“Derived Honesty and Achieved Goodness”: Doctrines of Grace in *All's Well That Ends Well*

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All's Well That Ends Well deeply concerns faith—in particular, how one may come by it. When Helena persuades the King of France that, despite his doubts, she can cure him, she attributes her healing power to “[t]he greatest grace lending grace.”¹ She thus establishes a theological dimension to the play borne out by the entirety of II.i. The King’s fistula merely represents superficially his inner canker: despair. His loss of hope is brought to our attention within the first thirteen lines of the play, and from the beginning to the end of II.i, the dialogue between Helena and her spiritual patient is that between a believer and a skeptic gradually turned proselyte. When the process of conversion begins in II.i.99, the King has already expressed his defeatism: he has wished himself dead, has virtually denied his usefulness to the living, and has surrendered his social “place” to more productive youths (I.ii.64–69). Then, like a pouting child who takes his disappointment out on anyone who tries to cheer him, the King flatly rejects Lafew’s invitation to be healed:

Laf.	Will you be cur’d
Of your infirmity?	
King. No.	(II.i.68–69)

Hence, Lafew must cajole the King as though he were a churlish boy to be humored:

O, will you eat
No grapes, my royal fox? Yes, but you will
My noble grapes, and if my royal fox
Could reach them. (II. 69–72)

When Helena takes over from Lafew as the King's verbal seducer to health, she must convince the King that his situation is not "inaidible"; she must make him "credulous" toward her "laboring art" (II.i.119, 115, 118). In his "despair," the King recalls Doctor Faustus (II.i.144). But the Helen in *All's Well*, far from securing Faustus' damnation with a kiss, dispels the misgivings of her "patient" with "[i]nspired merit," "certainty," and "confidence" (II.i.204, 148, 169). By the end of II.i, she has moved the King from conviction of his "peril" (l. 133) to "trust" in her powers and therefore to hope of recovering from his disease (l. 206). Helena's willingness to stake her life on her faith has instilled faith in another (II. 187-189).

Few critics have denied the allusions in II.i to religious faith. Some have also connected Helena's healing of the King to her cure of Bertram's faithlessness through exposing his deceit. And occasionally a scholar has seen religious allusions in other features of *All's Well*. Robert Y. Turner, for example, believes Bertram's story to be a variation on that of the prodigal son, popular during the years 1601-1604. R. G. Hunter more specifically associates Bertram's utter inability to behave well with the common Protestant view of a humanity who cannot help but work in every way toward their own destruction and who can be saved only by God.²

What critics have not noticed to date, however, is a more precise and revealing relationship between theology and *All's Well*. That relationship entails the Reformation controversy concerning the nature of grace. Is grace given exclusively at birth through God's election, as Reformed doctrine maintains? Or can faith be acquired in part through good works, as Catholics were teaching before the Reformation and continued to assert after the Council of Trent (1545-1563)? Put another way, is our salvation thoroughly out of our hands, dependent solely upon a predestined gift of grace? Or do we have some free will to pursue, to accept, or to reject grace? Can people cooperate at all with God, or is He all-powerful, and humanity completely impotent?³

This debate was by no means outmoded at the turn of the seventeenth century. Indeed, much of the dramatic tension in *All's Well* (1602-1603) reflects it—for instance, in II.iii, where Helena is rewarded for her "heavenly effect" on the King with her choice of husbands (II. 23-24). The King's language, as he instructs Helena's decision, re-emphasizes the symbolism of divine grace that, as in II.i, forms part of her rich characterization:

Thy frank election make;
Thou hast power to choose, and they none to forsake. (II. 55-56)

Helena's "election" mimics the Calvinist God's determination of who will be saved; this instance is but one of many in the play where human love points beyond itself to imply divine love, as well. Moreover, in the King's eyes, "election" by Helena is as irresistible to a man as is God's grace in Calvin's view.⁴ And no wonder: the King himself has thoroughly abandoned his despair under Helena's spell. But in the spirit of a reformed sinner who, once having witnessed the truth, cannot understand how others remain blinded, the King overestimates Helena's attractiveness to Bertram, who finds her quite resistible: "I cannot love her, nor will strive to do 't" (I. 145). More significantly, Bertram's rejection of Helena's devoted love subtly but sharply mocks the basis of Reformed theology: in refusing the "election" freely offered him, Bertram exercises free will. Contrary to Protestant teaching, he plays a role in determining the course of his own salvation, much as Helena has partaken in guiding the King's favor toward her.

In II.iii Shakespeare thus undercuts the very Calvinist idea of irresistible grace that he seems wholeheartedly to advance in II.i, where the King succumbs to Helena's magic. In "Giletta of Narbona," the source of *All's Well*, Painter offers nothing comparable to Shakespeare's II.iii, an addition that seems pointedly allusive to the theology of grace. Expanding his satire on Calvinist irresistible grace in II.iii, Shakespeare also creates sympathy for Bertram's disobedience to the King and for his distaste toward Helena's "election." Bertram's understandable shock at having thrust upon him a wife he has not even considered wooing is accompanied at first by a perfectly reasonable plea:

My wife, my liege? I shall beseech your Highness,
In such a business, give me leave to use
The help of mine own eyes. (II. 106-108)

So argues Hermia to Egeus in I.i of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and so dictates comic convention: the young must claim their autonomy from the old. We glimpse this comic truth earlier in *All's Well*, when Helena rebuffs the Countess' every attempt to call herself Helena's "mother," until those attempts become funny in their futility (I.iii.137 ff.). Later in the play, Bertram restates his need to choose freely when he explains why he has spurned Helena and now woos Diana: "I was compell'd to her [Helena], but I love thee [Diana] / By love's own sweet constraint, and will for ever / Do thee all rights of service" (IV.ii.15-17). Of course, Bertram proves insincere here, since he eventually deserts Diana. But his search for freedom and his rebellion against the King's coercion are not, in themselves, either

wicked or alien to comedy. Bertram, we somehow feel, is entitled to resist the King and to elect his own spouse.⁵

Nevertheless, Bertram's peculiar struggle for independence cannot be fully understood in the context of comic convention alone—if for no other reason than that, unlike most of his comic counterparts, he soon loses our sympathy as he proceeds not to earn responsibility for himself, but to lie, cheat, and evade responsibility. In fact, Bertram's profligacy and his resistance toward the love that Helena ceaselessly offers him continue to elaborate on the play's complicated, ever-shifting attitude toward the same question: where does grace come from? In II.iii the answer might appear to be not from divine "election" (l. 55), as represented by Helena's choice of Bertram, but from the decisions one makes on one's own. Yet that answer baldly contradicts another running throughout *All's Well*—that grace, like a gift, rains freely and irrespective of human merit, as it seems to do on the King (II.i) and finally on Bertram in V.iii. Many critics, along with Arthur Kirsch, have observed that the Bertram of V.iii "seems at his most unattractive precisely at the moment he is being redeemed." This apparent inconsistency between what Bertram deserves and what he receives has been almost universally identified by scholars, from Johnson onward, as the play's central problem.⁶ Yet Bertram's lack of merit presents no problem whatsoever in a Calvinist scheme: there, the forgiveness that descends on the undeserving demonstrates God's bounteous mercy, and God, according to His good and secret pleasure, elects as recipients of His grace some people who may not, from our limited and human perspective, appear worthy. But there is yet another, true problem at the play's conclusion: the Calvinism that can clearly account for Bertram's so-called "redemption" is continually undermined by another clear viewpoint in the play—that grace and love are earned rewards for goodness.

Although understanding Bertram's redemption may involve a tangle of theological, as well as dramatic, complications, *All's Well* is not a "Christian" play. Nor is it merely a comedy. It is, rather, a "problem play" that incorporates comedy and in which different Christian beliefs are explored in light of and in conflict with each other. By the term *problem play* I refer to a precise definition, probably best expressed by Ernest Schanzer:

A play in which we find a concern with a moral problem which is central to it, presented in such a manner that we are unsure of our moral bearings, so that uncertain and divided responses to it in the minds of the audience are possible or even probable.⁷

In Schanzer's view, then, a "problem play" is known by two criteria: it studies a moral problem itself, and it presents a moral problem to us. Although this definition does not rule out the possibility of resolution to either problem, it still implies that a "problem play" is more devoted to moral inquiry than to moral conclusions. *All's Well* is no exception in this regard.⁸

The problem of grace—of how we come by divine or even human love—is but one avenue to exposing the identity of *All's Well* as that of a "problem play." Yet this problem is a striking means of illustrating how the play continually defies the very judgments it constantly invites us to make: *All's Well* alternates its own apparent judgments about election and free will. The play first promotes one seeming truth and then substitutes its antithesis. Never does the work satisfyingly arbitrate between the two "truths." Instead, *All's Well* constantly revises its own judgments and ever teases ours.

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When Bertram has finally seen through Parolles' false exterior, he speaks a line that raises a complex of ironies. "All's one to him," says Bertram of the scoundrel. "What a past-saving slave is this!" (IV.iii.138-139). The question of whether Parolles or any other character in *All's Well* can be called "past-saving" involves far more consideration than Bertram gives it and, ultimately, a web of self-contradictory responses. But perhaps the sharpest sting in Bertram's judgment of Parolles is that it will all too soon appear to fit Bertram himself: having witnessed the shame that deception has brought on Parolles, Bertram nevertheless re-enacts the parasite's mistake when, for instance, he lies repeatedly to the King about his abuse of Diana (V.iii). Evidently, Bertram cannot imagine that his own treachery makes Diana suffer as Parolles' betrayal has hurt him. The education afforded Bertram by Parolles' unmasking seems wasted; it is as though Bertram were "past-saving."

How are we, then, to understand the forgiveness finally showered on Bertram by the one most injured at his hands? Over and again, *All's Well* instructs our interpretation of such cleansing grace with conflicting signs, many of them involving human love as a metaphor for divine love. From one perspective, the play frequently tempts us to think of grace as a state to be earned, as a condition over which one can exercise some control. Helena clearly voices this attitude, in connection with human love, when she says of Bertram: "Nor would I have him till I do deserve him" (I.iii.199). Much as Helena bases love on merit, so does the King demand that Bertram

"prove" his "honor" (V.iii.183). Similarly, Helena refers to her high regard for and payment to Diana as compensation for the maiden's labor:

... since you have made the days and nights as one,
To wear your gentle limbs in my affairs,
Be bold you do so grow in my requital
As nothing can unroot you. (V.i.3-6)

Though each of these details is small in itself, they all add up to plant in the audience's mind the idea that love, reputation, and financial security are rewards for good behavior. By extension, God's love, too, would be such "requital."

At the same time, however, the play asserts another position on grace, again through scattered details that gradually cohere. It is the Reformed view that divine grace is not earned, that it is gratuitous and thus out of one's control. The Countess, for example, alludes to Helena as an "angel" to "[b]less" her "unworthy husband"; here again, the spiritual language applied to human love suggests that divine grace is given unconditionally (III.iv.25-26). In addition, the King speaks of good looks and good character—and the Countess, of youth's passion—all as inherited, not acquired (I.ii.19-22, I.iii.128-135). Likewise, at one point Helena makes herself and Diana out to be the mere pawns of divine design:

Doubt not but heaven
Hath brought me up to be your daughter's dower,
As it hath fated her to be my motive
And helper to a husband. (IV.iv.18-21)

Helena also seems to relinquish control when she refrains from imposing herself on Bertram: "In everything I wait upon his will" (II.iv.54). She surrenders herself to "waiting" in the two senses of "serving" Bertram and of "awaiting" his acceptance.

Although there is little of the specifically doctrinal in the preceding examples, once we become conscious of how these subtleties covertly manipulate and confuse our opinions about free will and predestination, a link comes into focus between these details and the play's larger, more obvious vacillations: permeating *All's Well*, hints that human beings enjoy free choice compete for our approval with signs that humanity is predestined. In turn, this dramatic tension mirrors an actual historical controversy over the source of grace in Shakespeare's England.

Historical research suggests that English Renaissance society as a whole never fully embraced the Reformed doctrine of election. Such may be less the case during the period of high Renaissance drama—from the 1580s through the early 1600s—than both before and after those years. Yet given the disagreements over predestination that are known to have arisen during the era that spawned *All's Well*, the influence of such controversy on the play is probable. Although the Church of England officially adopted the essential Reformed doctrine of election in the Thirty-Nine Articles, the wording of the Articles, as well as the spirit of their contents, often generated vigorous argument.⁹

Debate centered particularly on the issue that persists in *All's Well*—that is, on the degree to which one could be said to affect one's own salvation or damnation. The same question might emerge in various forms—for example, in arguments over whether the elect persevered or could fall from grace because of ceasing to merit salvation. But always the question was fundamentally the same, and frequently the answers conflicted. Charles and Catherine George cite the English “tendency to retreat from the extremes of predestinarian ideology” as the single exception to the “remarkable consistency” of English Reformed thought. Dewey Wallace goes farther: he insists that, throughout the Reformation era, conflict “shift[ed] focus” from one aspect of the whole theology of grace to another, but that “more and more the doctrine of predestination came to the fore as the touchstone of how grace was regarded.” Nicholas Tyacke goes so far as to argue that the origins of the English Civil War can be traced to the Arminian controversy about grace that grew steadily from about 1605 on.¹⁰

A glance at the debate about election and free will in Shakespeare's time can place *All's Well* in historical context. Over the years the controversy repeatedly involved the facing off of humanists. Some would, like Luther and then Calvin, remain humanist scholars while calling into serious doubt the humanist glorification of a humanity empowered to make righteous choices.¹¹ Others, like Erasmus, More, and generations of Christian humanists to follow, would attempt to preserve some of the dignity that earlier Italian humanists like Pico had claimed for Adam's descendants.¹² Freedom to choose rightly confers that dignity. As England gradually adopted Reformed theology during the reigns of Edward and Elizabeth, the Christian humanism that shared its ancestry with Protestantism did not die out. It instead survived until Milton (1608–1674), and without fail its most distinguished inheritors, even if they profess Protestantism, posit some degree of human free will to choose rightly. In the disagreements about faith that ensued in England from the 1540s, one of the two participants

almost always had obvious Christian humanist leanings.¹³ Richard Hooker fought several battles over predestination—first with his colleague Walter Travers, and later with the anonymous author(s) of *A Christian Letter* (1599), the first printed response to Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*.¹⁴

But what about the lay inhabitants of London who would have peopled the original audience of *All's Well*? Were they aware of the bickering among their learned authorities? In fact, the public relished episodes of clerical incompatibility. Alan Fager Herr explains that, despite Queen Elizabeth's measures to quell controversial sermons, "a great many . . . were preached, and not only preached but printed as well." Yet the more exciting arena for the general public was contests between churchmen, for these went uncensored by state officials, who thought them harmless. Herr elaborates:

People flocked to hear men who did more exciting things than point out the way to heaven, and they read the works of these same men, thus encouraging presses to print the controversial sermons and the treatises which depended from them. Controversies rarely remained the property of the original contestants only, but were taken up by others until we find such titles as this: *A Disprooffe of D. Abbots Counterprooffe against D. Bishops Reprooffe of the defence of M. Perkins Reformed Catholic*. If readers could and would follow a theological controversy as intricate as this, it is plain that the age liked controversy, and that it was bound to flourish in spite of any prohibitions and inhibitions there might be.¹⁵

No doubt scenes between Richard Hooker and Walter Travers were of such moment as Herr describes: these two preachers alternately espoused differing views of grace and free will from the same pulpit. Indeed, W. Speed Hill writes: "The conflict between Hooker and Travers was especially intense, threatening the peace of the Inns of Court and thus also of the nation." It would be resolved only by the removal of one man from office—in this case, Travers.¹⁶

Martha Tuck Rozett relates the popularity of preaching that Herr describes to the rise of Elizabethan drama:

The growing popularity of preaching, like that of playing, accounted for a dramatic increase in the number of publications during the 1570s and 1580s. . . . Through pulpit and press, the attitudes of the preachers and the language that attached to those attitudes passed into the culture and became the common possession of playwrights and audiences alike. Whether or not these attitudes were consciously endorsed by the people exposed to them is unimportant; what matters is that their widespread influence gradually began to affect the way the plays were written and received.

Rozett shows that the same Londoners who attended the sermons were in general those who went to the theater, such that divines came to compete with playwrights for their audiences. A sizable portion of Shakespeare's audience in 1600, then, could be expected to have possessed no little familiarity with theological complexities of the day.¹⁷

English Renaissance drama thus came honestly by any doctrinal debate it incorporated. The specific preoccupation with free will and predestination that one finds in *All's Well* perhaps reaches its clearest and most provocative handling in the revenge play type: the issue of revenge, after all, is that of control, of where the power and will to act originate and of how they are licensed. Before such plays as *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Antonio's Revenge*, and *Hamlet* were dreamt of, however, the story of Jacob and Esau became the standard for illustrating the mechanics of election. One encounters the brothers, epitomizing the gulf between elect and reprobate, throughout sermons and religious treatises, as well as in the anonymous play of about 1568.¹⁸ The Calvinist double predestination in *Jacob and Esau* is eerily straightforward. God's intents are so fixed that no amount of sneaky deception can lower Jacob in His esteem. Neither can all manner of instruction raise Esau in God's sight. As the character Hanan says:

Esau hath ben nought euer since he was borne.
And wherof commeth this, of Education?
Nay it is of his owne yll inclination.¹⁹

Damned if he does and damned if he doesn't, Esau remains trapped in divine disfavor.

The explanation of salvation and damnation in *All's Well*, however, is far less clear-cut. A moralistic work like *Jacob and Esau*, in fact, teaches much about what Shakespeare avoided in addressing doctrines of grace in his own play. *Jacob and Esau* confirms the sterility of Reformed didacticism. It is medieval morality drama minus the protagonist's choice. But compare with that flat work the dialectical, experimental, and provocative "play" of More's *Utopia* and Erasmus' *Praise of Folly*. These and other works by the most gifted of Christian humanists were compulsory reading in late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century universities, where their readership more than likely did not end.²⁰ In them students would find models of education that promote, rather than constrain, free thought—paradigms that themselves allow for the free will that they always somehow champion.

Such is the intellectual tradition Shakespeare appropriates in structuring *All's Well*. He uses the tools of the Christian humanists to create exploratory

"problem comedy." Ironically, however, so pure a specimen of that form is *All's Well* that it finally does not favor Christian humanist views of free will and predestination over their Protestant counterparts. Instead, the play holds in consistent tension two possibilities: either the strict Reformed concept of predestination or the Christian humanists' belief in the partial efficacy of free will may be correct. Borrowing his dramatic method from the Christian humanists, Shakespeare also puts their opinions about grace and free will to the test.

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The doctrines of election and of free will, as Shakespeare manipulates them in *All's Well*, are finally no more reconciled than they were in the actual world that his fiction represents. At one early point, for example, the Countess observes of Helena that "she derives her honesty, and achieves her goodness"; what Helena "inherits" beyond her control and what she acquires on her own through "education" will cooperate, the Countess implies, toward developing her "virtues" (I.i.39-45). But no such cooperation can finally be discerned, one could argue, in the case of Bertram: his education has led him to produce no good works, and yet he is given "pardon" (V.iii.308).

In essence, *All's Well* insistently winds back upon itself when identifying whether human goodness and grace come from within humanity or from the divine alone. The title of the ballad that touts Helena's curing of the King beautifully conveys this ambiguity: "The showing of a heavenly effect in an earthly actor," reads Lafew (II.iii.23-24). An "actor" can be one who pretends to do or one who in fact does. Has Helena been an "actor" in the theatrical sense of the term and therefore only a human agent of "heavenly" grace? Or is Helena an "actor" in that she is a self-motivated doer of deeds, in that her "heavenly effect" originates with her own moral choice? Is she being controlled, or is she in control?

As these questions imply, the ambiguity in *All's Well* toward whether or not grace is earned cannot be separated from the problem of Helena's own faith. For indeed, Helena's characterization epitomizes the entire play's oscillation; she is herself a shuttle whose incessant movements between self-doubt and self-confidence produce much of the play's tension. If the whole of *All's Well* swings between visions of a humanity that here appears predestined and there seems free to choose, Helena recapitulates that ambivalence through a cycle of her own, first lacking and then rediscovering faith in herself. Often, her despair goes hand in hand with her belief that

she is fated by external forces; conversely, her general faith in the future is usually restored when she recovers assurance in her own power to act. The first scene of the play lucidly maps out this pattern. Helena initially mourns her social position as though it predestines her exclusion from Bertram's love: "Twere all one / That I should love a bright particular star / And think to wed it, he is so above me" (I.i.85-87). Yet by the scene's end, it is not Helena's destiny that is "fix'd," but her "intents" (l. 229). She is exhilarated by trust in her own ability: "Who ever strove / To show her merit, that did miss her love?" (II. 226-227). In one scene she thus transforms from an apparently chosen reprobate in affairs of the heart to a woman responsible for "meriting" her own amorous success.

Throughout the play Helena continues to embody this tension between election and free will. In I.iii the audience detects the same inner conflict between her lack of and her possession of self-confidence that her soliloquies in I.i make evident. Act I.iii is a contest for control: the Countess interrogates Helena for information that Helena refuses to release. Here, as elsewhere, we suspect that Helena operates according to a secret agenda. So senses the Countess, who, when Helena hedges, grills her all the more assiduously. The dynamics of I.iii suggest that Helena remains cryptic because she hesitates to presume too much in loving Bertram. She has little self-esteem. Paradoxically, however, the more she hides her feelings and expresses her inadequacy, the more willful and forceful she appears. Her very evasion seems almost to yield her the Countess' undivided attention, and her tentativeness, to invite the Countess' respect where her self-respect is missing. In fact, the exchange between Helena and the Countess blurs the lines of manipulation: does the Countess get her way when Helena finally confesses to loving Bertram (l. 191 ff.)? Or has Helena finessed the Countess into hearing her admission sympathetically? Has the Countess won the contest? Or has Helena allowed the Countess to think herself the victor, all the while plotting how best to win Bertram, as well as his mother's "leave and love, / Means and attendants" (II. 251-252)? Both interpretations of I.iii are possible because Helena conveys both helplessness and power. From one angle, she resembles the Reformed concept of humanity—weak and thoroughly dependent for her future upon a higher authority. From another, she brings to life the Christian humanist trust in wit and will.

Similar confusion about whether Helena is taking the initiative or being manipulated surrounds her continual riddling and scheming. Even her opening quibble—"I do affect a sorrow indeed, but I have it too" (I.i.54)—can make her appear either masterfully in charge of her public appearance or pathetically defensive toward the aristocrats who could ruin her. As the

plot progresses, Helena increasingly weaves back and forth between the extremes of melancholy defeatism and of sheer self-possession—for instance, first exiling herself for causing Bertram's flight to war (III.ii.99–129), then retrieving the “confidence” she has formerly displayed to the King by styling herself as Bertram's fit companion (II.i.159, 169; e.g., III.vii). This constant vacillation on Helena's part between passivity and activity defines the problem of her character as one of acquiring and keeping faith. When she lacks faith in herself, she appears a pawn; when she recovers confidence, she seems to be mistress of her own fortunes.²¹

Inevitably, the audience comes to share Helena's problem of belief. Her revolving opinion of herself and of her world ensures that our reactions to her and to the whole play will be highly mixed. To extend the language of theology, Helena shakes our faith in her and in the fiction of *All's Well*. Finally, the conjunction of Helena's ambivalence and our own is part of Shakespeare's method: it fosters our confusion over the claims of both free will and predestination because we cannot trust for long in any of Helena's views toward the same issues. Shakespeare deliberately makes this woman's every attitude just enough exaggerated, just enough excessive, to create some unpleasantness and, hence, to induce some revulsion. Clifford Leech has been treated by his fellow critics as a heretic for first suspecting Helena of unseemly.²² Still, I would not only espouse Leech's view, but add to it a dislike for Helena's frequent self-deprecations. Whether she is convinced of her worth or of her worthlessness, whether she seizes or abandons all control, Helena's speeches and behavior often approach the offensively extreme. The wording of her guilt-ridden speech about Bertram's disappearance, for example, smacks of needless anxiety and overprotectiveness toward her husband:

Poor lord, is't I
That chase thee from thy country, and expose
Those tender limbs of thine to the event
Of the none-sparing war? (III.ii.102–105)

Surely Helena patronizes Bertram, whose “limbs” hardly prove “tender” and whose battles “spare” at least a few like himself. In addition, her subsequent decision to withdraw from Rossillion for Bertram's sake rings of false martyrdom (II. 120–129). There is often something as forced and troublesome about Helena's retiring moments as there is about her complementary periods of tenacity and self-assertion. She can be equally unattractive when she gives up control, as in III.ii, and when she exercises

it to a fault—as in the ironical case of her limiting Bertram's freedom in the very act of choosing him freely.

Nor is our judgment of Helena confined to these unappealing options, for she can also appear admirable when either active or passive. I believe, for instance, that we relish her skill at manipulating Parolles in the play's first scene (ll. 99–215); she deftly borrows his military language, reflecting his belligerence, yet holds out against his verbal assaults and psychological barbs (he even greets her with an insult: "queen," l. 106). By the same token, she reveals a moral sensitivity when she asks Bertram for the blessing of his kiss, but meekly permits him to bestow or withhold it freely (II.v.78–88). In these two cases—and in many others—Shakespeare evokes sympathy for Helena, in her assertiveness, as well as in her humility. As the play progresses, these shades of Helena's "loveliness" that caught Coleridge's eye contrast ever more sharply with those of her distastefulness. The multiple ambivalences we feel toward Helena are not a purely Shakespearian invention: Painter disapproves of Giletta for loving Beltramo "more then was meete for a maiden of her age," but then reveres her for loving Beltramo "better then her owne selfe."²³ Shakespeare has expanded this faintest of contradictions into an entire method of characterization, so that the most minute of details concerning Helena seems designed to elicit disagreement.²⁴

Such tonal mingling in Helena's characterization conditions the way we think about salvation. Helena, that is, prevents us from thoroughly attaching ourselves to any single understanding of faith or grace. Because Helena can either engage or disengage our sympathy, whether she appears to be controlled or to be in control, she presents us with a spectrum of ways in which we may view the doctrines of election and of free will. As Helena's faith in herself, strength of conviction, and willingness to act recede or show forth, so does her character alternately suggest the validity of predestination or of free choice. Furthermore, no sooner are we enticed to affirm one of these two doctrines, as it is suggested through Helena's character, than the play makes us doubt the same doctrine by indirectly undercutting her character. Thus Helena in charge can be delightful or overbearing. So, too, can Helena the underling seem appropriately modest or cloyingly self-effacing. In which of these Helenas can we finally trust? Which would we hope to be like—Helena the director or Helena the directed? Concrete matters like these resonate with questions that arise about other characters, most notably Parolles and Bertram. As the careers of these two figures begin to climax in the later acts, the play's focus on grace enlarges steadily. But Shakespeare's reliance on his central characters to sustain ambiguity toward

free will and predestination never varies. The closing scene, V.iii, attests to this fact; Bertram's enforced confrontation with his transgressions is open to various readings, each involving a different perspective on the nature of grace. In addition, we are prepared for these final multiple perspectives by Shakespeare's puzzling treatment of Parolles. The episodes concerning Parolles' exposure and its aftermath foreshadow Bertram's following story with remarkable similarity.

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The key question about both Parolles and Bertram is whether either changes—or at the least shows potentiality for change—as a result of his embarrassment. If yes, then the forgiveness that each receives could readily be construed as a reward for actual or promised merit. If no, then grace given either of them must be considered a free gift. To discern whether these characters convert, then, would be to reach a clearer notion about whether *All's Well* depicts grace as earned through free will or as bestowed by God's election. In pursuing this question, we should first examine Parolles' history because it is more complete than Bertram's. Shakespeare permits us to judge whether Parolles acts differently after having been exposed, whereas Bertram's similar ordeal in V.iii is not followed through. Thus, Shakespeare's self-conscious paralleling of the two characters continues, in a sense, after the play's end: what we know about Parolles may enable us to speculate on Bertram's undisclosed future.

Even before Parolles is tricked, his characterization combines despicable traits with potentially redeeming qualities. Parolles is an egoist and a moral minimalist who will eventually sacrifice anything and anyone if his captors will only "let" him "live" (IV.iii.241–245). In this he is every bit as repugnant as Helena estimates (I.i.100–105). But are Parolles' "evils" so "fix'd" in him, as Helena describes them (I. 102), that Parolles can never be but wicked? Parolles' uncanny perceptiveness would suggest otherwise. A consistent irony of Parolles' character is that he somehow speaks truly, even as he lies or puts on airs. His remarks on the benefits of losing virginity, albeit crudely stated, ultimately coincide with Helena's decision to forfeit her own (I.i). The letter he writes to warn Diana about Bertram may be intended to promote his own cause, but Parolles sizes up Bertram accurately, calling him a "boy" and foreseeing Bertram's capacity for betrayal, like his own (IV.iii.223–232). The astuteness Parolles achieves in spite of himself—his misguided but promising vision—suggests that he could, perhaps, change for the better.

Yet the fact is that Parolles never unequivocally demonstrates such change, a point underscored by divergent critical views of his character. Commentary about the precise process that Parolles undergoes centers on his speech at the close of IV.iii:

Yet I am thankful. If my heart were great,
 'Twould burst at this. Captain I'll be no more,
 But I will eat and drink, and sleep as soft
 As captain shall. Simply the thing I am
 Shall make me live. Who knows himself a braggart,
 Let him fear this; for it will come to pass
 That every braggart shall be found an ass.
 Rust sword, cool blushes, and, Parolles, live
 Safest in shame! Being fool'd, by fool'ry thrive!
 There's place and means for every man alive. (ll. 330-339)

Here, Parolles himself gives two opposing impressions about whether he will go on to behave differently. Declaring "simply the thing I am shall make me live" implies that he will remain a coward and a cheat, but will own up to his real nature. On the basis of this statement, Parolles is often said to have "reformed."²⁵ But Parolles also says that he will "thrive" by "fool'ry"; insofar as "fool'ry" connotes "trickery," as it seems to here, it hardly signals a turnaround for this deceiver or an assurance that he is ready to admit publicly what he actually is. If he continued to mask his baseness with courtly and military pretensions, the only possible difference between his past and future would lie in his and everyone else's awareness of his pretense; and since nearly everyone but Bertram has already recognized it, such a difference would constitute at most a barely perceptible change. Indeed, perhaps these lines actually represent Parolles' minimalist attitude at its most extreme yet, since he expresses the contentment of a less than "great" "heart" with mere "place and means," such as belong to "every man."

This central speech on what Parolles' exposure has meant to him is thus fraught with an ambiguity that his subsequent characterization sustains. Shakespeare proceeds to keep us guessing about whether Parolles converts, perhaps most notably by playing Parolles off of Lavatch—that is, by comparing and contrasting two "fools." From IV.iii on, while Parolles suffers degradation from all quarters, he comes more and more to sound and behave like Lavatch. He is being conspicuously reduced to the genuine "fool" he is, and is called, in the last two acts (e.g., IV.iii.254, V.ii.53). When in IV.iii he ejaculates an "O Lord, sir. . .!" in response to his captors (ll.

309–310), he surely recalls the entire scene in which Lavatch has ridiculed courtiers with the identical phrase (II.ii). Similarly, when referring to himself before the King as a “poor man” in V.iii (l. 251), he echoes Lavatch’s introductory self-description, in I.iii, as “a poor fellow” (ll. 12–13). The gist of this implicit coupling of characters may be that, as a result of being made a laughingstock, Parolles is transforming from a base fool into a better kind of fool: a lowly servant of others, like Lavatch. He may, in effect, be learning a lesson. Unwilling earlier to grant Lafew that Bertram is his “master” (II.iii.186 ff.), he may be humiliated into becoming more submissive, as he later bears himself toward Lafew: “It lies in you, my lord, to bring me in some grace, for you did bring me out. . . . I praise God for you” (V.ii.46–47, 55). These lines offend Lafew (ll. 48–50), but even so, Parolles’ tone here possesses little of his former haughtiness. Possibly, therefore, Parolles grows morally, from loving only himself to caring for others. The theory that Parolles has changed in this way gains credence from his last gesture: he “lend[s]” his “handkercher” to the weeping Lafew (V.iii.321–322).

If Parolles has learned from his mistakes, then he merits, at least in part, Lafew’s newfound “grace” (V.ii.47). His will has played a part in his receiving that mercy. Of course, nothing about Parolles’ conduct in V.ii would prompt Lafew to forgive him; Lafew says, in fact, that Parolles “shall eat,” *though* he is undeserving (ll. 53–54; emphasis added). In addition, Lafew finally invites Parolles “home,” *in spite of* the latter’s “scurvy” “curtsies” (V.iii.322–324). Lafew’s forgiveness is thus at least partially unconditional. But the issue here is whether Lafew’s “grace” is *totally* unearned by Parolles and is hence a model of unconditional divine election. Although the play affords persuasive evidence that Parolles is growing morally and therefore warrants Lafew’s compassion, many passages indicate the contrary. In this connection, too, Parolles’ interplay with Lavatch is telling, since the contrast between the two characters often suggests that Parolles has not changed. Lavatch finds him, for example, affecting every bit the courtier in V.ii that he has been before his fall in IV.iii. His foppish diction is now made the more absurd because, as the ever-deflating Lavatch points out, it is so very incongruous with his present physical condition:

Par. I am now, sir, muddled in Fortune’s mood, and smell somewhat strong of her strong displeasure.

Clo. Truly, Fortune’s displeasure is but sluttish if it smell so strongly as thou speak’st of . . . Prithee allow the wind. (V.ii.4–9)

Lavatch's honesty points out the euphemistic language in which Parolles still wraps the plain truth. This Parolles appears no less given to self-delusion and pretentiousness than before. In this light, therefore, the mercy eventually bestowed on him is unconditional: Parolles numbers among the elect.

Evidently, Shakespeare is going to have the issue of Parolles' conversion both ways. We cannot, after all, study the treatment of this character to surmise whether Bertram may change or to detect a resolution of the play's tension between predestined and merited grace. Rather, close attention to Parolles' characterization until the end repays the audience with more confusion.

As in the case of Parolles, critics have long based their readings of Bertram—and often, therefore, of the whole play—on incomplete evidence. Either they judge Bertram worthy of Helena's faith in him, or they discount, as insincere or as unimportant, Bertram's last plea for "pardon!" (V.iii.308). Those who adopt the latter stance, unless they dismiss *All's Well* as unbearably flawed, locate the play's essence in Bertram receiving unearned.²⁶ Whether one argues that Bertram logically merits forgiveness through changing or, conversely, that the splendor of Helena's faith in her husband is its very illogic, both of these opposing interpretations derive from textual evidence. That substantiation, however, is exceedingly self-contradictory—though there is enough of it on either side to validate two entire and contradictory visions of the play.

The reading that Bertram converts and so earns forgiveness is supported, for example, by the constant sense that his character is changing in various ways. Bertram, in other words, does not appear to have been predestined, like the brothers in *Jacob and Esau*, to practise either good or evil consistently. Rather, his tendencies to behave both well and badly characterize him as perpetually in flux. On the one hand, Shakespeare creates the impression that Bertram is degenerating morally over the play's course: in I.i and for some time following, no one suspects his integrity, but in IV.iii, the First and Second Lords document at length his decline over time (II. 1-74). On the other hand, at the same time that Bertram's enormity is swelling, his moral perception also seems to be improving. It may be that, initially unable to see Helena's worth, he inadvertantly allows his wife to cure his infected sight, as she heals the King's despair in II.i; Helena's very prescriptions, called "notes" (e.g., I.iii.226), imply by their name that she is in particular a physician to the spiritually blind. Bertram, after all, is forced to see both Parolles' perfidy and Helena's virtue. His lines about her in V.iii.315-316 suggest that the scales have finally fallen from his eyes: Helena has made Bertram "know" her goodness "clearly." In short, Bertram often

seems capable of freely choosing to behave for the better and also for the worse; if he can decide to change for the better, then he can also earn mercy.

But while the play urges us to think Bertram has changed or can change, it also repeatedly warns that his self-proclaimed conversion is specious. And if it is, then the "pardon" granted him is unconditional, like Calvinist grace. A most obvious example of Bertram's unreliability is his habit of promising to reform and then reneging, for instance, when he tells the King he is reconciled to Helena (II.iii.167-176), when he swears to love Diana always (IV.ii.36-37), and when, back in court, he professes to feel shamed (V.iii.44-55). Bertram's last cry for forgiveness is not his first; he is forever seeking "pardon" (e.g., II.iii.167). The cyclical nature of his suits for mercy, followed by moral relapses until the very end, casts no little doubt on his final vow to love Helena "ever dearly" (V.iii.316). Even that oath is sworn conditionally, as critics have often noticed: Bertram may actually be leaving himself another exit from marriage "if" Helena cannot "make" him "know" that she has fulfilled her tasks (V.iii.315). Nor is Bertram's checkered career as a lover the sole means by which Shakespeare subverts his apparent conversion. In fact, much of the play's closing scene calls into question the lasting effects of anyone's spiritual renewal. The King, especially, is shown to stray from keeping his own word in V.iii, and our shaken trust in him is implicitly linked with our skepticism toward Bertram's similar vow to change.

In V.iii the King becomes "reconcil'd" to Bertram (l. 21). That is, he recovers faith in one he has presumed lost, and he promulgates his forgiveness:

Let him [Bertram] not ask our pardon,
The nature of his great offense is dead,
And deeper than oblivion we do bury
Th' incensing relics of it. (ll. 22-25)

This statement of the King's mercy toward Bertram is perfectly unequivocal. Yet as the scene unfolds, the King appears more and more to have protested his benevolence too much. In line 38, for example, he discourages further mention of Bertram's former crimes, since all is forgotten: "Not one word more of the consumed time"; almost immediately thereafter, however, the King conceives of Bertram's compunction over Helena's death as "striking] some scores away / From the great compt" (ll. 56-57). Contrary to his earlier command in line 38, then, the King indeed mentions "one word more" about Bertram's past, and he subtly reveals that, although he has publicly

pardoned Bertram, he nonetheless holds the young man accountable. Why else would the King still be keeping "score" of Bertram's sins and acts of penance? At this point, the King again breaks his own vow to ignore Bertram's wrongs by moralizing on them extensively (ll. 57-66). Next, the King reissues his dictum to "forget" Helena and to turn to present affairs (l. 67). But this time, too, only an instant passes before the King's suspicion of Bertram belies his magnanimity: on seeing Helena's ring in Bertram's possession, the King quickly jumps to the conclusion that Bertram has engaged in foul play:

[Thou] mak'st conjectural fears to come into me,
Which I would fain shut out. If it should prove
That thou art so inhuman—'twill not prove so;
And yet I know not: thou didst hate her deadly. . . . (ll. 114-117)

Here again, the King dredges up Bertram's former shortcomings, like his "hate" for Helena. Because Helena once attached great symbolic value to this gift from the King (ll. 108-112), he perhaps has some reason to fear Bertram's entanglement with her. He also tries not to blame Bertram immediately: "'Twill not prove so." Yet the King finally goes too far—ironically far—in doubting Bertram. Quite simply, the King is wrong in his judgment that Bertram has physically harmed Helena, and significantly, he bases his wrong opinion on the knowledge of Bertram's past that he has opened the scene by promising to "bury" (l. 24). The parallel between Bertram and the King as seeming converts is unmistakable. The latter's wavering, his failure to keep his promises, underscores Bertram's similar behavior. Each character seems unable to help himself; both appear involuntarily to repeat their mistakes. Neither, therefore, would seem to merit grace.

On the whole, then, the play does not seem hopeful in its outlook toward spiritual growth, whereby grace might be earned. Yet this attitude does not guarantee that grace is envisioned as a gift bestowed on Bertram, or on anyone, through election. As do so many of the play's aspects, its final assessment of Bertram both upholds and denies the idea that, no matter what wrong he commits, he is predestined to be forgiven. From one viewpoint on V.iii, as we have seen, he undoubtedly appears elected to grace by Helena's agency. For all the appeal of this interpretation, however, it is repeatedly disproved, as we have also observed. Even if we are to understand that Bertram represents the elect, the fact still remains that Helena goes

about earning Bertram's love: she accomplishes the tasks through exercising her innate wit.

How does one come by grace? If Shakespeare has an opinion, he is not prepared to divulge it in *All's Well That Ends Well*. The play—to the benefit of its vitality, if not the audience's peace of mind—relentlessly undermines its own pat answers. In order to maintain controversy, Shakespeare taps two opposing desires to be found in any audience: one, the wish to see justice served and, two, the longing for a miracle that transcends the rationale of justice. Such a miracle is love. We want Bertram punished, but we would also like to see Helena win the husband of her choice. We want more, that is, than the play or life can give us. *All's Well* comes brilliantly and painfully close to home by figuring forth the recognizable tension between our conflicting needs for justice and for unqualified love.

We can aspire and even pretend to know whether God rewards us according to justice as we understand it or whether He chooses whom to save on grounds that to us appear haphazard. But we do not know. Or so the English theologians of the sixteenth century all somehow strive to remind us. For no matter which controversial stand on election and free will any of these thinkers may defend, all of them finally agree that impenetrable mystery veils God's ways from our sight. It is their awe of the inscrutable that ultimately unites these churchmen, regardless of their intellectual differences.

How fitting that *All's Well*, in the last analysis, should also invoke that mystery, leaving its dilemmas open-ended and its audience bewildered. A small change that Shakespeare made from his source says much about the uncertainty with which he closes *All's Well*. Giletta seeks Beltramo's favor after she has given birth to twins; her ample, visible proof of having fulfilled the tasks is especially convincing because the boys are "very like their father."²⁷ Where Painter removes doubt, however, Shakespeare sustains it. Helena's child, unborn when wife encounters husband, can and yet cannot be seen; the mother's swollen womb implies, but does not absolutely verify, her claims to having consummated her marriage. Hence, perhaps, Bertram's "if" (l. 315) and the King's equally disconcerting line, "All yet *seems* well" (l. 333; emphasis added). Act V, then, brings the characters as close to resolution as it truthfully can—to a kind of understanding and to the edge of joy—even as it leaves them with insoluble problems.

Those problems belong to us, too, as they did to Shakespeare's first audience. So the King announces, metaphorically, in his Epilogue: "Ours be your patience then, and yours our parts" (l. 5). The play here begins to break through the conventional barriers between art and audience. Some

Elizabethans, we can be sure, were imaginative enough to assume the "parts" of Shakespeare's characters, and with this sympathy they would have sensed a theological component of *All's Well* that today may appear obscure, if not trivial. How these people were going to be saved, though, was the central issue in their lives. *All's Well* mirrored back to them their questions, fears, and hopes about grace. They may have voiced these concerns aloud, kept them private, or mulled them over unawares. Yet some form of controversy over election and free will would have reached them all. If we, in turn, assume the actors' "parts," we learn that *All's Well* is far less a religious work with a specific vision to propound than a play encompassing a theological tension. That distinction is crucial to make—not only for accepting the play on its own cultural terms, but also for understanding why the work unsettles audiences to this day. It seems an enigma by design.

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Notes

- 1 G. Blakemore Evans, gen. ed., *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), *All's Well That Ends Well*, II.i.160. All subsequent references will be to this edition.
- 2 Robert Y. Turner, "Dramatic Conventions in *All's Well That Ends Well*," *PMLA*, 75 (1960), 497. R. G. Hunter, *Shakespeare and the Comedy of Forgiveness* (New York: Columbia UP, 1965), ch. 5.

Critics who have observed Helena's association with divine grace include G. K. Hunter, ed., *All's Well That Ends Well*, New Arden ed. (London: Methuen, 1959), p. xlii and annotation to II.i; Clifford Leech, "The Theme of Ambition in *All's Well That Ends Well*," *ELH*, 21 (1954), 17–29; Kenneth Muir, *Shakespeare's Comic Sequence* (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1979), p. 128; A. P. Riemer, *Antic Fables: Patterns of Evasion in Shakespeare's Comedies* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1980), pp. 117 ff. The same association is also to be found in the play's source, "Giletta of Narbona," the thirty-eighth novel of William Painter's *Palace of Pleasure* (in G. K. Hunter, ed., *All's Well That Ends Well*, p. 146).

Cf. to R. G. Hunter, Arthur C. Kirsch, *Shakespeare and the Experience of Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981), ch. 5, and Carl Dennis, "All's Well That Ends Well and the Meaning of *Agape*," *PQ*, 50 (1971), 75–84. Kirsch and Dennis each examines, in his own way, the power of human goodness and mercy like Helena's to redeem a sinful, fallen nature like Bertram's.

A word on terminology seems crucial at the start. Throughout my essay I shall use three terms in discussing post-Marian theology: *Protestant*, *Reformed*, and *Calvinist*. These three adjectives represent an increasing degree of specificity, *Calvinist* pertaining strictly to the teaching of John Calvin and the theological tradition to which it gave rise. I shall usually refer to the doctrine of the Elizabethan Church as "Reformed"; Dewey D. Wallace, Jr., *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology, 1525–1695* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1982), recommends this term because Calvinism ultimately blended with teachings of other reformers to produce a Reformed tradition (pp. x–xi). I have also usually avoided the exceedingly troublesome terms *Puritan* and *Anglican*, which have generated far more commentary than I can address here. For more discussion of

this problematic terminology, see Wallace, *Introd.* and ch. 2; Charles H. and Catherine George, *The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1961), pp. 65–66; Richard L. Greaves, *Society and Religion in Elizabethan England* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minneapolis Press, 1979), pp. 3–29; and especially Patrick Collinson, *Godly People: Essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism* (London: Hambledon, 1983), and “A Comment: Concerning the Name Puritan,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 31 (1980), 483–488.

- 3 This theological question mirrors the play’s concern with whether nobility is inherited at birth or acquired through education and deeds. Many students of Painter’s story have noticed that Shakespeare has deprived Helena of Giletta’s money and relatives so as “to emphasize the conflict of [earned] virtue and [inherited] nobility in the persons of Helena and Bertram” (G. K. Hunter, *All’s Well*, p. xxvii). The theme of nobility in the play is addressed especially by M. C. Bradbrook, “Virtue Is the True Nobility,” *Review of English Studies*, NS I (1950), 289–301. See also Kenneth Muir, *Comic Sequence*, p. 127, and *Shakespeare’s Sources* (London: Methuen, 1957), pp. 99–100, where he suggests that the handling of nobility in *All’s Well* may derive from Giovanni Battista Nenna’s *Nennio, or A Treatise of Nobility*. Alice Shalvi, who introduces the Renaissance Facsimile edition of *Nennio*, suggests that literature on true nobility proliferated during the late sixteenth century because the rising English gentry hoped to legitimate their new power by appeal to meritocracy (trans. William Jones, [London, 1595; rpt. Jerusalem: Israel UP], p. vii). But another reason that the topic may have been so popular is that it resonates with the doctrinal issue of election versus free will.

- 4 The tenet of irresistible grace is crucial in Calvinist dogma:

The operations of God on his elect are twofold—internally, by his spirit, externally, by his word. By his Spirit illuminating their minds and forming their hearts to the love and cultivation of righteousness, he makes them new creatures. By his word he excites them to desire, seek, and obtain the same renovation.

John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. John Allen, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Education, 1844), II.v.5. (My numbers refer to book, chapter, and section numbers of Calvin’s 1559 edition of the *Institutes*.)

- 5 I think that Bertram’s motive for rebellion has been long overlooked. R. G. Hunter denies that Bertram has any reason at all for rejecting Helena (p. 122). Richard P. Wheeler, *Shakespeare’s Development and the Problem Comedies: Turn and Counter-Turn* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1981), sees Bertram’s motive as his subconscious fear of incest: Helena’s resemblance to the Countess overwhelms him (pp. 42–45). Kirsch agrees with Wheeler (p. 141), but I find Wheeler’s textual evidence extremely tentative, especially since Bertram tells us twice (in the passages I have quoted in my text) that he rejects Helena because he has not been permitted to choose her freely.

- 6 Kirsch, p. 108. Johnson’s lines on Bertram are well-known:

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 he has wronged, defends himself by falsehood, and is dismissed to happiness.

Arthur Sherbo, ed., *Johnson on Shakespeare, The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1968), VII, 404.

- 7 Ernest Schanzer, *The Problem Plays of Shakespeare* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 6.
- 8 Although every recent critic of the play tackles at least one of its several inconsistencies, most commentators ultimately point out resolutions where, I believe, they simply do not

exist. For instance, both Anthony Brennan, "Helena versus Time's Winged Chariot in *All's Well That Ends Well*," *Midwest Quarterly*, 21:4 (Summer, 1980), 391-411, and John Edward Price, "Anti-moralistic Moralism in *All's Well That Ends Well*," *Shakespeare Studies*, 12 (1979), 95-111, center on the play's tension between youth and age, and in general both desist from reducing the tension to a simplistic reading. At the same time, though, Brennan argues that Shakespeare favors the values of his older characters as models for his wayward youths (*passim*), whereas Price argues the reverse, finding the "moralism" of Lafew, the Countess, and the King rife with "useless platitude" (p. 95). Such discrepancy runs throughout scholarly commentary on the play, including opinions about its characters, its tone, its genre, and its moral vision. A sampling of criticism relevant here would comprise the following: Riemer, and Anne Barton, *Introd. to All's Well That Ends Well*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, G. Blakemore Evans, gen. ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), pp. 499-503, on genre; Bradbrook, and Robert Grudin, *Mighty Opposites: Shakespeare and Renaissance Contrariety* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1979), ch. 4, on tone; Leech, and Nicholas Brooke, "All's Well That Ends Well," in Kenneth Muir and Stanley Wells, eds., *Aspects of Shakespeare's Problem Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982), on moral vision. I shall be mentioning below many critical opinions of the play's characters.

- 9 For a helpful overview of the theology of grace in the Church of England, see H. C. Porter, *Reformation and Reaction in Tudor Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1958), pp. 323-343. For elaboration, see the Georges, prt. I, ch. 1.
- 10 The Georges, p. 70. Wallace, pp. viii-ix. Nicholas Tyacke, "Puritans, Arminianism, and Counter-Revolution," in Conrad Russell, ed., *The Origins of the English Civil War* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), and *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism, c. 1590-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987).
- 11 E.g., Martin Luther, *De servo arbitrio*, in E. Gordon Rupp, trans., *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), and Calvin, II.iii.1-5.
- 12 E.g., Erasmus, *De libero arbitrio*, in Rupp.
 Cf. to my point, John C. Olin, ed., *Christian Humanism and the Reformation: Desiderius Erasmus* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), who observes of Erasmus and Luther that, though they shared a humanist approach to scholarship, their "understanding of scripture" was entirely different (p. 17). Erasmus believes that salvation entails a certain, though small, cooperation between God and a human being. Luther rejects the notion of any such cooperation. Indeed, Luther and Calvin posit some degree of free will, but for both, because the will is corrupted by sin, it tends only toward wickedness—it cannot love the good (see, e.g., Calvin II.iii.1-12). On the contrast between Erasmus and Luther, see Rupp, *Introd.* See also Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, *The Puritans* (New York: American Book, 1938), pp. 13 ff. Porter explicitly associates those Cambridge divines who asserted some degree of free will with "Christian humanism" (p. 281). For a more recent discussion than Porter's of the controversies over predestination at Cambridge during the 1590s, see Peter Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982), ch. 9.
- 13 According to Porter, "Disputes about election began in England in the second part of the reign of Edward VI" (p. 338). For a catalogue of these disputes, see Peter Milward, *Religious Controversies of the Elizabethan Age: A Survey of Printed Sources* (London: Scolar, 1977), ch. 7 (a).
- 14 See Walter Travers, "A Supplication Made to the Council," and Richard Hooker, "Mr. Hooker's Answer . . .," in John Keble, ed., *The Works of . . . Richard Hooker*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1888), III, 548-596. For background on *A Christian Letter*, see W. Speed Hill, gen. ed., *The Works of Richard Hooker*, 4 vols. to date (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1982),

- IV, xiii-xxviii, and for background on Hooker's Christian humanist thought, see, e.g., pp. xxxix-xl. Michael T. Malone, "The Doctrine of Predestination in the Thought of William Perkins and Richard Hooker," *Anglican Theological Review*, 52 (1970), 103-117, offers a superb analysis of exactly how Hooker differed from the strict Calvinist doctrine of predestination. Cf. to Hooker, John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, in Merritt Y. Hughes, ed., *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose* (New York: Odyssey, 1957), III.173-175, 183-186; nn. to ll. 174, 183-193, and *On Christian Doctrine*, I.iv.
- 15 Alan Fager Herr, *The Elizabethan Sermon* (Philadelphia: n.p., 1940), pp. 56, 64-65.
- 16 Hill, IV, xxvii.
- 17 Martha Tuck Rozett, *The Doctrine of Election and the Emergence of Elizabethan Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984), pp. 20, 21.
- Porter (pp. 285-286) and Collinson (*Godly People*, p. 275) both supply historical examples to support the views that even the nuances of the predestinarian question held fascination for the laity; that congregations worried about the implications of the doctrine to their own lives and themselves became enmeshed in the controversy; and that such quarrels, even if contained between only two divines, could, in Hill's words, "[threaten] the peace of . . . the nation" (IV, xxvii).
- 18 The only extant early edition of *Jacob and Esau* is that of 1568, but the date of composition may be as early as the reign of Edward VI.
- 19 Anon., *Jacob and Esau*, ed. John Crow, Malone Society Reprints (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1956), II.163-165.
- 20 Margo Todd, "Humanists, Puritans, and the Spiritualized Household," *Church History*, 49 (1980), p. 19. Joel B. Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1978), provides extensive, rich cultural background to the development of exploratory Renaissance drama, background relevant to my point here.
- 21 G. K. Hunter observes that "Helena active" characterizes the first half of the play, and "Helena passive," the second half (e.g., p. xxxii). I disagree. Both Helenas seem to vie for dominance throughout the play.
- 22 Leech, "The Theme of Ambition in *All's Well That Ends Well*." In reaction to Leech, see, e.g., Geoffrey Bullough, ed., *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, 8 vols. (New York: Columbia UP, 1958), who sees Helena as "entirely good" and as a "ministering angel" (II.382-383).
- 23 Painter, pp. 145, 148.
- 24 Among critics her very name conjures associations with figures as disparate as Helen of Troy and Helena, mother of Constantine the Great and healer of the sick. For much elaboration on Helena's name, see, e.g., R. G. Hunter, p. 114; Leech, pp. 23-25; and Reimer, pp. 50-51.
- 25 Grudin, p. 92. See also the similar but less sanguine readings of, e.g., R. G. Hunter, p. 127, and Kirsch, pp. 131-132.
- 26 A cross-section of criticism here would comprise Muir, who sees Bertram as finally "converted" (*Shakespeare's Sources*, pp. 100-101); Dennis, who finds Bertram's last apology "sincere" (p. 80); Bradbrook, who agrees that Bertram converts, but feels the play is deeply flawed (e.g., p. 301); and R. G. Hunter, who believes that the point of Helena's grace is that Bertram does not merit it through any sort of moral growth (pp. 130-131).
- 27 Painter, p. 151.