Masculine Claustrophobia and the Bed Trick: A Psychoanalytic Reading of *All's Well That Ends Well* (1)

Hiroyuki Kondo (近藤弘幸)

Introduction

Since Frederick S. Boas first called *All's Well That Ends Well* a 'problem play' in 1896, this classification has been commonly accepted as a valid measure of criticism. Whether it is legitimate to categorise a Shakespearean play in a term that derives from Ibsen's theatre or not, it cannot be denied that *All's Well* is a highly 'problematic' play. It seems to raise various issues, and yet fail to give a satisfactory answer to any of them. This essay is an attempt to account for the play's ambiguousness by seeing it as a representation of masculine ambivalence towards maternal sexuality.

Coppélia Kahn, in her *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare,* offers a useful scheme for our purpose.[2] Her theory is, in her own words, 'an eclectic weaving together of [Freudian] ideas about the growth of identity' as modified by the post-Freudian advancement of developmental psychology(3). According to Kahn, when a baby boy grows out of the delusion of omnipotence, he is entangled in a contradictory wish both to regress into a happy symbiotic union with his mother and to establish a new identity of his own. If he is to accomplish the process of ego formation, he must abandon his own regressive desire, which is perceived by him as 'reengulfment' by his mother. At this stage, his father, who is clearly associated with the external world of reality, plays an important role. The child, by identifying with his father, can develop his new identity.

Although both boys and girls go through the same process of identity development, the separation from the mother carries an added peril for the boy, for '[the girl's] femininity is reinforced by her original symbiotic union with her mother and by the identification with her that must precede identity, while his masculinity is threatened by the same union and the same identification'(Kahn,10). And man is not free from this dilemma throughout his life. In Shakespeare's time and our own, the patriarchal polarisation of sex roles triggers off male anxiety that a man must be emphatically masculine in order to prove himself to be a man. It is in such adult struggles to establish or prove manhood that Shakespeare's works manifest an acute interest.

In this essay, this theory is used to discuss Bertram's rejection of Helena and the bed trick. It is used to support a reading of *All's Well* in which I attempt to bring out the experimental nature of the comedy. The first section of the essay propounds a view that regards Parolles as Bertram's surrogate father. This view is developed in the second section, where Bertram's flight from Helena is discussed in terms of the masculine fear of the strong maternal sexuality. In the third section is pointed out Bertram's establishment of manhood, and the last section discusses the bed trick as a miraculous and yet fragile solution to masculine anxiety.

1

Many critics of *All's Well* seem to accept, whether explicitly or implicitly, Dr Johnson's harsh condemnation of the character of Bertram:

> 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. (191)

Certainly his behaviour as the play unfolds it is far from attractive. On the other hand, however, Arthur Kirsch suggests that 'the tone, if not the substance, of such charges is excessive and reflects a displacement of the critics' real animus, which is against the nakedness of sexuality to which Bertram's adolescence makes him prey'(118). Bertram's being an adolescent, 'an unseason'd courtier' in his mother's words(1.1.67),[3] is obvious enough. Other characters continuously call him a boy, and his legal status as ward indicates that he is not older than twenty-one(Hunter,3). He is at that critical point where a young man has to emerge from his familial ties into the outer, public world. This emergence takes the form of independence from maternal nurture and the establishment of social identity in emulation of his father. Such a move is exactly what is expected of Bertram: his mother says: 'succeed thy father / In manners as in shape!'(1.1.57-8) and the King: 'Thy father's moral parts / Mayest thou inherit too!'(1.2.21-2) Thus the play, focusing on Bertram, reenacts the initial process of the establishment of a male sexual identity. The strength of the maternal pull towards reengulfment is also latent from the very beginning of the play, when the Countess says: 'In delivering my son from me, I bury a second husband'(1.1.1-2). The idea of delivery, ostensibly signifying the separation of the son from the mother, points back towards a symbiotic union between the two. Her son's next speech economically establishes his psychological stance:

> And I in going, madam, weep o'er my father's death anew; but I must attend his majesty's command, to whom I am now in ward, evermore in subjection.
> (1.1.3-5)

The death of his father and the strong maternal presence necessitates Bertram's departure from Rossillion to distance himself from his mother and to find a surrogate father. The spatial distance between Rossillion and Paris signifies the psychological distance that is required. Lafew consoles the mother and reassures the son in a sentence that summarises the situation: 'You shall find of the king a husband, madam; you, sir, a father'(1.1.6-7). The Countess, however, seems loath to 'deliver' her son, delaying his departure by talking with Lafew.

However, somehow Bertram leaves Rossillion for Paris. What Bertram seeks is to achieve martial honour 'in defense of fathers or in emulation of fathers or on behalf of the king as the national father'(Kahn,49). When Bertram arrives in Paris, the King is reminded of Bertram's father, and falls into a reverie about the days of their prime(1.2.19-22/24-48). While we may admit the moral significance traditionally attached to the speech, it must also be noted that what the King mentions first when praising the late Rossillion is not his moral uprightness, but his martial merit(Parker,101): 'He did look far / Into the service of the time, and was / Disciplined of the bravest'(1.2.26-8). Bertram can establish his manhood as soldier if he can follow his father's example.

Bertram's wish to leave the maternal dominion and to emulate his father's soldiership is, however, frustrated. The King, whose illness Bertram obviously has known little about(1.1.32), turns out to be too weak to sustain the image of ideal masculinity. Although it is true that the King tries to behave as Bertram's surrogate father(1.2.75-6), and the play certainly identifies him as a paternal figure, he exercises paternal authority not to endow Bertram with masculine identity, but to keep him in what Bertram thinks of as an effeminate environment. Bertram says indignantly:

> I shall stay here the forehouse to a smock,
> Creaking my shoes on the plain masonry,
> Till honour be bought up, and no sword worn
> But one to dance with. (2.1.30-3)

Contrary to his wish, Bertram is 'commanded here, and kept a coil with / "Too young", and "The next year" and "'Tis too early"'(2.1.27-8). In this absence of a surrogate father, the presence of Parolles becomes important.

In 2.1, virtually the first scene between the two, Parolles presents himself as an ideal soldier before Bertram:

> Noble heroes, my sword and yours are kin. Good

sparks and lustrous, a word, good metals. You shall find in the regiment of the Spinii one Captain Spurio, with his cicatrice, an emblem of war, here on his sinister cheek; it was this very sword entrench'd it.

(2.1.39-43)

Parolles's true status is of course reserved for the audience, who know that he is 'a notorious liar,' 'a great way fool,' and 'solely a coward'(1.1.98-9). It is no less true, however, that from Bertram's point of view, Parolles is indeed the realisation of a masculine ideal. For him, Parolles is a combination of valaour and 'knowledge,' that is, experience in the world(2.5.7-8). At the King's failure to become his surrogate father, Bertram needs to seek one somewhere else, and finds one in Parolles. His inability to see through Parolles's true nature can be explained by his urgent need to find a masculine ideal, identification with whom enables him to part from the union with his mother and to establish a new identity.

2

However, Bertram's acquisition of masculinity is not easy. Another ordeal awaits him: the King imposes on him the order to marry Helena. Those who consider the play a moral debate on the relation of birth and merit with regard to true nobility think that Bertram's rejection of Helena is his failure to recognise her true virtue. However, if we think that the scene's primary concern is with the moral theme, we cannot explain why Bertram refuses to consummate the marriage when 'honour and wealth' have been endowed by the King on Helena. On the other hand, if we take the insistent 'disparagement' of Helena on Bertram's part as simply a pretext that conceals the real reason for his rejection, we can perhaps reason out why he repudiates her. When the King exercises the royal and paternal prerogative to force him to marry Helena, Bertram is left no alternative but to accept the command, but later, he emphatically refuses to 'bed' her(2.3.266;269) and even kiss her(2.5). Obviously it is her sexuality that annoys Bertram. The entire scene represents, mainly through Bertram, male anxiety about female sexuality.

As many have noted, Helena is strongly sexualised and eroticised in the proceeding scene. Lafew describes her as one

whose simple touch
Is powerful to araise King Pippen, nay,
To give great Charlemain a pen in's hand
And write to her a love-line. (2.1.74-7)

The curative and positive aspects of female sexuality, of which the cure of the King itself is to become an example, are stressed here. When Lafew evokes Helena's sexuality again, however, the compliment is somewhat backhanded:

A traitor you do look like, but such traitors
His majesty seldom fears; I am Cressid's uncle
That dare leave two together. (2.1.95-7)

Helena is identified with Cressida, and the destructive aspect of female sexuality is introduced. The fear of the traitorous nature of female sexuality lingers in the dialogue between the King and Helena that immediately follows Lafew's speech.[4] The King, who has said earlier that he would try Gerard de Narbon's treatment if he were alive(1.2.72), rejects the prescription bequeathed to his daughter on the ground that

we must not
So stain our judgment or corrupt our hope,
To prostitute our past-cure malady
To empirics, or to dissever so
Our great self and our credit, to esteem
A senseless help, when help past sense we deem.

(2.1.118-23)

What the King fears is to tarnish his manhood by becoming deeply involved with a woman. It should be noted that the King has already expressed the masculine fear that man may be effeminised by a contact with woman(2.1.19-22).

Seeing that her father's name has no effect on the King, Helena next appeals to divine power: 'He that of greatest works is finisher / Oft does them by the

weakest minister'(2.1.135-6). Yet the King is still adamant in his refusal, though it seems to be implied that something inside him has been affected. He has initiated a rhymed dialogue, which may be taken as suggesting that he is drawn into the magical circle of Helena's sexual exorcism(Leggatt,26). The increase of intensity from '[I] may not be so credulous'(2.1.114) to 'I must not hear thee'(2.1.144) also measures the King's attraction to Helena.

Significantly, however, it is not until Helena says how confident she is in her own art(2.1.155-6) that the King explicitly expresses his inclination to try her remedy. Helena then associates her treatment with the regenerating forces of nature to persuade him:

> Ere twice the horses of the sun shall bring
> Their fiery coacher his diurnal ring,
> Ere twice in murk and occidental damp
> Moist Hesperus hath quench'd her sleepy lamb,
> (2.1.160-3)

The imagery here amplifies the sexual suggestiveness of Helena's activity by linking it with the night. The feminine pronoun that refers to Hesperus clarifies that Helena means Venus by it(Hunter,44), which reinforces the sexual tone of her cure. Then Helena herself makes use of the male fantasy of traitorous female sexuality to persuade the King, removing the possible slander from credulity on the male part and placing it on the female side(2.1.169-70). And finally the King gives consent to Helena in a sexually suggestive couplet: 'Here is my hand; the premises observ'd, / Thy will by my performance shall be serv'd'(2.1.200-1).

In front of a thus sexualised Helena, we may imagine that the immature Bertram's real reason for rejecting her is his fear of sexual encounter. What is more, this strongly sexual woman is closely associated with his mother. Those who regard sexuality as the primary concern of the play invariably point out the maternal resonance in the character of Helena. Both of Bertram's two references to Helena(1.1.73-4;2.3.113-4) clearly show that he associates her with his mother and the familial tie. Moreover, not only Bertram the character sees Helena as a maternal presence, but the play as a whole makes us see her in that way.

A strong alliance between Helena and the Countess is registered earlier in the play. In the scene where Helena confesses her love of Bertram to the Countess, there is a sense of genuine mutual understanding between the two characters. The Countess's speech(1.3.123-30) anticipates Helena's plea for pity(1.3.204-12), and foregrounds the Countess's comprehensive attitude. The dialogue between the two reveals the Countess teasingly and playfully having Helena admit her love of Bertram. The Countess's reassuring comment concludes the scene:

> Why, Helen, thou shalt have my leave and love,
> Means and attendants, and my loving greetings
> To those of mine in court. I'll stay at home
> And pray God's blessing into thy attempt.
> Be gone tomorrow; and be sure of this,
> What I can help thee to, thou shalt not miss.
> (1.3.246-51)

This promise of help by the Countess may, as Asp points out, be only passive(182). If we look at the situation from a different point of view, however, it might be argued that this very passivity reverses the positions of the two women, making Helena the agent of fulfillment of the Countess's wish to retrieve Bertram from Paris. When she (mistakenly) assumes that Helena has succeeded in winning Bertram and that Bertram is to return to Rossillion, the Countess says: 'It hath happen'd all as I would have had it'(3.2.1). I am not suggesting here that the Countess, as character, has any incestuous desire for Bertram, but that the play's structure instructs us to see Bertram's flight from Helena as a version of the male struggle to escape from reengulfment by the mother.

That Shakespeare intends the audience to see the play as such can be verified by his alterations to the source material.[5] The strong maternal presence of the Countess is Shakespeare's addition to Painter's story of 'Giletta of Narbona.' And in Painter, it is implied that Beltramo, Shakespeare's Bertram, is more than an adolescent. Both Giletta, Shakespeare's Helena, and Beltramo are more mature than Shakespearean

characterisations. When the narrative starts, Giletta has already refused many marriages, and Beltramo is 'growen to the state of a goodly yong gentleman'(146). In the scene of the cure of the King, Giletta's seductiveness is mentioned, but to be de-emphasised. Contrary to the progression in Shakespeare's scene, the King first seems attracted sexually to Giletta, 'perceyving her to be a fayre yonge maiden and a comelie'(146), but refuses to try her treatment. It is when she appeals to her father's name and divine help that he is moved. After the cure, when he is forced to marry Giletta, 'although she was faire, yet knowing her not to be of a stocke, convenable to his nobility'(147), Beltramo refuses to accept her. Significantly, here he seems to find her attractive enough, and yet refuses her only because she is socially inferior to him. These departures from the material as Shakespeare finds it are sufficient to show that his interest in reshaping the story is to foreground the issue of sexuality and associate it with a maternal figure.

Now Bertram leaves Helena behind, as he has left his mother behind at the beginning of the play, and goes to establish manhood in the battlefield, where he is, or rather he thinks he is, free from engulfing maternal sexuality.

3

The second half of *All's Well* can be seen as concerned with the establishment of Bertram's manhood, and it opens with his extraordinary promotion to general of the Florentine horse soldiers(3.3.1-3). The Duke of Florence plays the role of the ideal surrogate father, encouraging Bertram to cultivate the anti-effeminate activities of soldiership. Bertram asseverates his firm determination to leave the maternal dominion of love and plunge into the masculine world of war:

> This very day,
> Great Mars, I put myself into thy file;
> Make me but like my thoughts and I shall prove
> A lover of thy drum, hater of love. (3.3.8-11)

The next scene brings us briefly back to a world reminiscent of the first half, but after that we do not return to Rossillion until towards the end of the play. As the movement from Rossillion to Paris has been symbolic in the opening of the first half, so the transition from Paris to Florence marks a departure from one sphere of action to another.

This change of tone is reinforced by the introduction of new characters: a vivacious conversation among the Florentine women in prose replaces the lamentation of the Countess in verse. The new women further substantiate the change by reporting on Bertram's achievement of martial honour(3.5.5-7). They also inform the audience that Bertram is now trying to seduce one of them, Diana. These two pieces of information testify to a new Bertram, different from the man we have seen in the first half.[6]

In Florence, Bertram establishes the soldiership he has wanted, and then seeks to translate his martial honour into sexual terms. He now thinks that he has distanced himself safely enough from the maternal presence, and that he can explore his own sexuality. Moreover, sexuality has become for him an expression of masculine prowess, not an effeminising bond any more. Bertram seems interested in Diana precisely because she is a virgin, or rather, more than a virgin: she is Chastity itself, a woman 'of a most chaste renown'(4.3.14). When Diana reproves Bertram for calling her by a ludicrous romantic name and says her name is Diana, Bertram enthusiastically replies: 'Titled goddess; / And worth it, with addition!'(4.2.2-3). If he were to succeed in seducing this 'goddess' of chastity, he would be able to flaunt his virility. In the Second Lord's words, Bertram thinks that he will be 'himself made' by seducing Diana(4.3.16-7).

Bertram's renunciation of Parolles is another indication of his growth. In Paris, he needed Parolles as a surrogate father. In Florence, he has found another surrogate father, the Duke, and established his manhood. He does not need Parolles any more. Bertram gives an indication of his independence from Parolles much earlier than most critics seem to have thought. As soon as he achieves his soldiership, he opprobriously calls Parolles 'this same coxcomb that we have

i'th'wind'(3.6.110). Before the interrogation of blindfold Parolles starts, Bertram calls him again one who 'has deceiv'd me like a double-meaning prophesier'(4.3.96–7). It is also significant that Bertram's last step towards independence (the final exposure of Parolles) coincides with his supposed seduction of Diana. Shakespeare makes the association of these events explicit by specifying their almost simultaneous occurrence(Hodgdon, 60).

Now Bertram believes that he has achieved manhood in Florence: he has established soldiership, has experimented with his sexuality, and has freed himself from dependence on Parolles. However, he has to translate his manhood into what can be accepted by the older generation before he can be reconciled with them and take his full place as a man in France. Otherwise, 'The great dignity that his valour hath here acquir'd for him shall at home be encount'red with a shame as ample'(4.3.65–7). Bertram tries to accomplish this further step by accepting the wife of their choice. As Kahn suggests, 'In Shakespeare's world, marriage denotes full entry into society; when a son marries, he becomes a man'(82). To accept marriage, and to take on its ensuing familial and social responsibilities, confer masculine social identity on man. This is perhaps how Bertram wishes his rebellious journey to end, but the dynamics of the convention of the bed trick prescribe another direction, a direction which is less naturalistic and yet perhaps truer to the psychological reality of the male subject's ambivalence towards the maternal figure. Bertram is to find that his social masculine identity as a father is, despite everything, dependent upon Helena.

4

In Shakespeare's plays, men try to avoid marriage in various ways. The masculine anxiety about marriage partly results from the male polarisation of women into virgins and whores, and from the patriarchal marriage system, where the honour of a husband is conceived as dependent on his wife's chastity. It is difficult for a man to accept marriage, since to marry is to make his manhood dependent on a woman, who may turn out to be a whore. The common belief was that all woman are lustful: according to the clown of our play, 'And we might have a good woman born but or every blazing star or at an earthquake, 'twould mend the lottery well'(1.3.83–5). This makes the male acceptance of marriage still more difficult.

In comedy, men are salvaged from such fantasies of women through some kind of 'trick.' In *Much Ado About Nothing,* for instance, when Claudio is convinced of Hero's perfidy, he sees her in polarised terms:

> You seem to me as Dian in her orb,
> As chaste as is the bud ere it be blown;
> But you are more intemperate in your blood
> Than Venus, or those pamper'd animals
> That rage in savage sensuality. (4.1.57–61)

Don John's slander of Hero can be regarded as a displaced expression of Claudio's own fear. However, the mock death of Hero exorcises this masculine misogyny: by anticipating Hero's infidelity in fantasy and then killing Hero as Venus, the marriage between Claudio and Hero is finally made possible. When she reappears, Hero says: 'One Hero died defil'd, but I do live, / And surely as I live, I am a maid'(5.4.62–3). Hero's potential as unfaithful wife has been clearly erased, and as if confirming it further, a messenger enters to deliver the news of Don John's arrest.

Bed tricks in the source story of *All's Well* and its analogous folk tales reflect the masculine anxiety about marriage discussed above.(7) The trick takes a traditional form in which the wife is required to fulfill the apparently impossible condition the husband has made for the consummation of their marriage. The principal requirement for the wife to meet is that she must produce an heir. She has also to perform another task symbolising sexual intercourse, like, for example, the digging of a well or the winning of a ring in *All's Well.* As Carol Thomas Neely suggests, these two tasks express the husband's fear of female sexuality and his hesitation in accepting marital responsibilities, along with his contradictory wish for an illegitimate affair and for the achievement of family continuity through an heir(78). The fulfillment of the condition by the wife

symbolises the reconciliation of these conflicting aspects, and such stories end with the husband's full acceptance of the wife.

Bertram's proviso in *All's Well* seems to conform to this convention. He says: 'When thou canst get the ring upon my finger, which never shall come off, and show me a child begotten of thy body that I am father to, then call me husband'(3.2.56－8). As in conventional stories, the stipulation consists of two tasks: producing an heir and winning a ring. The text of *All's Well* is exceptionally eloquent as to the significance of Bertram's ring. Helena identifies it with Bertram's passionate desire for an illicit affair: 'in his idle fire, / To buy his will it[i.e. the ring] would not seem too dear'(3.7.26－7). Bertram's ring is also heavily charged with social connotations. Bertram says that the ring is

> an honour 'longing to our house,
> Bequeathed down from many ancestors,
> Which were the greatest obloquy i'th'world
> In me to lose. (4.2.42－5)

The ring represents the paternal legacy he has inherited, which he has to preserve till he passes it onto his heir. The bed trick reorientates Bertram's 'idle fire' and his paternal legacy towards the legitimate, socially sanctioned wife, and by producing an heir, enables the continuity of the paternal legacy.

However, the bed trick in *All's Well* cannot be fully explained only in these terms, because Bertram's rejection of Helena reflects more than a male fear of female sexuality in general: Helena is represented, as we have seen, as a maternal figure. The bed trick in *All's Well* can be understood as a dramatic expression of the male infantile ambivalence that seeks both to merge with and to separate from the mother. When he imposes the impossible condition on Helena, Bertram emphatically expresses his determination not to consummate their marriage. This reflects his masculine wish to separate himself from symbiotic union with his mother; however, the unusual intensity of his wish also demonstrates the strength of his contradictory wish to regress into a happy merger.

If we look at the bed trick in this way, Bertram's conventional condition becomes more than conventional. The conventional contradiction of 'I am ready to have intercourse with you only after I have had intercourse with you' stipulates that Bertram can accept Helena only when she can make him a father without his participation in the sexual act(Adelman,161). Bertram can escape from his dilemma if Helena can confer on him adult identity as a father without the reenactment of infantile sexuality. Thus the bed trick in *All's Well* simultaneously evokes masculine claustrophobia about maternal sexuality and provides a miraculous solution to it.

However, as we might expect, such a magical solution is fragile. In Painter's story, Giletta gives birth to twins and brings them up till they have become perceptibly like their father. It is only after this that she returns to France to claim her status as wife(151－2). In *All's Well*, Helena only becomes pregnant. When the pregnant Helena appears in the final scene, she subtly changes the words of Bertram's condition:

> And, look you, here's your letter. This it says:
> When from my finger you can get this ring
> And is by me with child, &c. (5.3.305－7)

Shakespeare was ready to make a dramatic compression of time up to the point where Helena 'feels her young one kick'(5.3.296), though it is presumably only a few days after the child has been conceived. He could have made Helena appear with the baby in her arms, but he chose to make her only pregnant. This decision suggests that Shakespeare purposely portrays Bertram's new identity only as a possibility, and not as a reality.

Bertram's notoriously insufficient acceptance of Helena also demonstrates the fragility of his new identity. When Helena appears to save Bertram's face and life, he exclaims with a cry of relief and accepts her as wife both in name and substance(5.3.302). His next speech is, however, not directed to Helena but to the King, and it is only conditional:

> If she, my liege, can make me know this clearly
> I'll love her dearly, ever, ever, dearly.
> (5.3.309－10)

The irony is that if Bertram knows everything clearly, if he knows that Helena is not a virgin mother and that he has actually taken part in the sexual act, he will not be able to accept her. Bertram's final couplet wryly reminds us that Bertram can accept Helena only as long as he does not know, in any depth, what has actually happened.

Conclusion

Male fear of female sexuality is often at the heart of the representation of man and woman from a masculine point of view. The extreme polarisation of sex roles in patriarchy means that a man has to be emphatically masculine in order to prove himself a man. In such a society, a man must struggle to differentiate himself from those qualities that are regarded as 'feminine.' This adult struggle has its origin in infantile experience. It is in fact a reenactment of his initial ambivalence towards his mother, and his contradictory wish both to establish a new identity of his own and to move backwards into that symbiotic union where he thought he was omnipotent. In *All's Well*, Shakespeare makes this association between adult and infantile struggles explicit by creating the strong maternal presence of the Countess, and by emphasising the strong tie between Helena and the Countess.

Parolles is also one of Shakespeare's additions to his source, and we have considered him here as a surrogate father of Bertram, one who helps him resist his own regressive wish. If we regard Parolles as a surrogate father and Helena as a maternal figure, Bertram's rejection of Helena can be understood as a version of male flight from maternal sexuality.

However, man cannot really fly from the original ambivalence he feels towards his mother. Bertram's acquisition of adult identity as a father turns out, after all he has done, to be dependent on the maternal figure, Helena. The bed trick seems to provide a miraculous solution, but Bertram's new identity is only potential at best. His response to the discovery of his own position further exposes the paradox that he can accept Helena only in so far as he is kept in the dark as to what has actually happened.

Thus, though Bertram's wish is magically fulfilled, it is indicated that such a fulfillment is only superficial, and therefore solves nothing in actuality. The King's ending couplet is suggestive:

> All yet seems well, and if it end so meet,
> The bitter past, more welcome is the sweet.
> (5.3.327-8)

All only *seems* well. The heavy repetition of *if*'s and *seem*'s at the closure persistently forces us to reexamine the validity of the conventional 'happy' ending of comedy. From this point of view, it can be concluded that *All's Well* is not a defective conventional comedy, but an experimental development of the convention of comedy itself.

Notes

(1) This essay is a much condensed version of a part of my master thesis submitted to the University of Tokyo in December 1993.

(2) Psychoanalytic approaches to *All's Well* have been made by various critics. Most notable are Adelman, Wheeler (both Freudian), and Asp (feminist/Lacanean). My indebtedness to them is no less than to Kahn. For a full account of Kahn's theory, see her own Introduction to *Man's Estate*(1-20).

(3) References to *All's Well* are to Hunter's edition hereafter. Other editions consulted are: Barbara Everett's (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), Russell Fraser's (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985), Quiller-Couch and Dover Wilson's (London: Cambridge UP, 1968), and Susan Snyder's (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993).

(4) See Neely's analysis of the scene(69), to whose shrewd observations I am deeply indebted.

(5) The source, the thirty-eighth novel of William Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*, is reprinted in Hunter(145-52). References to Painter's story

are to this edition hereafter.

(6) When the Widow asks Helena if she knows Bertram, she replies that she has only heard about him(3.5.50-1). This is obviously a lie, but it can be understood as a reflection of the dramatist's intention to emphasise a new Bertram.

(7) See Lawrence, who cites various 'Fulfilment of the Task' analogies(39-54).

References

Primary Sources

Shakespeare, William. *All's Well That Ends Well.* Ed. G.K.Hunter. The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare. 1959. London: Methuen, 1967.

———. *Much Ado About Nothing.* Ed. A.R.Humphreys. The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare. 1981. London: Routledge, 1988.

Secondary Sources

Adelman, Janet. 'Bed Tricks: On Marriage as the End of Comedy in *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure.*' *Shakespeare's Personality*. Eds. Norman N.Holland, Sidney Homan, and Bernard J.Paris. Berkeley: U of California P, 1989. 151-74.

Asp, Carolyn. 'Subjectivity, Desire and Female Friendship in *All's Well That Ends Well.*' *Shakespeare's Comedies.* Ed. Gary Waller. Longman Critical Readers. London: Longman, 1991. 175-92.

Boas, Frederick S. *Shakespeare and His Predecessors.* 1896. New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1968.

Hodgdon, Barbara. 'The Making of Virgins and Mothers: Sexual Signs, Substitute Scenes and Doubled Presences in *All's Well That Ends Well.*' *Philological Quarterly* 66 (1987): 47-71.

Johnson, Samuel. *Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare.* Ed. H.R.Woudhuysen. New Penguin Shakespeare Library. London: Penguin, 1989.

Kahn, Coppélia. *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare.* Berkeley: U of California P, 1981.

Kirsch, Arthur. *Shakespeare and the Experience of Love.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981.

Lawrence, William Witherle. *Shakespeare's Problem Comedies.* 2nd ed. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1960.

Leggatt, Alexander. '*All's Well That Ends Well*: The Testing of Romance.' *Modern Language Quarterly* 32 (1971): 21-41.

Neely, Carol Thomas. *Broken Nuptials in Shakespeare's Plays.* New Haven: Yale UP, 1985.

Parker, R.B. 'War and Sex in *All's Well That Ends Well.*' *Shakespeare Survey* 37 (1984): 99-113.

Wheeler, Richard P. *Shakespeare's Development and the Problem Comedies: Turn and Counter-Turn.* Berkeley: U of California P, 1981.