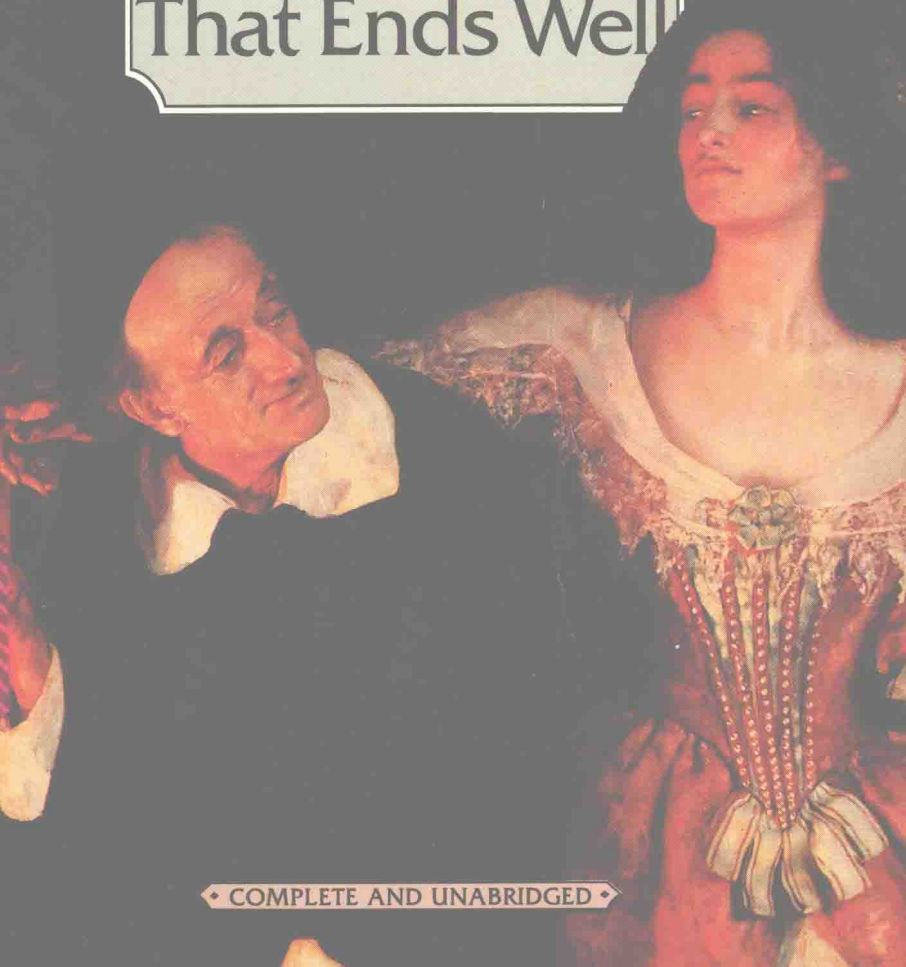


WORDSWORTH CLASSICS

WILLIAM  
SHAKESPEARE

All's Well  
That Ends Well



◆ COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED ◆

ALL'S WELL THAT  
ENDS WELL



Charles Dickens



WORDSWORTH CLASSICS

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL



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## INTRODUCTION

*All's Well that Ends Well* (circa 1602) eludes definitive classification as a Comedy, History or Tragedy. It also has a close affinity with *Measure for Measure*, both plays forming part of Shakespeare's later work and they have been variously described as tragi-comedies, problem comedies or dark comedies. There is an enigmatic quality to *All's Well that Ends Well* and it has been categorised as being 'crude enough to be early, yet mature enough to be late.' Indeed, it is only in recent years that scholars have agreed on the position of *All's Well that Ends Well* as being a work of Shakespeare's maturity. The inspiration for the play was almost certainly Boccaccio's *Decameron*. The story concerns Bertram, the young Count of Rousillon, who on his father's death is summoned to the court of the King of France, leaving behind him his mother and the heroine Helena, daughter of the famous physician Gerard de Narbon.

The King of France is suffering from a disease widely thought of as being incurable. However, Helena who loves the courtier Bertram, travels to Paris and effects a cure for the king by means of a prescription left by her father. As a reward, she is permitted to choose her husband and she selects Bertram who unwillingly obeys the king's order to marry her. Under the malign influence of the worthless braggart Parolles, Bertram enters the service of the Duke of Florence and informs Helena that until she can remove the ring from his finger and bear his child he will not return to her and neither may she call herself his wife. Helena disguises herself as a pilgrim and travels to Florence where she finds Bertram courting Diana, the daughter of her hostess in Florence. Helena discloses her true identity to the host family and takes Diana's place at a secret assignation with Bertram having put about the story that she (Helena) is dead. Helena exchanges rings with Bertram, giving him the king's ring, and conceives a child by Bertram. The King of France, on a visit to the house of Bertram's mother, recognises his ring and accuses Bertram of killing Helena, of whom he is very fond, and demands an explanation on pain of death. Helena then appears and reveals the truth of her masquerade as Diana and explains that Bertram's conditions have now been met. The stage is then set for the classic Shakespearean *finale* in which the remorseful

Bertram accepts Helena as his loving wife. *All's Well that Ends Well* is a problem play at many levels; there is the difficulty in feeling sympathy for Bertram, and in taking real pleasure in Helena's success, as her character is not as developed as many of the leading women in Shakespeare's plays. There are many similarities with Mariana and Angelo in *Measure for Measure*. Helena's mother, on the other hand, is one of Shakespeare's great creations. The subplot concerning Parolles is regarded by many as being one of the most successful and dominant aspects of the play both on the page and on the stage.

*Details of Shakespeare's early life are scanty. He was the son of a prosperous merchant of Stratford-upon-Avon, and tradition has it that he was born on 23rd April 1564; records show that he was baptised three days later. It is likely that he attended the local grammar school, but he had no university education. Of his early career there is no record, though John Aubrey states that he was, for a time, a country schoolmaster. How he became involved with the stage is equally uncertain, but he was sufficiently established as a playwright by 1592 to be criticised in print. He was a leading member of the Lord Chamberlain's Company, which became the King's Men on the accession of James I in 1603. Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway in 1582, by whom he had two daughters and a son, Hamnet, who died in childhood. Towards the end of his life he loosened his ties with London, and retired to New Place, his substantial property in Stratford that he had bought in 1597. He died on 23rd April 1616 aged 52, and is buried in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford.*

#### **Further reading:**

R Berman: *A Reader's Guide to Shakespeare's Plays* 1973

R A Foakes: *Shakespeare: The Dark Comedies to the Last Plays* 1971

W W Lawrence: *Shakespeare's Problem Comedies* 1931; 1969

K Muir (ed): *Shakespeare The Comedies* 1965

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

The scene: Rousillon, Paris, Florence,  
Marseilles

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

KING OF FRANCE

DUKE OF FLORENCE

BERTRAM, *the young Count of Rousillon*

LAFEU, *an old lord*

PAROLLES, *a follower of Bertram*

RINALDO, *Steward to the Countess of Rousillon*

LAVACHE, *Clown to the Countess*

*Two French gentlemen at Court named DUMAIN,  
later captains in the Florentine army*

*A soldier, pretending to be an interpreter*

*A gentleman, astringer to the French king*

*A Page*

COUNTRESS OF ROUSILLON, *mother to Bertram*

HELENA, *a waiting-gentlewoman to the Countess*

*A Widow of Florence*

DIANA, *daughter to the widow*

MARIANA, *neighbour to the widow*

*Lords, officers, soldiers, &c., French and Florentine*



# ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

[I. I.] *A room in the palace of Rousillon*

*Enter BERTRAM the young Count of Rousillon, his mother the COUNTESS, HELENA, and Lord LAFEU, 'all in black'*

*Countess.* In delivering my son from me I bury a second husband.

*Bertram.* 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.

*Lafeu.* You shall find of the king a husband, madam—you, sir, a father. He that so generally is at all times good, must of necessity hold his virtue to you, whose worthiness would stir it up where it wanted rather than 10 lack it where there is such abundance.

*Countess.* What hope is there of his majesty's amendment?

*Lafeu.* He hath abandoned his physicians, madam, under whose practices he hath persecuted time with hope, and finds no other advantage in the process but only the losing of hope by time.

*Countess.* This young gentlewoman had a father—O, that 'had,' how sad a passage 'tis—whose skill was almost as great as his honesty; had it stretched so far, 20 would have made nature immortal, and death should have play for lack of work. Would, for the king's sake, he were living. I think it would be the death of the king's disease.

*Lafeu.* How called you the man you speak of, madam?

*Countess.* He was famous, sir, in his profession, and it was his great right to be so: Gerard de Narbon.

*Lafeu.* He was excellent, indeed, madam. The king  
30 very lately spoke of him admiringly and mourningly: he was skilful enough to have lived still, if knowledge could be set up against mortality.

*Bertram.* What is it, my good lord, the king languishes of?

*Lafeu.* A fistula, my lord.

*Bertram.* I heard not of it before.

*Lafeu.* I would it were not notorious....Was this gentlewoman the daughter of Gerard de Narbon?

*Countess.* His sole child, my lord, and bequeathed to  
40 my overlooking. I have those hopes of her good that her education promises: her dispositions she inherits, which make fair gifts fairer; for where an unclean mind carries virtuous qualities, there commendations go with pity, they are virtues and traitors too; in her they are the better for their simpleness; she derives her honesty and achieves her goodness.

*Lafeu.* Your commendations, madam, get from her tears.

*Countess.* 'Tis the best brine a maiden can season her  
50 praise in. The remembrance of her father never approaches her heart but the tyranny of her sorrows takes all livelihood from her cheek....No more of this, Helena, go to, no more, lest it be rather thought you affect a sorrow than to have—

*Helena.* I do affect a sorrow indeed, but I have it too.

*Lafeu.* †How understand we that? 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. 60

*Bertram.* Madam, I desire your holy wishes.

*Countess.* Be thou blest, Bertram, and succeed  
thy father

In manners as in shape: thy blood and virtue  
Contend for empire in thee, and thy goodness  
Share with thy birthright. Love all, trust a few,  
Do wrong to none: be able for thine enemy  
Rather in power than use; and keep thy friend  
Under thy own life's key: be checked for silence,  
But never taxed for speech.... What heaven more will,  
That thee may furnish, and my prayers pluck down, 70  
Fall on thy head.... [*she kisses him*] Farewell, my lord.

[*she turns to go, passing Lafeu on the way*]

'Tis an unseasoned courtier. Good my lord,  
Advise him.

*Lafeu.* He cannot want the best

† That shall attend his lord.

*Countess.* Heaven bless him! Farewell, Bertram.

[*she departs*]

*Bertram.* The best wishes that can be forged in your  
thoughts be servants to you! [*to Helena*] Be comfortable  
to my mother, your mistress, and make much of her.

*Lafeu.* Farewell, pretty lady, you must hold the credit  
of your father. 80

[*Bertram and Lafeu go out by another door*]

*Helena.* O, were that all! I think not on my father,  
And these great tears grace his remembrance more  
Than those I shed for him. What was he like?

I have forgot him: my imagination  
Carries no favour in't but Bertram's....  
I am undone, there is no living, none,  
If Bertram be away.... 'Twere all one

That I should love a bright particular star,  
 And think to wed it, he is so above me:  
 90 In his bright radiance and collateral light  
 Must I be comforted, not in his sphere....  
 Th'ambition in my love thus plagues itself:  
 The hind that would be mated by the lion  
 Must die for love. 'Twas pretty, though a plague,  
 To see him every hour, to sit and draw  
 His archéd brows, his hawking eye, his curls,  
 In our heart's table; heart too capable  
 Of every line and trick of his sweet favour....  
 But now he's gone, and my idolatrous fancy  
 100 Must sanctify his relics. Who comes here?

*PAROLLES enters*

One that goes with him: I love him for his sake,  
 And yet I know him a notorious liar,  
 Think him a great way fool, solely a coward.  
 Yet these fixed evils sit so fit in him,  
 That they take place, when virtue's steely bones  
 Look bleak i'th' cold wind: withal, full oft we see  
 Cold wisdom waiting on superfluous folly.

*Parolles.* Save you, fair queen.

*Helena.* And you, monarch.

110 *Parolles.* No.

*Helena.* And no.

*Parolles.* Are you meditating on virginity?

*Helena.* Ay...You have some stain of soldier in you;  
 let me ask you a question. Man is enemy to virginity,  
 how may we barricado it against him?

*Parolles.* Keep him out.

*Helena.* But he assails, and our virginity, though  
 valiant in the defence, yet is weak: unfold to us some  
 warlike resistance.

*Parolles.* There is none: man, setting down before 120  
you, will undermine you and blow you up.

*Helena.* Bless our poor virginity from underminers  
and blowers up! Is there no military policy, how  
virgins might blow up men?

*Parolles.* Virginity being blown down, man will  
quicklier be blown up: marry, in blowing him down  
again, with the breach yourselves made, you lose your  
city. It is not politic in the commonwealth of nature to  
preserve virginity. Loss of virginity is rational increase,  
and there was never virgin got till virginity was first lost. 130  
That you were made of is mettle to make virgins.  
Virginity by being once lost may be ten times found:  
by being ever kept, it is ever lost: 'tis too cold a com-  
panion: away with't!

*Helena.* I will stand for't a little, though therefore  
I die a virgin.

*Parolles.* There's little can be said in't—'tis against the  
rule of nature. To speak on the part of virginity, is to  
accuse your mothers; which is most infallible dis-  
obedience. He that hangs himself is a virgin: virginity 140  
murders itself, and should be buried in highways out  
of all sanctified limit, as a desperate offendress against  
nature. Virginity breeds mites—much like a cheese—  
consumes itself to the very paring, and so dies with  
feeding his own stomach. Besides, virginity is peevish,  
proud, idle, made of self-love, which is the most in-  
hibited sin in the canon. Keep it not—you cannot choose  
but lose by't. Out with't: within ten year it will make  
itself ten, which is a goodly increase—and the principal  
itself not much the worse. Away with't. 150

*Helena.* How might one do, sir, to lose it to her own  
liking?

*Parolles.* Let me see. Marry, ill, to like him that ne'er

it likes. 'Tis a commodity will lose the gloss with lying; the longer kept, the less worth: off with't while 'tis vendible; answer the time of request. Virginity, like an old courtier, wears her cap out of fashion, richly suited, but unsuitable, just like the brooch and the toothpick, which wear not now... Your date is better in your  
 160 pie and your porridge than in your cheek: and your virginity, your old virginity, is like one of our French withered pears, it looks ill, it eats drily, marry 'tis a withered pear; it was formerly better, marry yet 'tis a withered pear: will you any thing with it?

*Helena.* †Not my virginity yet...

There shall your master have a thousand loves,  
 A mother, and a mistress, and a friend,  
 A phœnix, captain, and an enemy,  
 A guide, a goddess, and a sovereign,  
 170 A counsellor, a traitress, and a dear;  
 His humble ambition, proud humility:  
 His jarring concord, and his discord dulcet:  
 His faith, his sweet disaster; with a world  
 Of pretty, fond, adoptious christendoms,  
 That blinking Cupid gossips. Now shall he...  
 I know not what he shall. God send him well!  
 The court's a learning place, and he is one—

*Parolles.* What one, i' faith?

*Helena.* That I wish well. 'Tis pity—

180 *Parolles.* What's pity?

*Helena.* That wishing well had not a body in't,  
 Which might be felt, that we, the poorer born,  
 Whose baser stars do shut us up in wishes,  
 Might with effects of them follow our friends,  
 And show what we alone must think, which never  
 Returns us thanks.

*A page enters*

*Page.* Monsieur Parolles, my lord calls for you.

[*he goes*

*Parolles.* Little Helen, farewell. If I can remember thee, I will think of thee at court.

*Helena.* Monsieur Parolles, you were born under a 190 charitable star.

*Parolles.* Under Mars, I.

*Helena.* I especially think, under Mars.

*Parolles.* Why under Mars?

*Helena.* The wars have so kept you under, that you must needs be born under Mars.

*Parolles.* When he was predominant.

*Helena.* When he was retrograde, I think, rather.

*Parolles.* Why think you so?

*Helena.* You go so much backward when you fight. 200

*Parolles.* That's for advantage.

*Helena.* So is running away, when fear proposes the safety: but the composition that your valour and fear makes in you is a virtue of a good wing, and I like the wear well.

*Parolles.* I am so full of businesses, I cannot answer thee acutely: I will return perfect courtier, in the which my instruction shall serve to naturalize thee, so thou wilt be capable of a courtier's counsel, and understand what advice shall thrust upon thee—else thou diest in thine 210 unthankfulness, and thine ignorance makes thee away. Farewell: when thou hast leisure, say thy prayers; when thou hast †money, remember thy friends: get thee a good husband, and use him as he uses thee: so farewell.

[*he goes*

*Helena.* Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie,  
Which we ascribe to heaven: the fated sky

Gives us free scope; only doth backward pull  
 Our slow designs when we ourselves are dull.  
 What power is it which mounts my love so high?  
 220 That makes me see, and cannot feed mine eye?  
 The mightiest space in fortune nature brings  
 To join like likes, and kiss like native things.  
 Impossible be strange attempts to those  
 That weigh their pains in sense, and do suppose  
 What hath been cannot be: who ever strove  
 To show her merit that did miss her love?  
 The king's disease—my project may deceive me,  
 But my intents are fixed, and will not leave me.

[*she goes*]

[1. 2.] *A room in the King's palace at Paris*

*A flourish of cornets: the KING OF FRANCE enters supported by attendants, lords and councillors following; he sits in the chair of state and letters are placed before him*

*King.* The Florentines and Senoys are by th'ears,  
 Have fought with equal fortune, and continue  
 A braving war.

*I Lord.* So 'tis reported, sir.

*King.* Nay, 'tis most credible. We here receive it  
 A certainty, vouched from our cousin Austria,  
 With caution, that the Florentine will move us  
 For speedy aid; wherein our dearest friend  
 Prejudicates the business, and would seem  
 To have us make denial.

*I Lord.* His love and wisdom,  
 10 Approved so to your majesty, may plead  
 For amplest credence.

*King.* He hath armed our answer,  
 And Florence is denied before he comes:  
 Yet, for our gentlemen that mean to see



The Tuscan service, freely have they leave  
To stand on either part.

2 *Lord.* It well may serve  
A nursery to our gentry, who are sick  
For breathing and exploit.

*BERTRAM, LAFEU, and PAROLLES enter the chamber*

*King.* What's he comes here?

1 *Lord.* It is the Count Rousillon, my good lord,  
Young Bertram.

*King.* Youth, thou bear'st thy father's face.  
Frank nature, rather curious than in haste, 20  
Hath well composed thee: thy father's moral parts  
Mayst thou inherit too! Welcome to Paris.

*Bertram.* My thanks and duty are your majesty's.

*King.* I would I had that corporal soundness now,  
As when thy father and myself in friendship  
First tried our soldiership! He did look far  
Into the service of the time, and was

Discipled of the bravest: he lasted long,  
But on us both did haggish age steal on,  
And wore us out of act...It much repairs me 30  
To talk of your good father...In his youth  
He had the wit, which I can well observe  
To-day in our young lords; but they may jest  
Till their own scorn return to them unnoted  
Ere they can hide their levity in honour:

So like a courtier, contempt nor bitterness  
Were in his pride or sharpness; if they were,  
His equal had awaked them, and his honour,  
Clock to itself, knew the true minute when  
Exception bid him speak, and at this time 40  
His tongue obeyed his hand. Who were below him  
He used as creatures of another place,