CLIFFS NOTES on
SHAKESPEARE'S

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL
THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL & THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR

NOTES

including

- *Life of Shakespeare*
- *Introductions*
- *Brief Plot Summaries*
- *Lists of Characters*
- *Summaries and Commentaries*
- *Questions for Review*
- *Selected Bibliographies*

by
Denis Calandra, Ph.D.
Department of Theater
University of South Florida

INCORPORATED
LINCOLN, NEBRASKA 68501

Editor

Gary Carey, M.A.
University of Colorado

Consulting Editor

James L. Roberts, Ph.D.
Department of English
University of Nebraska

ISBN 0-8220-0004-0
© Copyright 1985
by
C. K. Hillegass
All Rights Reserved
Printed in U.S.A.

Cliffs Notes, Inc. Lincoln, Nebraska

CONTENTS

LIFE OF SHAKESPEARE 5

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

Introduction 8

Brief Plot Summary 9

List of Characters 10

Summaries and Commentaries

Act I–Scene 1 12
Act I–Scene 2 15
Act I–Scene 3 16
Act II–Scene 1 17
Act II–Scene 2 20
Act II–Scene 3 20
Act II–Scenes 4 & 5 24
Act III–Scenes 1 & 2 26
Act III–Scenes 3 & 4 28
Act III–Scene 5 29
Act III–Scenes 6 & 7 30
Act IV–Scene 1 32
Act IV–Scene 2 33
Act IV–Scene 3 35
Act IV–Scenes 4 & 5 36
Act V–Scenes 1 & 2 37
Act V–Scene 3 38

Questions for Review 40

THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR

Introduction 42

Brief Plot Summary 42

List of Characters 44

Summaries and Commentaries

Act I–Scene 1 48
Act I–Scenes 2 & 3 50
Act I–Scene 4 51
Act II–Scene 1 53
Act II–Scene 2 54
Act II–Scene 3 56
Act III–Scenes 1 & 2 57
Act III–Scene 3 59
Act III–Scenes 4 & 5 61
Act IV–Scene 1 63
Act IV–Scenes 2–4 64
Act IV–Scenes 5 & 6 66
Act V–Scenes 1–5 67

Questions for Review 69

Selected Bibliography 70

试读结束：需要全本请在线购买： www.ertongbook.com

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL & MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR Notes

LIFE OF SHAKESPEARE

Many books have assembled facts, reasonable suppositions, traditions, and speculations concerning the life and career of William Shakespeare. Taken as a whole, these materials give a rather comprehensive picture of England's foremost dramatic poet. Tradition and sober supposition are not necessarily false because they lack proved bases for their existence. It is important, however, that persons interested in Shakespeare should distinguish between *facts* and *beliefs* about his life.

From one point of view, modern scholars are fortunate to know as much as they do about a man of middle-class origin who left a small country town and embarked on a professional career in sixteenth-century London. From another point of view, they know surprisingly little about the writer who has continued to influence the English language and its drama and poetry for more than three hundred years. Sparse and scattered as these facts of his life are, they are sufficient to prove that a man from Stratford by the name of William Shakespeare wrote the major portion of the thirty-seven plays which scholars ascribe to him. The concise review which follows will concern itself with some of these records.

No one knows the exact date of William Shakespeare's birth. His baptism occurred on Wednesday, April 26, 1564. His father was John Shakespeare, tanner, glover, dealer in grain, and town official of Stratford; his mother, Mary, was the daughter of Robert Arden, a prosperous gentleman-farmer. The Shakespeares lived on Henley Street.

Under a bond dated November 28, 1582, William Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway entered into a marriage contract. The baptism

of their eldest child, Susanna, took place in Stratford in May, 1583. One year and nine months later their twins, Hamnet and Judith, were christened in the same church. The parents named them for the poet's friends, Hamnet and Judith Sadler.

Early in 1596, William Shakespeare, in his father's name, applied to the College of Heralds for a coat of arms. Although positive proof is lacking, there is reason to believe that the Heralds granted this request, for in 1599 Shakespeare again made application for the right to quarter his coat of arms with that of his mother. Entitled to her father's coat of arms, Mary had lost this privilege when she married John Shakespeare before he held the official status of gentleman.

In May of 1597, Shakespeare purchased New Place, the outstanding residential property in Stratford at that time. Since John Shakespeare had suffered financial reverses prior to this date, William must have achieved success for himself.

Court records show that in 1601-02, William Shakespeare began rooming in the household of Christopher Mountjoy in London. Subsequent disputes over the wedding settlement and agreement between Mountjoy and his son-in-law, Stephen Belott, led to a series of legal actions, and in 1612 the court scribe recorded Shakespeare's deposition of testimony relating to the case.

In July, 1605, William Shakespeare paid four hundred and forty pounds for the lease of a large portion of the tithes on certain real estate in and near Stratford. This was an arrangement whereby Shakespeare purchased half the annual tithes, or taxes, on certain agricultural products from parcels of land in and near Stratford. In addition to receiving approximately ten per cent income on his investment, he almost doubled his capital. This was possibly the most important and successful investment of his lifetime, and it paid a steady income for many years.

Shakespeare is next mentioned when John Combe, a resident of Stratford, died on July 12, 1614. To his friend, Combe bequeathed the sum of five pounds. These records and similar ones are important, not because of their economic significance but because they prove the existence of William Shakespeare in Stratford and in London during this period.

On March 25, 1616, William Shakespeare revised his last will and testament. He died on April 23 of the same year. His body lies within

the chancel and before the altar of the Stratford church. A rather wry inscription is carved upon his tombstone:

> Good Friend, for Jesus' sake, forbear
> To dig the dust enclosed here;
> Blest be the man that spares these stones
> And curst be he who moves my bones.

The last direct descendant of William Shakespeare was his granddaughter, Elizabeth Hall, who died childless in 1670.

These are the most outstanding facts about Shakespeare the man, as apart from those about the dramatist and poet. Such pieces of information, scattered from 1564 through 1616, declare the existence of such a person, not as a writer or actor, but as a private citizen. It is illogical to think that anyone would or could have fabricated these details for the purpose of deceiving later generations.

In similar fashion, the evidence establishing William Shakespeare as the foremost playwright of his day is positive and persuasive. Robert Greene's *Groatsworth of Wit,* in which he attacked Shakespeare, a mere actor, for presuming to write plays in competition with Greene and his fellow playwrights, was entered in the *Stationers' Register* on September 20, 1592. In 1594 Shakespeare acted before Queen Elizabeth, and in 1594-95 his name appeared as one of the shareholders of the Lord Chamberlain's Company. Francis Meres in his *Palladis Tamia* (1598) called Shakespeare "mellifluous and hony-tongued" and compared his comedies and tragedies with those of Plautus and Seneca in excellence.

Shakespeare's continued association with Burbage's company is equally definite. His name appears as one of the owners of the Globe in 1599. On May 19, 1603, he and his fellow actors received a patent from James I designating them as the King's Men and making them Grooms of the Chamber. Late in 1608 or early in 1609, Shakespeare and his colleagues purchased the Blackfriars Theatre and began using it as their winter location when weather made production at the Globe inconvenient.

Other specific allusions to Shakespeare, to his acting and his writing, occur in numerous places. Put together, they form irrefutable testimony that William Shakespeare of Stratford and London was the leader among Elizabethan playwrights.

One of the most impressive of all proofs of Shakespeare's authorship of his plays is the First Folio of 1623, with the dedicatory verse which appeared in it. John Heminge and Henry Condell, members of Shakespeare's own company, stated that they collected and issued the plays as a memorial to their fellow actor. Many contemporary poets contributed eulogies to Shakespeare; one of the best-known of these poems is by Ben Jonson, a fellow actor and, later, a friendly rival. Jonson also criticized Shakespeare's dramatic work in *Timber: or, Discoveries* (1641).

Certainly there are many things about Shakespeare's genius and career which the most diligent scholars do not know and cannot explain, but the facts which do exist are sufficient to establish Shakespeare's identity as a man and his authorship of the thirty-seven plays which reputable critics acknowledge to be his.

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to assign a date to the composition of *All's Well.* There are no definite allusions or associations with contemporary slang or happenings. There are a good number of rimed couplets, suggesting that this play might be an early work of Shakespeare's. But because these couplets are such fine examples, they suggest a mastery of the couplet tradition instead of immaturity. Most scholars who note errors in characterization, as well as entrance and exit notations, seem to think that this First Folio edition is probably a recast, rewritten version of the play, lacking Shakespeare's final editing. And because of one of its key lines, they think that it may be a "lost play" of Shakespeare's—*Love's Labour's Won.*

Shakespeare's plot of a beautiful woman who is turned down by the man whom she loves—after she has cured a king of a critical illness—is clearly taken from William Painter's *Palace of Pleasure* (1566), a situation that had already been explored by Boccaccio in his *Decameron;* both stories also contain the ingenious "bed trick." At that time, Helena's cleverness in getting a child from Bertram would have been applauded. The baby would have been proof of her deep love

and courage. It was sterling – if ironic – proof of her vow of fidelity. Then, as well as today, Bertram would have had few redeeming qualities. He lacks all sense of honor; he is a cad. Thus, the comedy is ultimately flawed. We cannot totally rejoice at Helena's "success" in regaining her husband. The play simply has a rapid "happy ending," which was required. Ultimately, we feel that Helena is such a remarkable woman that her absolute infatuation with a fraud makes her character suspect. The meaning of *All's Well* is, therefore, ambiguous and seemingly ironic.

BRIEF PLOT SUMMARY

The central action of *All's Well That Ends Well* concerns Helena, a beautiful woman, and her pursuit of a man of higher social position than herself in the French court of Rousillon. Helena is the daughter of a recently deceased court physician; the man whom she pursues is Bertram, a young man of the nobility, who is in mourning for his late father, the Count.

Helena follows Bertram to Paris where, as a reward for "miraculously" curing the king of an apparently terminal illness, she is granted the husband of her choice. She chooses Bertram. Bertram at first refuses to have her, but then he submits to the angry king's command – but only outwardly. Together with his dubious "follower" Parolles, Bertram flees France to fight in the Italian wars, where he plans to achieve the necessary "honor" suitable to his rank. Furthermore, he vows never to consummate his marriage with Helena unless she can perform two "impossible" tasks: (1) "get the ring upon [which is on] my finger," and (2) "show me a child begotten of thy body that I am father to." Helena does just that, with the help of a widow (whom she pays handsomely) and the widow's virgin daughter, Diana. During the well-known "bed trick," Bertram is fooled into believing that he has made love to Diana, whereas, in reality, Helena has smuggled herself into the bed. An exchange of rings also takes place. Diana and Helena continue the ruse until the last minutes of the play, when they surprise the entire Parisian court (who think that Helena is dead), and they then embarrass Bertram deeply when they reveal what has transpired. But Helena finally has her man, and "all" has apparently ended "well."

In a comical subplot, another "trick" is used, this time to reveal Parolles' dishonesty in the presence of Bertram; Parolles is taken captive, blindfolded, and outrageous denunciations are extracted from him about Bertram and others. But even Parolles is grudgingly accepted back into the company at the end of the play. Again, "all's well that ends well"–apparently.

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Helena

The daughter of a very famous, recently deceased court physician, Helena has the physical and mental attributes which could command the attention of virtually any eligible bachelor, but unfortunately, she does not have the correct social pedigree to entice the man whom she loves, Bertram, a Count's son. Through the use of her native wit and the body of knowledge which she inherits from her father, as well as because of her sheer strength of will, she overcomes all obstacles and wins Bertram. To some commentators on this play, Helena's tactics seem questionable, although no one underestimates her strength of character.

Bertram

For several reasons, Bertram seems significantly inferior to Helena. He is under the influence of the patently superficial Parolles, and he lies outright on more than one occasion. Furthermore, he blatantly disregards the king's wishes. To a twentieth-century audience, he might seem to have every right to refuse a forced marriage, but to the world which the play inhabits, that is not the case. Besides, Helena is clearly (in everyone else's opinion) a splendid person. The play ends, however, in such an abrupt manner that Shakespeare leaves us wondering just how "well" all has "ended" for Bertram and his "rightful" bride.

King of France

In his prime, the king was a valiant warrior and a staunch friend of Bertram's father. He is utterly charmed by Helena, and he is grateful for the cure which she administers to him. All of this makes his

试读结束：需要全本请在线购买： www.ertongbook.com

outrage even greater when Bertram refuses to accept Helena as a bride. He exerts his royal authority to force the marriage, and in Shakespeare's scheme of things in the play, he seems to be right in doing so.

Countess of Rousillon

Bertram's mother fully sympathizes with Helena in her state of lovelorn agony, and she goes so far as to say that she will disown her son as a result of his rejection of her adopted "daughter." She does what she can to make things "end well."

Lafeu

Lafeu is an elderly friend of the Countess and her family. His role is that of adviser and mollifier. He is the first to see through Parolles' schemes, and it is his daughter whose planned marriage to Bertram (before Helena is "resurrected" at the end of the play) will signal a return to good order.

Parolles

Lafeu sums up the character of Parolles when he says: "The soul of this man is his clothes." Parolles is the tempter of Bertram as a "prodigal son," and in the end, Parolles is seen as such and rejected.

Clown (Lavache)

The Countess' servant offers comic reflections about several characters in the play, most pointedly about Parolles. His mouth is lewd, and his manner is absurd.

A Widow of Florence

For a fee, the widow helps Helena arrange and execute the old "bed trick"; here, Bertram is trapped into sleeping with his own wife in the belief that she is another woman.

Diana

Diana is the widow's daughter and Helena's ally in her pursuit of Bertram. She is the bait used to trap Bertram. Diana displays a

good deal of wit and a composed bearing under the pressure of the courtly observers during the final "revelation scene."

Mariana

A neighbor of the widow.

Two French Lords, the Brothers Dumain

The two noblemen who mastermind the plot to expose Parolles. They are friends to Bertram.

SUMMARIES AND COMMENTARIES

ACT I – SCENE 1

Summary

At the opening of this play, the main figures of the plot are weighed down with thoughts of two recent deaths. "Young Bertram," the Count of Rousillon (in France), has lost his father, as has Helena, the beautiful daughter of a famed physician, Gerard de Narbon, "whose skill was almost as great as his honesty." Bertram's mother is further distressed that she must say farewell to her son, now a ward of the ailing king of France. Opening the play, she exclaims: "In delivering my son from me [to the king's court], I bury a second husband." As an older lord and a close family friend, Lafeu assures the Countess that in the king she shall find someone as good as a second husband for herself and a second father for Bertram.

Once mother and son have said their goodbyes and he has departed, Helena delivers a soliloquy in which she reveals a double reason for her sadness. "I am undone; there is no living, none, if Bertram be away. . . ." A "follower" of Bertram, named Parolles, interrupts her and engages her in an extended dialogue on the subject of virginity. He pledges that he will "return a perfect courtier" from Paris, where he is about to go with Bertram. A second soliloquy, this time by Helena, reveals her to be resolute in her pledge to pursue her unlikely attempt at capturing Bertram's heart: ". . . my project may deceive me, but my intents are fixed, and will not leave me."

Commentary

A gloomy mood at the opening of the play is often customary for a Shakespearean comedy. But amidst the general lamentation over departures and deaths, there is some emotional ambiguity which sets a tone for this "problem play," as *All's Well* has been called by some critics. Lafeu remarks on Helena's tears at the Countess' praise, whereupon the older woman kindly says that Helena must *not* cry lest people think that she is "affecting" or putting on her sad demeanor. Helena's answer – "I do affect a sorrow indeed, but I have it too" – seems puzzling, until we learn in her soliloquy that she is crying for the sake of her unacknowledged lover, and not (or not entirely) for her deceased father. Helena keeps to herself much of the time, partly because she may be embarrassed at the feelings she has for a person beyond her station, socially. In the first moments of the play, she is uneasy, aware that Bertram is "so far above me."

One wonders what Bertram's feelings in this first scene may be. Though some editors have disputed the placement of Lafeu's second line in the following exchange, it seems possible that the wise, older gentleman is reacting to Bertram's abruptness in cutting off his mother's speech.

> *Lafeu:* Moderate lamentation is the right of the
> dead,
> Excessive grief the enemy to the living.
> *Countess:* If the living be enemy to the grief,
> The excess makes it soon mortal.
> *Bertram:* Madam, I desire your holy wishes.
> *Lafeu:* How understand we that?
>
> (64–69)

There is something of a gentle handslap in the tone of Lafeu's last line. Bertram may be speaking rudely, overstepping the quite normal impatience of a young man about to leave home (and to leave off mourning) for a more adventuresome life in Paris. Consider for yourself if this line – "How understand we that?" – makes sense here, or if it might better fit in just before the words "moderate lamentation," where some editors place it.

There is an abrupt shift in tone at Parolles' entrance. Helena con-

fides that he is a "notorious liar" whom she tolerates only because of his association with Bertram. The conversation between the two, saturated in polite obscenity, gives the audience a clear view of the play's heroine as someone who is not so romantic and frail that she cannot survive in the gritty world of court sexuality. Parolles argues conventionally that virginity is nonsensical since it goes against nature and since it condemns, as it were, its own mother, and furthermore, he says that it loses its value proportionately with age. Helena can bandy easily enough with this affected man of the world and can ask in her own private interest, "How might one do, sir, to lose it [one's virginity] to her own liking?" But her mind is fixed on Bertram, for he will soon appear at court in Paris. Notice the way that her lines are broken to indicate breathlessness and distraction as she imagines Bertram there amidst pretty mistresses:

> . . . with a world of pretty, fond, adoptious christendoms [young women with adopted names] that blinking Cupid gossips [*i.e.*, that the god of love godfathers]. Now shall he – I know not what he shall. God send him well! The court's a learning place, and he is one –
>
> (187–92)

Helena insults Parolles, calling him a coward and an overdressed fool, and he beats a hasty retreat. Her feistiness is evident.

Helena's second soliloquy differs from the first in its view of fate. Now the focus is on individual determination.

> Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie,
> Which we ascribe to heaven. The fated sky
> [influence of the stars]
> Gives us free scope; only doth backward pull
> Our slow designs when we ourselves are dull.
>
> (231–34)

The exchange between Helena and Parolles seems to have had the effect of bolstering her courage.

ACT I – SCENE 2

Summary

Bertram presents himself at court in Paris just as the king is bidding his soldiers to fight in the Italian wars. The sight of Bertram, Lafeu, and Parolles spurs memories of former days:

> I would I had that corporal soundness now,
> As when thy father and myself in friendship
> First tried our soldiership!
>
> (24–26)

At the end of this short scene, the king asks how long it has been since the court physician at Rousillon died; if he were still alive – perhaps he could cure the king's illness.

Commentary

Shakespeare broadly contrasts youth and age here, with Bertram greeting the feeble king while preparations are made for a war in which the young gentlemen of France can prove themselves. Note that the war is described as being more a training ground than anything else: ". . . freely have they leave/ To stand on either part" means they can fight for either Siena or Florence, as far as the king is concerned. In this play, "honor" has a number of different connotations, one of which is the prestige a young man like Bertram can achieve in battle.

One remark which the king makes in describing Bertram's father has a bearing on the previous scene. The king says:

> Who were below him he used as creatures of another
> place,
> And bowed his eminent top to their low ranks,
> Making them proud of his humility,
> In their poor praise he humbled.
>
> (42–45)

The gist of the comment is that Bertram's father was *not* a social snob. Ironically, a motivating factor in Bertram's behavior toward Helena (whom we know to be sensitive to the issue) is just such snobbery.

ACT I – SCENE 3

Summary

The clown Lavache begs the Countess for permission to marry Isbel for the simple reason that he is "driven on by the flesh." The Countess listens to his facetious and cynical logic concerning marriage, and then playfully (though this will change), she remonstrates with him: "Wilt thou ever be a foul-mouthed and calumnious knave?"

In the second part of the scene, the Countess' steward informs her that he has overheard Helena, who thought she was alone, saying that "she loved your son." "Keep it to yourself," is the Countess' advice, adding, "Many likelihoods informed me of this before. . . ." Helena enters and when confronted with the fact–"You love my son"–she begs pardon. But, to her surprise, she receives Bertram's mother's blessing in her endeavor–"Thou shalt have my leave and love"–and so Helena makes plans to go to Paris with a remedy "to cure the desperate languishings whereof/ The King is rendered lost." Of course, her plan is also to pursue the man she loves.

Commentary

In the encounter with the clown, the Countess engages in explicit sexual talk, just as Helena did with Parolles. Shakespeare's clowns, of course, had license to say things which smack of the other side of respectability, but these two scenes which depict refined women at ease with the language of obscene puns and innuendoes give a strong impression of the very real sexual matter at the heart of *All's Well That Ends Well.*

The steward's description of Helena, who expressed herself "in the most bitter touch of sorrow that e'er I heard virgin exclaim in," moves the Countess to reflect on her own past romantic involvements:

> Even so it was with me, when I was young;
> If ever we are nature's, these [pains] are ours; this
> thorn
> Doth to our rose of youth rightly belong;
> Our blood [passion] to us, this to our blood is born.
>
> (134–37)

试读结束：需要全本请在线购买： www.ertongbook.cc