bertram is in a predicament – all the evidence, testimony and statements from witnesses are against him and he is about to be sentenced for his 'whoring' and 'murder'. The possibility was that the King might have married Bertram and Diana (to save Diana's honour) before executing him (for Helena's murder), which may remind us of Angelo in *Measure for Measure*. In any case, Helena's reappearance therefore saves Bertram from the 'charges' as well as rescuing him from further public humiliation. Helena's delayed resurrection rather ironically brings a great sense of relief to Bertram.

Another very important reason for the delay of Helena's re-entrance is that, in the unromantic court of *All's Well* (as in Shakespeare's contemporary society), her pregnancy would never be perceived as naïvely as a saintly 'virginal' conception<sup>46</sup>, let alone the fulfillment of her tasks. It would simply arouse suspicion of adulterous sexual intercourse during her husband's absence in Italy. In view of Bertram's hatred towards Helena, her pregnancy (and possible fornication) would be a perfect excuse for him to divorce her (as Helena anticipates: 'If it appear not plain and prove untrue / Deadly divorce step between me and you!' [311-312]). Obtaining Bertram's ring may not serve as solid evidence of consummation either, since he might also claim that the ring was stolen, given that he tells lies.

Helena has to avoid any risk of being 'bewhored' for her 'fornication', of her child being slandered as a 'bastard', and of being falsely accused of theft. It is most essential therefore that at least the facts that Bertram bedded 'Diana' and that the rings were exchanged between the two lovers in bed should be certified in public. She can only appear in the court scene after everything has been cleared up.

The play concludes with Bertram's repentance – 'Both, both. O pardon!' (5.3.302). Sadly, his love sounds still conditional: '*If she, my liege, can make me know this clearly / I'll love her dearly, ever, ever dearly*' [309-310, italics mine]); however, he is 'doubly won' and reconciliation is anticipated.

## Conclusion

We have observed how Shakespeare has transformed a simple fairy-tale source story into a complex yet well-thought-out drama with a coherent theme of sexual transgression and its related issues.

As I have shown above, the play abounds in obscene images, which impart a uniformly decadent atmosphere to the whole play and even influence the actions and thought of the protagonists. In fact, what is unique about *All's Well* is that the hero and the heroine are constantly placed within a bawdy context. Helena in particular, who is called 'queen (quean)' from the very start by Parolles, is, in every step of her activity, subjected to whorish images. The

economic use of her possessions (her virginity, her father's legacy, her fortune, her friendships and even the situation itself) – her tradeswomanship – for her own benefit is also emphasised and constantly displayed.

Helena's bed-trick has been made unique by Shakespeare because she is substituting for someone whom her prodigal husband considers a prostitute. It is no longer a simple 'fulfillment of the tasks': in setting up the situation and thus acting as a procuress, in replacing the 'sinful' bedfellow, and in playing the role of a whore, Helena is an accomplice in her husband's fornication, while at the same time paradoxically taming his prodigality and legalising the sexuality of all those who are involved in the trick. She has verified that, even when stepping into an extremely bawdy context, her chastity can remain intact (just like Marina in Shakespeare's *Pericles*).

The final prosecution scene is also one of Helena's plots to secure her husband. The King's 'fair' court does not exempt the aristocratic Bertram from a thorough investigation of his sexual misconduct (which may remind us of the fair court of the Duke where the sexuality of Angelo and Lucio are properly cross-examined in *Measure for Measure*). The pregnant Helena can only enter after his 'sexual offence' with Diana is confirmed<sup>47</sup>.

The play is neither didactic nor admonishing, but seems to be showing us the reality of life where vice exists in virtue and virtue cohabits with vice:

The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good  
and ill together; our virtues would be proud if our  
faults whipp'd them not, and our crimes would  
despair if they were not cherish'd by our virtues.  
(4.3.68-71)

What Shakespeare seems to have demonstrated through Helena is that it is not necessarily 'wicked' to engage in what appears to be a 'sinful' act – the playwright has proved that one can still act 'lawfully' even in a highly problematic context.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on a chapter on *All's Well That Ends Well* in my uncompleted D.Phil. thesis "Prostitution in Early Modern English Drama" at the University of Oxford. I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Richard McCabe, for constructive advice.

<sup>2</sup> The Arden edition (edited by G. K. Hunter) is used for all the citations unless otherwise stated; the play's date is generally accepted to be between 1603 and 1606 (Hunter xxv; Fraser 5; Snyder 24; Leggatt 11; Bate 587).

<sup>3</sup> Henry Cockeram's definition of the word 'wicked' in *The English Dictionary: or, An interpreter of hard English words* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1650) is 'Flagitious, execrable, Enormious, Nefarious, Impious', indicating a strong sense of ecclesiastical immorality; Shakespeare's use of the term is often related to sexual morality: 'I think the best way were to entertain him with hope till the wicked fire of lust have melted him in his own grease' (*Merry Wives* 2.1.64-66); 'Fie, sirrah, a bawd, a wicked bawd' (*MM* 3.2.18); "'Tis not

impossible / But one, the wicked'st caitiff on the ground, / May seem as shy, as grave, as just, as absolute, as Angelo' (*MM* 5.1.55-58); 'The word is too good to paint out her wicked-ness' (*Much Ado* 3.2.98-99); 'Is she of the wicked? Is thine hostess here of the wicked?' (*2H4* 2.4.324-325).

<sup>4</sup> Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch. See the introduction to his edition (xxxv).

<sup>5</sup> Samuel Johnson had a particular distaste for Bertram. He wrote: 'I cannot reconcile my heart to Bertram; a man noble without generosity, and young without truth; who marries Helena as a coward, and leaves her as a profligate; when she is dead by his unkindness, sneaks home to a second marriage, is accused by a woman whom he has wronged, defends himself by falsehood, and is dismissed to happiness' (400).

<sup>6</sup> This is also the case with Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, *Othello* and *Pericles*, which I am also working on in my doctoral thesis.

<sup>7</sup> The original ordinance has not survived, but the 16th century translation from the original manuscript is now in the Bodleian Library. John Stow may have used it in preparation for his *Survey of London*.

<sup>8</sup> The name of the Bishop of Winchester appears in Henry VII's ordinance, the translation of which is in the same Bodleian Manuscript as Henry II's.

<sup>9</sup> Shakespeare introduces the Bishop's 'ownership' of prostitutes: Pandarus at the very end of *Troilus and Cressida* says, 'Some galled goose of Winchester' (5.10.55), referring to prostitutes; Gloucester in the first part of *Henry VI* condemns his uncle, the bishop, as allowing prostitutes to continue their business: 'Thou that giv'st whores indulgences to sin' (1.3.35).

<sup>10</sup> Karras 14; Corporation of London Record Office, Guildhall, L-B A, fol130r.

<sup>11</sup> Some historians argue that brothels were reopened under the reign of Edward VI and continued more or less unmolested in Queen Mary's time; however, I will accept the year 1546 as the official closing date.

<sup>12</sup> Bridewell Court Books III, fol. 115, 120v

<sup>13</sup> For the types of clientele, see Griffiths' *Structure of Prostitution* (55).

<sup>14</sup> See Griffiths, *Structure* 55 for detail.

<sup>15</sup> Bridewell Hospital, which was chartered by King Edward VI in 1553, was initially intended as a workhouse, but started functioning as a criminal court and house of correction for petty offenders.

<sup>16</sup> Studies of Bridewell Court Books have been partly analysed by historians such as Ian Archer, Paul Griffiths and Laura Gowing, and many of my explanations here of the London sex trade are based on their work as well as my own study.

<sup>17</sup> Helena is associated with Helen of Troy in the Clown's corrupt ballad and with Cressida by Lafew, and her reputation, Helena herself says, will be '[t]raduc'd by odious ballads' (2.1.171).

<sup>18</sup> The third part of the dictionary gives definitions and explanations of 'Gods and Goddesses, Men and Women, Boyes and Maids, Giants and Devils, Birds and Beasts, Monsters and Serpents, Wells and Rivers, Herbs, Stones, Trees, Dogs, Fishes, and the like'. The women's section consists of a variety of different types of women such as 'Women that were shamelesse', 'Women that were transformed', 'Women that were chaste', 'Women Queans and Queens', 'Women excelling for love to their Husbands', and 'Warlike women'.

<sup>19</sup> See Martin Ingram 301 and also Laura Gowing 59-110. As mentioned in both books, sexual slander itself could be prosecuted and treated as a criminal offence. For real cases of and terms used for defamation and sexual slander in Early Modern England, see also Sharpe and Habermann. Habermann's *Staging Slander and Gender in Early Modern England* deals intensively with how this aspect of culture is represented on stage (for example on the "slandered heroine" in *Othello*, which I am also dealing with in my thesis). Wite regard to the term 'quean', *OED*'s definition is: 'A woman, a female; from early ME. a term of disparagement or abuse, hence: A bold, impudent, or ill-behaved woman; a jade, hussy; and spec. a harlot, strumpet (esp. in 16-17th c.). Now arch' (1). The term is used once again in the play: in Act 2 Scene 2, Lavatch, the clown, says 'as a scolding quean to a wrangling knave' (24-25) in the same



derogatory sense. We can also discern the frequent use of this pun in other of Shakespeare's plays (as well as in other contemporary dramas): Frank Ford in *The Merry Wives* addresses the dubious 'old lady' (the disguised Falstaff) as 'A witch, a quean, an old cozening quean!' (4.2.158); Falstaff in *Henry IV Parts 1 and 2* also jokingly uses the term 'queen/quean' to Mistress Quickly, who is the mistress of the Boar's Head in Eastcheap (and hence the bawd) (1H4 2.4.386, 387; 2H4 2.1.46); Florence, a courtesan in *The Fair Maid of Bristow*, is referred to as '(a) boulder quean'. Other examples: 'With a painted Quean upon his lap' in *The Academy of pleasure furnished with all kinds of complementall letters, discourses and dialogues* (Anonymous, 1656); 'So it fortun'd (fie vpon that vnfortunate word of Fortune) yt this whore, this quean, this curtizan, this common of ten thousand, so bribing me not to betray her, had giuen me a great deale of counterfeit gold, which she had receiued of a coiner to make awaie a little before' (Pg 49, G2) in *The Unfortunate Traveler* (1594) by Thomas Nash; 'Alas good John she loue thee? if you thinke so, you are greatly deceiued: for she is the scottigest quean in London: And I haue heard her behinde your backe, to mocke and flout you, saying: Doth shitten John thinke that I will marry him? in faith sir no' in *The Gentle Craft, Part 1* (1637) by Thomas Deloney; 'Y'are a quean, a scoffing, jeering quean' (4.4) in *Monsieur Thomas* by Fletcher; 'A shrewd dissembling Quean' (1.3.) in *The Elder Brother* by John Fletcher (1579-1625). In the translation of Lucius Seneca's *Hippolytus, Medea, Agamemon, Herculas Oetaeus* by John Studley (1581), King Aetas' 'wicked chylde' Nedea is referred to as 'This horrible, most odious quean, this monstrous wicked wight' (131).

<sup>20</sup> The same imagery of warfare is used in *The Winter's Tale*: 'No barricade for a belly' (1.2.204).

<sup>21</sup> 'That you were made of is mettle to make virgins. / Virginitie, by being once lost, may be ten times found; by being ever kept it is ever lost' (127-129).

<sup>22</sup> Boulton, for example, who is a servant of the brothel in *Pericles*, insults the virgin Marina about setting a high value on her chastity: 'your peevish chastity . . . is not worth a breakfast in the cheapest country under the cope' (4.4.122-123).

<sup>23</sup> Pompey in *Measure for Measure* talking about the demolition of prostitution: "'Twas never merry world since, of two usuries, the merriest was put down' (3.2.6-7). 'Poor rogues, and usurers' men! bawds between gold and want' (*Timon* 2.3.61-62). More examples in Williams under 'usury'.

<sup>24</sup> See his conversation with the Countess in Act 1 Scene 3 (14-92) and Act 2 Scene 2. I have not been able to include him in this article but his earthy affairs and cynical attitude also echo the actions of the protagonists.

<sup>25</sup> The image of 'Grape(s) and fox' is proverbial, alluding to Æsop's fable of 'The Fox and the Grapes', where the fox said that the grapes were sour simply because he could not reach them. Grapes here are often explained as symbolising Helena's cure, which is not sour (see Hunter, footnote); however, they would also appear to represent 'women' or 'prostitutes' in a figurative sense. There was a proverb that went: 'A woman at a window is like grapes on the highway' (Tilley W617), referring to 'a woman in everyone's reach', i.e. a common woman (prostitute). An example of the figurative use of 'grapes' as (common) women in Shakespeare occurs in *Venus and Adonis*: 'Even ... poor birds, deceived with painted grapes ...' (601). Painting, or heavy make-up, was one of the characteristics of prostitutes, and painted grapes can mean a heavily made-up woman, i.e. a prostitute. Another example of grapes in relation to prostitution is the name of the room of an inn, 'the Bunch of Grapes', in *Measure for Measure* (2.1.127-128). As A. R. Humphreys notes, inn-rooms had fancy names, such as Pomegranate and Half-moon (1H4 2.4.27 and 37). Such names are not only fancy, but also symbolise features of the body or sexuality of both sexes.

<sup>26</sup> *Timon* in *Timon of Athens* uses 'traitor' referring to sexually treacherous women:

Let not the virgin's cheek  
 Make soft thy trenchant sword: for those milk-paps,  
 That through the window-bars bore at men's eyes,  
 Are not within the leaf of pity writ,

But set them down horrible traitors.

(4.3.116-120)

Earlier in the play, Helena enumerates 'a thousand loves' Bertram would meet in the French court, one of which is 'a traitress' (1.1.166). According to Rubinstein, 'traitor' can mean a 'trader: whore, bawd, brothel-customer' (although OED does not give such a definition).

<sup>27</sup> The term 'pander' or 'pandar' derives from Pandarus who, in Boccaccio (in the form Pandaro) and after him in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, is fabled to have procured Cressida for Troilus. Some critics in fact point out the similarity of Pandarus' line 'Come your ways, come your ways' in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* (3.2.43-4) to the first line of Lafew here, 'Nay, come your ways'.

<sup>28</sup> Dolphins are a symbol of masculine sexual energy, and in Renaissance plays are often mentioned together with mermaids ('siren mermaid'), which may personify the temptation of sexual desire. Cleopatra's admiring metaphors on Antony's power and masculinity also include 'dolphin': 'His legs bestrid the ocean: his rear'd arm / Crested the world: his voice was propertied / As all the tuned spheres, ... his delights / Were dolphin-like' (5.2.81-88). In *Henry IV Part 2* the notorious bawdy house the Boar's Head Tavern has an inn-room called the 'Dolphin chamber' (2.1.85), which clearly has a sexual connotation. See also Williams under 'dolphin' (102-103).

<sup>29</sup> *Bertram*: I am commanded here (in France), and kept a coil with / "Too young", and "The next year" and "'Tis too early" (2.1.27-28).

<sup>30</sup> 'Those girls of Italy, take heed of them; / They say our French lack language to deny / If they demand; beware of being captives / Before you serve' (2.1.19-22). The charms of Italian courtesans had already reached Shakespeare's England and Shakespeare's characters are also aware of them: the beauty of Roman courtesans is introduced by Iachimo in *Cymbeline* (5.5.161), and their charms are mentioned by Imogen, who suspects her husband of having been captivated by a Roman courtesan: 'Some jay of Italy / (Whose mother was her painting) hath betray'd him' (3.4.50-51); 'Some Roman courtesan' (125).

<sup>31</sup> See footnote 5 for Samuel Johnson's criticism of Bertram.

<sup>32</sup> Ervin Beck also categorises *All's Well* within this paradigm in his extensive study on Prodigal Plays in his dissertation: "Prodigal Son Comedy: The Continuity of a Paradigm in English Drama, 1500-1642." Richard Helgerson's *The Elizabethan Prodigals* deals with the early prodigal-son/husband works but does not include our play. Other Renaissance works in this genre or works which have prodigal characters include: George Whetstone's *Promos and Cassandra* (1582); Thomas Lodge's *Catharos Diogenes in his Singularity* (1591); Robert Greene's *Groats-worth of Wit bought with a Million of Repentance* (1592); Anonymous, *Contention between Liberality and Prodigality* (1600); Ben Jonson's *Cynthia's Revels* (1600); George Chapman, Ben Jonson, and John Marston's *Eastward Ho* (1603-1605); Thomas Middleton's *Michaelmas Term* (1604-6); Marston's *The Dutch Courtesan* (1604-1605); Thomas Dekker's *The Honest Whore 1&2* (1605-1606); Thomas Middleton's *The Trick to Catch the Old One* (1607); Thomas Dekker's *If This Be Not A Good Play the Devil is in it* (1611); John Fletcher's *The Wild Goose Chase* (c.1621); Thomas Dekker's *The Wonder of a Kingdom* (1623); Philip Massinger's *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* (1625). Regarding Shakespeare, the following plays contain the essence of prodigality: *Henry IV 1&2*, *Merchant of Venice*, *Taming of the Shrew*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Comedy of Errors*, *Measure for Measure*, *Hamlet* and *Timon of Athens*. (Earlier works than Lyly's which can be placed within this paradigm are R. Wever's *Lusty Juventus* [1547-53] and *Nice Wanton* [1547-53]; Thomas Ingeland's *The Disobedient Child* [1559-70] and *Misogonus* [1560-1577]; George Gascoigne's *The Glass of Government* [1575]; George Pettie's *Petite Palace of Pettie his Pleasure* [1576]; and George Whetstone's *Rock of Regard* [1576].)

<sup>33</sup> Promos in *Promos and Cassandra* is spurred on by Phallax, and Scarborough in *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage* associates with Ilford.

<sup>34</sup> *Bertram*: 'I'll to the Tuscan war'; *Parolles*: 'To th' wars, my boy, to th' wars!' [2.3.269; 274]

<sup>35</sup> See also Kay 109.

<sup>36</sup> Earlier Elizabethan works in this genre seem to have endings which are more didactic, while the later works seem to conclude with not much admonition – nor with a full repentance by the prodigals.

<sup>37</sup> Master Arther in *How a Man May Choose A Good Wife from a Bad* rejects his loyal wife (chosen by his father) far more coldly than Bertram: 'If thou wilt win my heart, die suddenly'; Scarborough in *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage* ignores his wife Katherine (chosen by his uncle) and his children – he does not even acknowledge them and accuses her of adultery; Flowerdale in *The London Prodigal* abandons his loyal wife Luce after getting her into trouble with her family; The Captain in Thomas Middleton's *The Phoenix* tries to sell his wife Castiza whom he married for her fortune; Ilford in *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage* threatens his wife (Scarborough's sister) with physical violence after finding out that she is penniless; Young Chertley gives away the tokens he originally sent to Luce, his 'wife', to Gratiana; and Vallenger in *The Fair Maid of Bristow* strips off his wife's clothes to bestow on Florence the vicious courtesan.

<sup>38</sup> As Kay also points out, Helena is close to Luce in Heywood's *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon*, who disguises herself and secretly arranges a bed-trick: 'In taking on the role of active intriguer, Helena comes closest to Luce in Heywood's *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon* whose wild young fiancé Chartley abandons her on the eve of her wedding, courts a tradesman's daughter (also named Luce), whom he tries to involve in a fraudulent marriage, and then woos a third and wealthier gentlewoman. Having earlier tricked Chartley into marriage by substituting herself for her namesake, Luce arranges a final confrontation at the Wise Woman's house, where Chartley's increasingly impudent lies are confounded as each person he has offended steps forward in turn to contradict his evasions. Finally, Luce's appearance resolves all confusions and leads to Chartley's reform' (Kay 120).

<sup>39</sup> Outside London's city walls was called liberty and was officially out of the City's jurisdiction. The pollution of the City was ejected, although this did not necessarily mean that all within the walls was necessarily 'clean'. Italy may have been stricter in this sense: there the authorities tried to put the 'pollution' entirely outside the city walls, and people who resided 'outside the city' could arouse suspicion. Most famously, in Florence, the Onestà was trying to keep fallen women out of the city but failed (see John Brackett's study on the control of prostitution in Florence).

<sup>40</sup> The Widow says that they are fallen aristocrats (the ancient Capilet) and that she keeps an inn for a living. Such a story may arouse people's sympathy; however, both in England and in Florence at the time, women who had become poor and were undowered, not being able to afford to marry (or to retire to a convent in the case of Italian women), were 'perceived as socially dangerous by [their] contemporaries' (Brackett 274). They were dangerous especially because they might go into the business of prostitution in order to feed themselves: 'the poor were a danger to society, especially uncontrolled women' (ibid). In this sense Diana and the gentlewoman in the source are both impoverished and both could generate suspicion.

<sup>41</sup> Mariana says that 'the honour of a maid is her name, and no legacy is so rich as honesty' (3.5.12-13). Mariana warns Diana: 'Beware ... Diana, ... the misery is, example, that so terrible shows in the wrack of maidenhood, cannot for all that dissuade succession, but that they are limed with the twigs that threatens them' (18-24). The Widow says to Helena: '... But [Diana] is arm'd for him and keeps her guard / In honestest defence' (73-74).

<sup>42</sup> 'Diana, take heed of this French earl' (3.5.11-12); 'I have told my neighbour how you have been solicited by a gentleman his companion' (15); 'I know that knave, hang him! one Parolles; a filthy officer he is in those suggestions for the young earl' (16-17); 'I would he lov'd his wife; if he were honest / He were much goodlier. ... 'Tis pity he is not honest. Yond's that same knave / That leads him to these places. Were I his lady / I would poison that vile rascal' (79-84); 'Marry, hang you!' (90); 'And your curtsy, for a ring-carrier!' (91).

<sup>43</sup> 'Fontybell' means 'beautiful fountain', which could have an erotic connotation. According to Thisleton a fountain with a statute of Diana was erected at Cheapside in 1596, and he argues that the name may refer to it (quoted in Hunter 100-101). Hunter argues, however, that there is no evidence that the fountain was ever called such and that the naming is obscure (101). In any case, in Italy, it was common

for courtesans of the period to have pseudonyms: they would name themselves after goddesses or famous queens, or coin their names from their characters or the characteristics of their bodies. Surnames would generally tell where they originated (see Paul Larivaille's *La vie quotidienne des courtisanes en Italie au temps de la Renaissance Rome et Venise, XVe et XVIe siècles*).

<sup>44</sup> 'Creature' is a typical term for a prostitute: 'We were never so much out of creatures' (*Pericles* 4.2.6).

<sup>45</sup> Lucio is eventually forced to marry Kate, but we find out that he has escaped from marrying her before when he was brought to the Duke's court for impregnating her by 'forswearing' (*Measure for Measure* 4.3.167-172). Such an attitude to prostitutes is well described in John Marston's *The Fawn* (1604-1606): 'many ... men lie sometime with strange women, whom, for the instant use, they abhor' (the disguised Duke Hercules of Ferrara, 4.1.333-334).

<sup>46</sup> David McCandless points out that her 'visible pregnancy sanctifies her sexuality' (467-468); Adleman argues that Helena's pregnancy is like a 'miraculous conception', a 'final muted fantasy of Helena as virgin mother' (160).

<sup>47</sup> The irony is that Bertram is in fact falsely charged with 'murder' and 'fornication', which demonstrates the vulnerability of the judicial system – however fair the case may look, and however carefully it may be assessed, people can still be charged falsely.

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An Act of Henry II (Bodleian Library MS e. Musaeo 229)  
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