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Foreign Affairs: The Search for the Lost Husband in Shakespeare's *All's Well that Ends Well*

All's Well that Ends Well is notoriously problematic. More than anything, the actions of the heroine as she first weds and then beds the unwilling Bertram have disturbed critics. The play's folktale roots, however, demonstrate that Helena's transgressive agency was conventional in a folkloric world no longer familiar to us. As W.W. Lawrence first pointed out, the two major movements of the play (Helena's curing of the king and her fulfillment of Bertram's impossible conditions for marriage) both derive from folklore motifs – motifs that are linked in Shakespeare's primary narrative source, Boccaccio's tale of Giletta of Narbonne.¹ If we go beyond the folkloric territory mapped by Lawrence to consider the tale-type known as 'The Search for the Lost Husband' (number 425 in the Aarne-Thompson Index),² the apparent contradictions in Helena emerge as complementary aspects of her gendered heroism, and part of a deeply conservative narrative tradition. Shakespeare, I propose, found this tale-type latent in Boccaccio and magnified it, heightening the resemblance between the protagonist and the folktale heroine who searches for her lost husband, then finds and regains him. A consideration of this narrative tradition provides a valuable, though obviously not sufficient, lens for viewing *All's Well*.

The folklorist Jan-Öjvind Swahn summarizes the AT 425 tale-type as follows: 'A woman breaks the taboo which is incidental to her association with a supernatural, male being, and he thus disappears. She searches for him, finds and regains him.'³ The AT 425 tale-type is an old story – one of the oldest – with over 1500 versions on record from all over the Indo-European language area and beyond.⁴ According to Richard Dorson, these 'are only a fragment of the mass of variants that could be accumulated from the living oral tradition'.⁵ Donald Ward states that AT 425 'has achieved an acceptance through time and space and among peoples of the most diverse cultures as [has] no other magic tale'.⁶ The earliest recorded version, the story of Cupid and Psyche from Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*, dates from the mid-second century CE. Behind Apuleius's Latin text is a Greek oral tale; and, far behind

that, scholars have detected antecedents in Hittite texts in the second millennium BCE.⁷ Discussing the origins of the tale-type, Ward observes:

It is the story of the sexual union of the epitome of divine male sexuality with the apotheosis of mortal female sexuality. The eroticism of the modern folktale is, of course, perceived—as is the nature of folktales—not in stimulating scenes of passion, but by external signs and symbols. But the farther we become removed from relatively modern sensibilities of Western society, the more we discern the erotic element that is central to the early strata of the tradition.⁸

In later versions, the original disparity between human female and divine male often emerges in a class difference: thus for example, in the English ‘Sorrow and Love’, a farmer’s daughter marries a gentleman.⁹

Folklorists divide the AT 425 tale-type into several sub-types.¹⁰ Sub-type A, known as ‘Cupid and Psyche’, is the most widespread as well as the oldest on record. The best known to modern audiences – thanks to its multiple literary versions since the eighteenth century and its film adaptations in the twentieth – is sub-type C, ‘Beauty and the Beast’.¹¹ The best known to Shakespeare’s audience, however, was probably sub-type B, which circulated in western Europe from the early middle ages.¹² In this sub-type, a young girl, usually through her own volition, marries a man under a spell: typically he is a beast—often a bull, a bear, or a dog—by day and a man by night. He disappears when she violates a tabu, frequently an oath of secrecy about his condition. To regain him she must perform a penitential search, overcoming apparently insuperable obstacles, such as climbing a glass hill, as in the Scottish ‘The Black Bull of Norrway’,¹³ or crossing the Red Sea, as in the German ‘The Singing, Springing Lark’,¹⁴ or, as in the Italian ‘King Crin’, weeping seven bottles of tears, and wearing out seven pairs of iron shoes, seven iron mantles, and seven iron hats.¹⁵ Her search usually entails the heroine’s emotional and physical abjection: the heroine of the Scottish ‘The Hoodie-Crow’ must wear horse-shoes on hands and feet to pick her way over a hill of poison thorns.¹⁶ When the heroine of ‘Sorrow and Love’ pursues her betrothed, she has ‘only thin slippers on, and soon began to look more and more like a tramp. Gave away all her jewellery in exchange for food ... Did not know how to beg, as she had been brought up a lady. Asked everywhere for ... [him], but no one knew the name. Nearly starved’.¹⁷ However, the AT 425 heroine is usually aided in her quest by three female helpers—usually crones, sometimes her husband’s relatives – who give her three valuable objects; they may also impose tasks, such as filling a bowl with tears. When she at last finds her

husband – ‘east of the sun, and west of the moon’, in the words of the well-known Scandinavian version¹⁸ – he is about to be married to another woman; the true wife bargains with the false one, exchanging the three gifts for three nights in the same room as her husband. On the first two nights the husband sleeps, drugged by the rival bride, while the heroine pleads for recognition. So, in ‘The Black Bull of Norrøway’, she sings:

Seven lang years I served for thee,
The glassy hill I clamb for thee,
The bluidy shirt I wrang for thee;
And wilt thou no wauken and turn to me?¹⁹

When he finally awakes – as if from the dead – and recognizes her, the spell is broken: he rejects the false bride and embraces the true one.

It would obviously be impossible to ascribe a single meaning to a tale so old and so various. A story's significance changes with each retelling.²⁰ However, the remarkable stability of the tale-type over time and space allows us to risk a few generalizations. First of all, it is woman-centered; indeed, Swahn believes that ‘it developed almost exclusively in a female milieu’.²¹ It thus resembles the Indian ‘women-centered tales’ identified by A. K. Ramanujan: tales ‘told by women about women and often to younger women’, in which ‘saving, rescuing, or reviving a man, often solving riddles on his behalf, becomes the life-task of the heroine. In such tales women predominate The antagonists are usually women ... [and] her chief helpers also tend to be women.’ Ramanujan also notes that ‘marriage begins rather than ends the story; a separation ensues, and then a rescue of the male by the female’.²² Since it is a woman-centered tale, we see things from the heroine's point of view. Thus her husband is both beast and god; monstrous and beautiful; frightening and desirable. The tale-type is also clearly about the sexual initiation of the female;²³ the transforming power of erotic love; and the domestication of the male, the mysterious and foreign Other.

Although the ‘Beauty and the Beast’ sub-type emphasizes the heroine's aversion to her mate's monstrosity – an aversion she must overcome in order to free him – in most cases the male's strangeness isn't in itself an obstacle to their union; indeed, the protagonist's desire for her mysterious mate is often stressed. In ‘The Glass Mountain’, a stranger, who has taken shelter for the night with a widow and her three daughters, insists on having the youngest as his wife; ‘and the lass, she liked his looks well enough, so it was settled that way’.²⁴ In a Scottish version, ‘The Tale of the Hoodie,’ a crow asks three sisters in turn to marry him; the first two reject him, saying ‘an

ugly brute is the hoodie [crow]'; the youngest says, 'I will wed thee ... a pretty creature is the hoodie'.²⁵ In the Italian 'Filo D'Oro and Filomena', retold by Calvino, a girl picks a savoy instead of the cabbage she was supposed to gather and finds a tiny crystal window in the ground; a 'handsome youth' appears: 'Come to me, lovely maiden. I'm madly in love with you!' The summons is irresistible: 'the next thing she knew – as though drawn by a magnet – Filomena found herself underground with him, in a room fit for a queen' where the youth gives her kisses and a bag of money.²⁶ Calvino's phrase 'as though drawn by a magnet' neatly underscores the current of desire that animates these tales. In 'Pinto-Smalto', from Giambattista Basile's seventeenth-century collection, the power of desire to construct its object emerges clearly: here a merchant's daughter, refusing his efforts to arrange a marriage for her, makes a husband for herself out of sugar, almonds, rose-water, perfumes and jewels; and in answer to her prayers, the Goddess of Love brings him to life: 'When her father saw this handsome young man, whom he had not previously seen enter, coming out of his daughter's room, he was filled with amazement; but when he perceived his marvellous beauty ... he decided to consent to the marriage'.²⁷ A Ligurian version represents the arbitrary nature of desire even more comically: a princess sees an old woman washing turnips and remarks on their beauty; the old woman replies, 'Yes, they're beautiful, but not as beautiful as the right arm of King Richard.' Although she has never seen King Richard, the girl falls in love with his right arm, and the next day sets out to find him.²⁸

Inevitably inadequate to the demands of her relationship with her strange husband, the heroine in these tales loses him through her own fault, whether this is disobedience, indiscretion, or curiosity. In some cases, it is her desire for him in conjunction with her violation of a tabu that occasions her loss. Thus when the wife in 'East of the Sun, West of the Moon', prompted by her mother, dares to look at her sleeping husband by candlelight, she sees that 'he was the loveliest Prince one ever set eyes on, and she fell so deep in love with him on the spot, that she thought she couldn't live if she didn't give him a kiss there and then'.²⁹ The kiss costs her dearly, however, since while giving it, she spills hot wax and thus wakes him.

Frequently the heroine's initial desire for a mate seems in itself a violation of an unspoken tabu, and she is punished for it. In the Italian variant 'The Mouse with the Long Tail', a princess, rebelling against her father's refusal to arrange a marriage for her, tells him: 'I'm giving you two days, and if in that time you don't find someone to betroth me to, I shall kill myself.' Her father

punitively insists she marry the first passer-by, who happens to be a mouse with a long tail. After the wedding, the humiliated princess finds herself magically abandoned on a deserted plain, alone and longing for her mouse-husband. She is compelled to seek him on foot, weeping and saying over and over, 'Alas, my mouse! / My loathing has changed to longing!'³⁰

Similarly, in the English 'Sorrow and Love', the heroine's unfocussed desire for a husband initiates the plot. When a farmer asks his three daughters what they will have from the market, the older ones ask for material things, like a dress, while the youngest asks for a pennyworth of 'sorrow and love'. The father cannot find it, of course, and so he is pleased when he meets 'a handsome young gentleman' who says that 'he knew what it was. ... Young gentleman said he could get it for him, but he must see his daughter ... Young gentleman stayed only a few seconds. Said she was to be there at eight o'clock next morning and he would bring her some sorrow and love.' Clearly, however, he has already brought it, since 'she was madly in love with him, thought of him all night, couldn't sleep, wishing for eight o'clock to come'.³¹ The sorrow of love has begun to torment her, and as the tale unfolds, she has much more than a pennyworth of it. In this tale the girl seems to be punished *primarily* for the desire that consumes her. When she arrives, 'trembling with excitement', one second late for her appointment with the handsome young gentleman: "You're too late," he said, "it's past eight o'clock." He got off his horse, took hold of her hand, removed her glove, and then bit off the end of her little finger. With it he made three bloodstains on the front of his white shirt. Then he jumped on his horse. "My name is Squire King Kaley: if you ever find me again then I'll make you my wife." He set off.³² Here the cruelly arbitrary excuse for girl's punishment (she is one second late) points to an unstated cause: she's surely punished for her desire, for wanting 'sorrow and love.' Like the biblical Eve, who is condemned to desire the husband who will rule over her; and like the princess married to the mouse in the Italian tale; the girl is punished with desire: she loses her heart – as well as the end of her little finger and the three symbolic drops of blood, so suggestive of sexual initiation – to Squire King Kaley. She must seek until she finds him, and can claim her promised place as his wife.

The AT 425 heroine typically pays for her 'sin' by the ordeal of the search that characterizes this tale-type. Her journey is thus like a pilgrimage – an act of atonement – and not surprisingly, in some versions the heroine actually dresses as a pilgrim.³³ Her search also has some of the features of an other-worldly journey: in Apuleius, Psyche must literally go to hell;³⁴ in an Arabic version, 'The Camel Husband', the heroine travels 'into the land of the

Djinn', crossing 'the boundary between the world above and the world beneath'.³⁵ (Sub-type J, unique to the Irish-Gaelic tradition, is actually named 'the maid who serves in hell'³⁶). This arduous search is also redemptive, since it finally allows the heroine to break the spell on her husband, bringing him back from a metaphoric death, and restoring him to his true identity. The eponymous camel husband in the Arabic tale tells his wife, 'you have opened the way for my return. From today I can live not as a camel, but as a man.'³⁷ In most versions (and again, the 'Beauty and the Beast' sub-type presents an exception), the husband's alienation from his true self is expressed in his betrothal to another woman, the rival whom the heroine has to supplant. The happy re-marriage that concludes the plot is thus at once the heroine's triumphant achievement and the reward for her labours.

As I observed earlier, it is reasonable to assume Shakespeare knew some oral version of this tale – perhaps more than one. As James T. Bratcher has pointed out, an AT 425 story appears to be one of the sources of Peele's *Old Wives' Tale*, and thus it 'seems virtually certain' that 'a variant of this tale, involving a bear as the bridegroom' was current in sixteenth-century England.³⁸ Shakespeare probably also knew Apuleius's *Golden Ass*, and drew on it for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*;³⁹ and he encountered something like an AT 425 story in Boccaccio's tale of Giletta of Narbonne. Like many AT 425 heroines, Giletta is led by her desires into an unequal and painful union: we are told (in William Painter's translation) that she 'fervently fell in love with Beltramo, more then was meete for a maiden of her age'.⁴⁰ Like the daughter in Basile's 'Pinto Smalto', who makes her own ideal husband, Giletta refuses all suitors. She pays for her inordinate desire with the pain of Beltramo's desertion on their wedding day; and his subsequent written refusal to return from Italy. Like the typical AT 425 heroine, too, Giletta embarks on a search for her lost husband, and as a pilgrim, she presumably travels on foot, a constant feature of the traditional search. She also finds her husband sexually in thrall to another woman, and bargains for the opportunity to spend the night with him. Finally, she begs him to recognize her as his true wife on the basis of her labors, and the story ends with their happy remarriage.

Shakespeare heightens the resemblance of this source tale to the AT 425 type in several ways. First, he emphasizes the 'sorrow and love' that drive the heroine. Helena begins the play in tears, and in her first soliloquy declares her hopeless passion for the handsome Bertram, the 'bright particular star' who is so above her (1.1.88).⁴¹ Significantly, she uses bestial imagery to express her sense of the disparity between herself and Bertram:

Th'ambition in my love thus plagues itself:
 The hind that would be mated by the lion
 Must die for love. (1.1.92-4).

The metaphor is disturbing: it suggests not only her lowly status relative to Bertram (menial hind versus royal lion), her frankly physical desire for him (she wants to be 'mated'), but also Bertram's potential for cruelty: lions *prey* on deer. It is not clear whether Helena imagines the hind 'dying for love' because the match would be impossible, and thus her love frustrated, or because a hind 'mated by' a lion wouldn't survive the marriage bed. In any case, Bertram figures in Helena's 'idolatrous fancy' as an animal bridegroom: he is both a young god and a savage beast. Like the 'handsome youth' made of sugar, almonds and jewels in the Italian tale, Helena's Bertram is a love-object fashioned by desire.

In Boccaccio the heroine responds to her husband's desertion on their wedding day by demonstrating her competence: 'hopinge by her well doinge to cause him to retourne into his countrye, [she] went to Rossiglione.... And perceyving that through the Countes absence all things were spoiled and out of order, shee like a sage Ladye, with greate diligence and care, disposed his things in order againe'.⁴² Beltramo's response to her efforts is a letter stating the impossible conditions for their marriage (the ring and child). Giletta, 'after shee had a good while bethoughte her, purposed to finde meanes to attaine the two thinges, that thereby she might recover her husbande'; and so she sets out on her pilgrimage. Like her exemplary management of the estate, Giletta's journey is as a deliberate strategem, and demonstrates her 'constant mind and good wit'.

By contrast, Shakespeare represents Helena's journey as impelled by deep remorse: there is nothing rational or calculated about it. Her passionate soliloquy in 3.3, after she reads Bertram's 'dreadful sentence,' establishes her anguished sense of guilt and her determination to sacrifice herself to save Bertram from an early – though arguably well-deserved – death in battle:

Whoever shoots at him, I set him there.
 Whoever charges on his forward breast,
 I am the caitiff that do hold him to't,
 And though I kill him not I am the cause
 His death was so effected. Better 'twere
 I met the ravin lion when he roared
 With sharp constraint of hunger; better 'twere

That all the miseries which nature owes
Were mine at once. (3.3.112–20)

As a soliloquy, this gives credence to Helena's subsequent self-presentation in her letter to the Countess:

I am Saint Jacques' pilgrim, thither gone.
Ambitious love hath so in me offended
That barefoot plod I the cold ground upon,
With sainted vow my faults to have amended. (3.4.4–7)

As the closing couplet of her sonnet-letter asserts – 'He [that is, Bertram] is too good and fair for death, and me, / Whom I myself embrace to set him free' (16–17) – Helena undertakes a redemptive journey into a symbolic underworld for Bertram's sake.

By presenting the heroine's flight from Roussillon as an act of genuine self-abnegation, rather than a conscious stratagem, Shakespeare sacrifices the logic of the source tale: as many critics have complained, it is difficult to reconcile Helena's stated intentions in act 3 (self-immolation) with her opportunistic orchestration of the bed-trick in act 4. But Shakespeare gains a great deal: not only does he mitigate anxieties about his heroine's display of agency, he heightens her resemblance to the immensely sympathetic and popular AT 425 heroine, whose travel and travail are acts of atonement. While Helena's discourse of pilgrimage is specifically medieval and Christian, the penalty she pays for her 'ambitious love' is part of a much older narrative tradition.

Other changes Shakespeare makes to his source also heighten the story's likeness to the AT 425 pattern. Thus he emphasizes the arduous nature of the journey performed by Helena with Diana and the Widow: he stages them traveling, struggling with fatigue and frustration (4.4, 5.1). Shakespeare's striking addition of the dowager Countess – wholly absent in Boccaccio – supplies a powerful and sympathetic 'crone' who authorizes Helena's project and gives her emotional and material support. Specifically, she offers 'leave and love, / Means and attendants' when Helen sets out for court (1.3.252–3) and promises to 'pray God's blessing into [her] attempt' (1.3.252–5). With Diana and her mother – considerably more helpful in Shakespeare than in Boccaccio – the Countess forms a trinity of female helpers, reminiscent of the female aid provided in the AT 425B tales.⁴³ More significant, perhaps, are the changes Shakespeare makes to the husband in Boccaccio's tale. While Beltramo is simply churlish and proud, Bertram is much worse – a callous

seducer and liar, he is in patent need of the redemption Helena symbolically offers in the final scene. Unlike Giletta in the final confrontation with Beltramo, who cries 'My Lorde, I am thy poore unfortunate wyfe',⁴⁴ Helena does not even assert her identity when she confronts her husband: she says, with perhaps greater pathos and humility, 'Tis but the shadow of a wife you see, / The name and not the thing'; Bertram's response, 'Both, both. O pardon', signifies his recognition of her status as his wife, and his penitence (5.3.307–8).

In the AT 425 tales the act of recognition itself is enough to free the husband from enchantment. At the end of 'The Hoodie-Crow', the husband declares, 'That is my married wife ... and no one else will I have', and at that very moment the spells fell off him, and never more would he be a hoodie'.⁴⁵ The simplicity of this ending satisfies because it is generically appropriate: we accept it just as we accept the original premise of a crow's marriage to a girl. Shakespeare, however, famously problematizes his folk-tale materials, arousing different, conflicting generic expectations.⁴⁶ Most readers want more from Bertram than the few words Shakespeare allows him: as Susan Snyder observes, 'the intractable baseness of its hero ... makes the happy ending feel not inherent but imposed by fiat'.⁴⁷ Or, as Carolyn Asp puts it succinctly, 'The frog prince remains a frog until the end and the princess chooses to overlook his slimy skin'.⁴⁸

My claim then is not that acknowledging the influence of the AT 425 tale-type is enough to make *All's Well* really end well. It does, however, provide a valuable interpretive lens, clarifying aspects of the play that have puzzled critics; in particular, the apparent contradictions in the character of Helena. Variousy condemned for her aggressive pursuit of Bertram, and praised for her self-abnegating devotion to him, Helena provokes dissension. Is she self-denying as her soliloquy in 3.2 implies, or self-seeking as her actions in Florence may suggest?⁴⁹ Is she saintly or, as Susan Snyder charges, obsessive in her idealization of Bertram and her focus on her own feelings?⁵⁰ Some of these contradictions dissolve, I believe, if we acknowledge Helena as 'the wife who searches for her lost husband', a figure who is typically at once obsessive and saintly; indeed, the obsessiveness is an aspect of the saintliness. Crucially in this narrative tradition, the wife forfeits her husband through her own fault: she is responsible for his disappearance, as Helena insists that she is to blame for Bertram's flight. Like Helena's, the wife's quest for the lost husband is at once a penitential pilgrimage and a rescue mission. She redeems him from the alienation of enchantment, symbolized in the person of the rival bride, not

simply by her wit, but through her suffering and with providential aid. Both agent and patient, she embodies a powerful stereotype of female heroism.

An awareness of the AT 425 narrative tradition also underscores how deeply conservative Helena's apparently transgressive heroism is. Like much folklore, this tale-type promotes the stability of the community, and the preservation of patriarchal values and institutions. While we don't know exactly how oral tales were exchanged in early modern England, it seems reasonable to imagine contexts something like those in modern rural Europe, where an oral tradition of story-telling still functions to perpetuate the dominant values of the community. Analyzing the performance of Spanish AT 425 variants in 1980s, James Taggart finds that older women used the stories to prepare younger women for the transition from courtship to marriage. Girls were encouraged to overcome sexual anxieties and schooled to assume the burden of emotional labor in marriage: the wife's love would humanize her husband and restore rifts in their relationship. Men retold the same stories, affirming this division of labor and their need for a woman's devotion. 'The metaphorical description of the women's role in maintaining the marital bond appears in the "Cupid and Psyche" stories told by women as well as men, in which heroines endure long and difficult ordeals to restore their relationships with lost husbands. The role of men in maintaining the marital tie is substantially less, judging from the stories circulating in oral tradition.'⁵¹

Alessandro Falassi has analysed in detail the exchange of folklore at the Tuscan *veglia*, for centuries 'the ritualized evening gathering of family and friends in front of the fire' and still in the 1970s the 'main occasion for meeting and the place of social reality for the members of the patriarchal families and their friends and acquaintances'. Though several people of both sexes might contribute stories and songs in any evening, the 'housemother' – the patriarch's wife – presided over the gathering and acted as the primary storyteller. As Falassi explains it, the *veglia*

consisted of several parts placed in sequence: the first part was the storytelling of such popular märchen as 'Princess and the Frog,' 'Cinderella,' and 'Little Red Riding Hood.' Next followed a time for riddles, catches, lullabies, and folk prayers as children went to bed. Afterward came courtship through folk song, often sung in dialogue form by young people. Finally there was the part devoted to narratives and folk songs about married couples, which served to emphasize further the expected behavioral norms for both sexes..⁵²

The first part of the *veglia* instructed the children in their social and familial obligations; the second concerned the reciprocal contractual obligations of

courtship; the third part focused on the preservation of those obligations in marriage. Magic-romantic and love tales, such as AT 425 were particularly popular. As Falassi observes, the AT 425A story in which a father picks a rose from the garden of a monster and then must surrender his daughter in replacement offers a 'paradigmatic example of the circulation of woman-object. Who takes a rose [woman] belonging to someone else has to give his daughter in replacement.'⁵³ Thus children learned the structure of patriarchal marriage, and the gender roles expected of them. More generally Falassi comments on the predilection of the older members of the family for tales of the vicissitudes and crises of marriage: of absent husbands, and tested wives; of unchaste wives justly punished; and of chaste wives falsely accused, but finally rewarded by the reconstitution of the couple.⁵⁴ Like these stories, AT 425 would reaffirm for its audience the centrality of marriage for the female, and her responsibility for its preservation.

Falassi also analyzes the 'anti-*veglia*', the gathering at the inn of single men, rogue males who 'could not, or did not want to, or were not supposed to be integrated into the system of the *veglia* and of the family'.⁵⁵ He contrasts their transgressive performances (obscenity, drunkenness, gambling, misogyny, hatred of family rules, blasphemy, aggression, discord, and social protest) with the socially sanctioned performances of the *veglia* (verbal censorship, moderate drinking, permitted games, praise of women, praise of family, praise of religion, politeness, concord, praise of institutions).⁵⁶ This opposition of *veglia* and anti-*veglia* – the former a celebration of the patriarchal family, the latter a rebellion against it – takes us back to Shakespeare's *All's Well that Ends Well*. Another way to view the morality-play struggle for Bertram's soul is as a contest between the spirit of the *veglia* – embodied in Helena and her trinity of female helpers – and the spirit of the anti-*veglia*, embodied in the rogue male Parolles. Though Bertram attempts to rebel against his obligations to his king and surrogate father, his mother and his wife, and to assert his membership in the company of rogue males, the forces of the patriarchal family, acting through Helena, are too much for him.

If, as Swahn believes, the AT 425 tale-type is remarkable for its preservation by female storytellers, if women indeed have 'cherished' this narrative tradition,⁵⁷ it is perhaps because the tale acknowledges and affirms the value of a wife's emotional work within a marriage; offering women comfort with its promise of the male beast made human, the foreign domesticated. However, as Cristina Bacchilega argues, "The Search for the Lost Husband" cycle repeatedly reenacts the patriarchal exchange of women, and affirms women's collusion with the system'.⁵⁸ Speaking specifically of 'Beauty and the Beast',

she observes that ‘the tale’s insidiously patriarchal appeal depends most on the active but self-effacing heroine – a protagonist with agency whose subjectivity is construed as absence and whose symbolic reward is in giving rebirth to another’.⁵⁹ Her observation might be applied to the AT 425 tradition as whole, and helps to account for the discomfort feminists might feel as they survey it. *All’s Well that Ends Well* is, I suggest, Shakespeare’s enigmatic intervention in this equivocal tradition, and as such it challenges us to scrutinize afresh the cultural construction of marriage as the primary ground and goal of female heroism.

Notes

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- 1 W.W. Lawrence, *Shakespeare’s Problem Comedies* (New York, 1931), 32–63.
- 2 Antti Aarne, *The Types of the Folktale: a Classification and Bibliography*, translated and enlarged by Stith Thomson, FF Communications, no. 3, 2nd revision (Helsinki, 1961), 140–5. I will refer to the tale-type as AT 425.
- 3 Jan-Öjvind Swahn, *The Tale of Cupid and Psyche* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1955), 18.
- 4 For the number of documented variants, see W.F.H. Nicolaisen, ‘Guest Editor’s Foreword’, *Midwestern Folklore* 15 (1989), 69. For the distribution, see Swahn, *The Tale of Cupid and Psyche*, 202.
- 5 Richard Dorson (ed), *Folktales Told Around the World* (Chicago, 1975), 230.
- 6 Donald Ward, ‘“Beauty and the Beast”: Fact and Fancy, Past and Present’, *Midwestern Folklore* 15 (1989), 119.
- 7 Graham Anderson, *Fairytales in the Ancient World* (London, 2000), 61–9.
- 8 Ward, ‘Beauty and the Beast’, 120.
- 9 ‘Sorrow and Love’, *The Penguin Book of English Folktales*, ed. Neil Philip (London, 1991), 80–5.
- 10 Swahn slightly revises Aarne’s definition of the type (*The Tale of Cupid and Psyche*, 19–21), and provides a useful summary of the sub-types according to their motifs (24–36).

- 11 The critical literature on sub-type C, 'Beauty and the Beast', is substantial. Important recent discussions include Cristina Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairytales* (Philadelphia, 1997), 72–102; Betsy Hearne, *Beauty and the Beast: Visions and Revisions of an Old Tale* (Chicago, 1989); Maria Tatar, *Off With Their Heads!* (Princeton, 1992), 140–62; Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde* (London, 1994), especially 273–318; and Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tale as Myth* (Lexington, 1994), 24–48.
- 12 For the probable date, see Swahn, *The Tale of Cupid and Psyche*, 436. He conjectures that the sub-type B arose 'either among the Bretons or, under the influence of Breton motifs, in France. From there the tale has partly wandered northward and, via the Island Celts, entered Scandinavia, partly east-and southward' (295). Swahn notes that the oldest references in literature to tales which probably belong to this sub-type are from north-western Europe; the earliest cited by him is an allusion in *The Complaynt of Scotland* (1549) to 'The tail of the thre futtiit dog of norrovay' (London, 1872–73), 63 (Swahn 295 n).
- 13 'The Black Bull of Norroway', *Popular Rhymes of Scotland*, ed. Robert Chambers (Edinburgh, 1847), 244–7.
- 14 'The Singing, Springing Lark', Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, translated and with an introduction by Jack Zipes (New York, 1992), 317–21.
- 15 'King Crin', Italo Calvino, *Italian Folktales*, trans. George Martin (New York, 1980), 57–60.
- 16 'The Hoodie-Crow', *The Lilac Fairy Book*, ed. Andrew Lang, (London, 1910), 336–40.
- 17 'Sorrow and Love', Philip, *English Folktales*, 82.
- 18 'East of the Sun, West of the Moon', Peter Christian Asbjørnsen, *East of the Sun, West of the Moon* (New York, 1953), 1–16. The tale was among several gathered in Norway by Asbjørnsen and his collaborator Jorgen Moe, published in *Norske Folkeeventyr* (Christiania [Oslo], 1842–1852), and translated into English by George Webb Dasent (1859).
- 19 'The Black Bull of Norroway', Chambers, 247. Katherine Briggs reprints an anglicized version of this tale in *A Dictionary of British Folktales in the English Language*, Part A, 2 vols. (London, 1970), 1: 155–8; see also, in the same volume, 'The Glass Mountains' (274–7), and 'The Red Bull of Norroway' (458–60). Neil Philip includes an incomplete but interesting English version, 'The Glass Mountain', in *The Penguin Book of English Folktales*, 72–5.
- 20 Neil Philip cautions against the tendency of scholars to 'think of story as something that inheres in the plot rather than in the words, images and

performance.... Best, perhaps, to speak not of a story but of a narration. For an orally transmitted tale is not a fixed thing, like a static printed text. It is fluid, changeable, alive. Each narration is a separate event' (*The Penguin Book of English Folktales*, xvi).

- 21 Swahn, *The Tale of Cupid and Psyche*, 437. Dégh observes that since Swahn does not present statistical evidence, his assertion of a female AT 425 tradition is 'only an impressionistic comment, not an established fact' ('How Do Storytellers Interpret the Snakeprince Tale', *Narratives in Society: A Performer-Centered Study of Narration*, FF Communications no. 255 [Helsinki, 1995], 137–51). However, Swahn's knowledge of the tale-type was so thorough that his impressions carry some weight.
- 22 The protagonists in these stories, Ramanujan continues, 'are true cousins of the feisty heroines in Shakespeare's comedies that owe their plots to Italian novellas, which in turn are related to tales in the *Arabian Nights* and the *Kathaasaritsagara*' (*Folktales from India*, edited and with an introduction by A. K. Ramanujan [New York, 1991], xxv).
- 23 Betsy Hearne comments succinctly, 'It is obvious in 'Cupid and Psyche' ... that the burning issue is sex. The mysterious husband crawls into Psyche's couch the first night and makes her his bride. She not only gets used to this situation but likes it, looks forward to her nights with him, and immediately becomes pregnant.' Hearne, *Beauty and the Beast*, 15.
- 24 Philip, *The Penguin Book of English Folktales*, 72.
- 25 'The Tale of the Hoodie', narrated by Ann MacGilvray, *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, collected and translated by J.F. Campbell, new ed., 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1994), 1: 141.
- 26 Italo Calvino, *Italian Folktales*, 474. The story of Filomena's passionate and troubled relationship with her 'handsome youth' is clearly closely related to Giambattista Basile's story of Parmetella (*The Pentamerone*, 5.4), the earliest Renaissance version of Cupid and Psyche (Anderson, *Fairytales in the Ancient World*, 62). Parmetella's subterranean lover is a beautiful black slave who becomes a handsome white youth in bed. See also Calvino's 'The King's Son in the Henhouse', *Italian Folktales*, 627–31.
- 27 Giambattista Basile, *The Pentamerone*, ed. N.M. Penzer, trans. Benedetto Croce, 2 vols. (London: Bodley Head, 1932), 2: 115. The motif of the husband literally constructed by the protagonist also appears in Calvino's 'The Handmade King', *Italian Folktales*, 489–93. In a West Virginia variant, 'The Dough Prince,' the handmade husband ('straight, tall, and very handsome') leaves the heroine to campaign against some bandits 'in some far-off land', where he is

- captured by the 'queen of the palace'; see Ruth Ann Musick, ed., *Green Hills of Magic: West Virginia Folktales from Europe* (Lexington, 1970), 149. See also 'Master Semolina', in *Folktales of Greece*, ed. Georgios Megas, trans. Helen Coloclidis (Chicago, 1970), 60–5.
- 28 'Il braccio destro di Riccardo', *Fiabe Liguri*, scelte da Pino Boero e tradotto da Beatrice Solinas Donghi (Milan, 1982), 46.
- 29 Asbjørnsen, *East of the Sun*, 6.
- 30 Calvino, *Italian Folktales*, 653–5.
- 31 Philip, *The Penguin Book of English Folktales*, 81.
- 32 Philip, *The Penguin Book of English Folktales*, 82.
- 33 Swahn cites five instances of this motif in sub-types A and B, from Italy, Spain and Germany (*The Tale of Cupid and Psyche*, 247).
- 34 Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, trans. W. Aldington, revised by S. Gaselee, Loeb Classical Library (London, 1915), 6.16–20, 272–9.
- 35 'The Camel Husband', *Arab Folktales*, ed. and trans. Inea Bushnaq (New York, 1986), 192.
- 36 Swahn *The Tale of Cupid and Psyche*, 33, 329–33.
- 37 Bshnaq, *Arab Folktales*, 192–3.
- 38 James T. Bratcher, 'Peele's *Old Wives' Tale* and Tale-Type 425A', *Studies in Medieval, Renaissance, American Literature*, ed. Betsy Feagan Colquitt (Fort Worth, 1971), 97.
- 39 For Shakespeare's possible use of Apuleius in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, see *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, ed. Geoffrey Bullough, 8 vols. (London, 1957–75), 1: 372, and 398–400. Apuleius was translated into English by William Adlington in 1566; and, as Gaslee observes in his introduction to the Loeb edition, the translation must have been popular since it was reprinted three times in the next thirty years, and again forty years later: 'the great rarity of all these editions is further evidence that they were appreciated and constantly read' (*The Golden Ass*, viii).
- 40 *The Palace of Pleasure* (Novel 38), Bullough (ed.), *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, 2.389.
- 41 This and all subsequent quotations of the play are from Susan Snyder's edition in the Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford, 1994).
- 42 The quotations in this paragraph are from Bullough (ed.), *Narrative and Dramatic Sources*, 2.392.
- 43 Missing from both Shakespeare and Boccaccio are the female antagonists with whom the AT 425 heroine has to contend. Although in Apuleius, it is Cupid's mother, Venus, who tries to thwart the protagonist, in most AT 425 variants

it is the mother of the rival bride. Thus the AT 425 stories, like many folktales, feature both hostile and nurturing mother-figures. *All's Well that Ends Well* is remarkable in foregrounding only the latter.

- 44 Bullough (ed.), *Narrative and Dramatic Sources*, 2: 394.
- 45 'The Hoodie-Crow', Lang, *The Lilac Fairy Book*, 340.
- 46 See for example Sheldon Zitner's remarks on 'the reductive interpretations of critics who extract from both the story and the play folklore materials that supposedly carry with them imperatives for response' (*All's Well that Ends Well*, Twayne's New Critical Introductions to Shakespeare [Boston, 1989], 14–16); and Susan Snyder's introduction to *All's Well the Ends Well*, 5–6.
- 47 Snyder, in her introduction to *All's Well that Ends Well*, 47.
- 48 Carolyn Asp, 'Subjectivity, Desire and Female Friendship in *All's Well That Ends Well*,' *Literature and Psychology* 23, no. 4 (1986), 48.
- 49 For a survey of idealizers and detractors, see Snyder's introduction to *All's Well*, 32–7.
- 50 Snyder contends that 'idealization of Helen by the other characters and by critics . . . should be suspect . . . when we see how her obsession creates the perfect love object by neglecting all his qualities except high birth and good looks. In order to achieve their ends, the sanctifying critics must in turn neglect this very obsessiveness, which . . . drives her to focus totally on her own feelings with no attention to his' (Intro., 37–8).
- 51 James M. Taggart, *Enchanted Maidens: Gender Relations in Spanish Folktales of Courtship and Marriage* (Princeton, 1990), 164.
- 52 Alessandro Falassi, *Folklore by the Fireside: Text and Context of the Tuscan Veglia* (Austin, 1980), xviii, 3.
- 53 Falassi, *Folklore by the Fireside*, 250–4. Calvino also notes the popularity of AT 425 'not only in Sicily but also in Tuscany and more or less everywhere' (*Italian Folktales*, xxix).
- 54 Falassi, *Folklore by the Fireside*, 259, 146–52.
- 55 Falassi, *Folklore by the Fireside*, 260.
- 56 Falassi, *Folklore by the Fireside*, 260–1.
- 57 Swahn, *The Tale of Cupid and Psyche*, 437–8.
- 58 Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairytales*, 76.
- 59 Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairytales*, 78.