All’s Well
That Ends Well
By William Shakespeare | Directed by Victor Pappas
Dear Educators,

*All’s Well that Ends Well* is a play that has not aged well, particularly in the era of “Me Too,” as our awareness of the pervasiveness of sexual assault has come into focus, and as we teach our students about the importance of consent. Much of this play gets overshadowed by the so-called “bed trick” that culminates Helena’s quest to get Bertram back, as it is an integral part of the plot of this play, despite being unacceptable by today’s standards.

With that in mind, this play still can have a lot to offer us, especially in terms of opening up a discussion with students. I often say that drama is a series of poor choices that characters need to deal with, whether that’s thinking a “bed trick” is a good idea and other poor relationship choices of the comedies, or the dueling, backstabbing, and murder of the tragedies. While we all want to provide good examples to our students, sometimes the inherent drama of a cautionary tale can also have an impact. After watching this play, it can be as simple as asking students whether, now that Helena has schemed her way into being Bertram’s wife, they think she will truly be happy.

It may be more obvious, for example, that *Macbeth’s* bad choices lead to his downfall, but there are many opportunities for discussion in the more problematic plays. Shakespeare — and in fact, any dramatic work — can be full of teachable moments, whether or not all ends well.

Best,
Michelle Burce
Education Director

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**2018–2019 Student Matinees**

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Plot Synopsis

The Countess of Rossillion’s son, Count Bertram, is leaving for Paris to serve the King of France, who has fallen ill. Helena is a young woman who was adopted by the countess following the death of her father, a celebrated physician. Helena is in love with Bertram and plans to follow him to Paris, where she also intends to cure the king with one of her father’s potions.

The king is persuaded to take the cure and makes a complete recovery. He rewards her with a handsome dowry and her choice of husband. She chooses Bertram, who rudely complains of her humble origins. Nevertheless, he is forced to marry her or incur the king’s displeasure. After the wedding, he refuses to consummate the marriage, saying that for him to fully accept her as his wife she must become pregnant with his child — rather an impossible demand under the circumstances.

Bertram leaves for the Florentine wars with his scurrilous companion Parolles, swearing never to return to France until his wife is dead. Helena follows him to Florence, where she discovers that he is trying to seduce a young woman named Diana. Helena tells Diana that she is Bertram’s rejected wife and offers to take the girl’s place in bed. That night, during Bertram’s illicit tryst, Helena disguised as Diana gives him a ring that she received from the French king.

Bertram hears a rumor that his wife is at last dead and returns to France hoping to marry an heiress. He is thwarted by Diana, who tells the king that Bertram is already engaged to her. He denies it, but the king sees the ring he gave to Helena on his finger and suspects that he must have killed his wife. The young man must either tell the truth or face arrest for murder. Helena appears and tells how she has, by a trick, become pregnant with Bertram’s child. She demands that he fulfill his promise and accept her as his wife, and Bertram agrees.

From Shakespeare’s Geneologies by Vanessa James.
Marrying Up
Marrying above one’s station and the friction it creates (whether real or imagined) is just as popular a storyline today as in Shakespeare’s lifetime. From Jane Austen’s heroines to Meghan Markle’s royal wedding to the book and film *Crazy Rich Asians*, the triumph of love over class is one that continues to resonate.

Gender Flip Fairytale
It’s a familiar plot: A hero accomplishes an impossible task and gets rewarded by a King with a princess’s hand in marriage. In the case of Helena, she does the impossible task (healing the King) and Bertram (as the King’s ward) takes the place of the princess.

Polarizing Protagonist
Victorian theatre artists had mixed feelings about the play. Famous actress, Ellen Terry, found Helena’s pursuit of Bertram to be predatory, “really despicable,” and “undignified.” Playwright George Bernard Shaw praised Helena for embodying the New Woman and compared her to Nora from Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*.

Ominous Opening
The first recorded performance of the play in 1742 didn’t end so well. The actress playing Helena fell ill on opening night and the actor playing the ailing King of France was ailing himself and died during the run — earning the play a cursed reputation.

Basic Braggart
The character of Parolles would have been immediately recognized as a comic character type by Shakespeare’s audience. The braggart soldier whose battlefield boasts are full of hot air is based upon a popular commedia dell’arte stock character.

Leading the Audience
There are only two Shakespeare plays that give you an indication of how we’re supposed to feel about the play: *All’s Well That Ends Well* and *As You Like It*.

Foul Papers
Scholars believe that *All’s Well That Ends Well* was published from a working draft, known as “foul papers.” In the original script the Countess’s lines are attributed variously to “Mother,” “Lady,” “Countess,” and “Old Countess.” Other characters are referred to by title only in the beginning of the script and assigned given names later in the story.

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Our Production

“Love all, trust a few, do wrong to none.”

The Countess bestows this advice on her son, Bertram, as he departs from home on a journey that will return him — and others — transformed. “It’s a play about the beautiful rich complexity of figuring out who you are in the world and how other people affect that,” said director Victor Pappas at first rehearsal. “A lot of what happens in the play is about mentoring, and you either have a great mentor in your life like the Countess, or you have an iffy mentor in your life like Parolles.”

The medieval setting of our production gives credence to the earnest value placed on valor, chastity, and spirituality by the story’s characters. It also lends clarity to seniority and status: “The older gentlemen have longer outfits. The younger ones will have shorter,” explained costume designer K.D. Schill. Velvet and rich textiles distinguish royalty and nobility from lower class characters.

“When you look at all of Shakespeare, this is an intimate one. This is a close one,” remarked scenic designer Carol Wolfe Clay. “It’s about family and love and relationships.” Even though the cast isn’t small for Shakespeare, most of the scenes are between two or three people. Gothic arches create a space that can be intimate or vast — manipulated with light by designer Andrew D. Smith to move and focus attention.

Sound designer Johanna Melamed has curated music by female medieval composers like Garsenda, Countess of Provence, and Caterina Assandra, as well as modern compositions inspired by medieval music.
**Pre-Show Reflection**
These questions will help students to think about some of the big ideas behind the play before watching it.

- Can you think of a time you have had to choose between a person you had a crush on and a friend?

- Have you ever had someone betray you? How easy or difficult is it to repair a reputation?

- Is it true that “all’s well that ends well”? Or put another way, do the ends justify the means? Why or why not?

- Have you ever had a crush on someone who did not like you back? Why did you like that person? Did them not liking you back affect how much you had a crush on them?

**Post-Show Discussion**
The following questions are to help lead a discussion with your class after seeing the play. For all of these, there are many possible answers and student responses will vary. Some possible responses are provided.

- Bertram can be easily vilified by today’s standards, but if the gender roles were switched, how would that change how you felt about a woman forced into marriage, running away, then being tricked into sleeping with her husband who she chose not to sleep with earlier?

- Why do you think Helena is interested in marrying Bertram?
  - He is really attractive and charming, and Helena cannot resist having a crush on him.
  - When her father died, she transferred her love and affection on to Bertram, who was a playmate and friend.
  - She sees something in him worth investing in now for when he matures into a grown man.

- Why do you think Bertram runs away and refuses to acknowledge their marriage?
  - He’s young, immature, and not ready for marriage.
  - He doesn’t like Helena at all.
  - He is interested in her, but wants glory in the battlefield before settling down.

- Is Helena justified in her actions to get Bertram back?
  - Yes: He wronged her, and she’s doing everything she can to save their marriage.
  - No: She manipulates him, and sexual deception is always wrong, regardless of the circumstances.
  - Maybe: She’s not going about it the right way, but they are technically married.

- What is the tone of the play?
  - Comedy: it fits the rule of Shakespeare comedies ending in marriages!
  - Tragedy: Bertram and Helena’s relationship is doomed.
  - Romance: It ends with everyone working out, and they’ll live happily ever after.
  - Something else: Why?
Problem plays

In Shakespeare's plays you can basically assume that if everyone dies at the end it's a tragedy. And if everyone gets married at the end, it's a comedy. Histories . . . well, they’re based on historical characters.

But what about the ones that end in marriage, but that don't seem so funny to the modern day audiences? We call these problem plays.

Most people think of The Merchant of Venice, and the anti-Semitism surrounding Shylock, as a prime example of a problem play. Or perhaps you're aware of the lesser known Measure for Measure, in which Angelo, the man in charge while the Duke is out of town, tries to get a young nun, Isabel, to sleep with him in order to lift his sentence off of her brother for having sex out of wedlock (the irony is not lost in that case). The crafty Isabel gets out of it by having Angelo's ex-fiance sleep with him instead — a bed trick ploy also used in All's Well that Ends Well — and everything ends well in the end with the Duke proposing to Isabel! Happy endings all around — it ends with a wedding, so it's a comedy!

Anyone else not laughing at that plot?

While many people associate the term “problem play” with Shakespeare's darker comedies: All's Well that Ends Well, Measure for Measure, Troilus and Cressida, and The Merchant of Venice, it was first used to describe plays in the late 19th century by F.S. Boas. In his book, Shakespeare and his Predecessors (1896), Boas coins the “problem play” classification. A problem play is any play dealing with a social or political problem with the aim of igniting public debate, often where morality issues presented in the play are not resolved to a contemporary audience's satisfaction. (Owens)

In Boas' time contemporary plays such as Ibsen's A Doll's House, or Shaw's Mrs. Warren's Profession were considered problem plays. You only need to know what Mrs. Warren’s profession was to know the play was scandalous at that time.

In All's Well that Ends Well we see Helena get married to Bertram, who clearly does not want to be married to her. Before consummating their marriage, he skips town and leave her a letter with the following.

“When thou canst get the ring upon my finger, which never shall come off, and show me a child begotten of thy body that I am father to, then call me husband. But in such a ‘then’ I write a ‘never.’”

Basically unless she removes the ring from his finger, and gets pregnant with his child he'll stay away from France, and consider their marriage void.

In his travels, Bertram meets Diana, a desirable young woman. Helena catches up with Bertram and meets Diana as well. Diana agrees to help Helena out and the infamous bed trick plan is laid. Diana convinces Bertram to give her his ring, and agrees to the list of guidelines for that night to make the bed trick work. When midnight comes and Bertram arrives, instead of Diana it’s Helena that he sleeps with. Helena gets the ring, and gets pregnant with Bertram’s child, fulfilling his conditions. Bertram is forced to stay married, and all is “well” in the end.

The modern director has the challenge of how to address these problems. Should they create some clever staging to make it make more sense? Should they lean into the problematic elements as a way to engage the audience in critical thought? Should they try to find the humorous parts within the problems? Every director is different and has the challenge of making it work for our contemporary minds.

Sources

The History of “Bed Tricks”

The “bed trick” that takes place in this play may be shocking to modern audiences who have been coached in the importance of consent, but the bed trick itself has a long history in literature and folklore. Here are three very famous examples of the bed trick used well before Shakespeare.

In Greek mythology, Zeus takes the form of Amphitryon, the King of Thebes, and sleeps with Amphitryon’s wife, Alcmene. Alcmene later becomes pregnant and gives birth to a child that will grow into the great hero Hercules.

In the *Historia Regum Britannie*, the legend of King Arthur includes a bed trick. Uther Pendragon, the legendary king of sub-Roman Britain, is magically disguised by the wizard Merlin to look like the Duke of Cromwell. He appears to the Duke’s wife, and sleeps with her. The child that is born goes on to become King Arthur.

In the Book of Genesis in the Bible, Jacob falls in love with Laban’s daughter Rachel, and agrees to work for him for seven years in order to win her hand in marriage. On their wedding night, Laban substitutes his older daughter Leah in place of Rachel, so Jacob unknowingly marries her instead. Laban says this is because it is customary for the older daughter to be married off first. Jacob agrees to work another seven years to marry Rachel, and ends up with both sisters as his wives.

After reading these descriptions of early uses of the bed trick, discuss the following questions:

- Why do you think the bed trick was popular to use in folklore and legends? How does the substitution of a god or king for a regular man (as biological father) contribute to the lore around a particular legendary figure?
- How well does the idea of the bed trick translate into literature and more realistic stories from the Renaissance through the mid-20th century? What about today, when we as a society have a better understanding of the importance of consent in sexual relationships?

A Fairy Tale of Love and War

In many ways, *All’s Well that Ends Well* uses fairy tale tropes in telling the story of Helena and Bertram. In this activity, students will identify story elements that are present both in this play, and in famous fairy tales.

**Instructions**

1. In groups of 5–7 people, have students list some of the more fairy-tale or fantasy-like story elements of this play. Some examples are below:
   - They live happily ever after, despite how unlikely that is.
   - The clever low-born woman wants to marry a higher class man.
   - Helena is given a “quest” that seems impossible at first.

2. Then, have each group try to identify a fairy tale or fantasy story that also has similar elements.
   - In some versions of “Little Red Riding Hood,” everyone lives happily ever after, despite having been eaten by a wolf previously.
   - In “Cinderella,” the heroine is a poor maid who dreams of marrying the prince.
   - In *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo is sent on a quest to destroy the one ring.

**Discussion Questions**

- Why do you think Shakespeare chose to use so many fantastical story elements in this play?
- Does All’s Well that Ends Well feel like a fairy tale? Why or why not?

**Activity Extension**

Have students re-write the plot of *All’s Well That Ends Well* as if it were going to be published in a fairy tale anthology. Begin with “Once upon a time…” and end with “And they lived happily ever after.”

**Discussion Questions**

- Did you feel that you needed to change any part of the play to make it into a fairy tale?
- Older fairy tales, such as the original Grimm’s Fairy Tales, are quite dark. Would this play fit in with those fairy tales?
- What pieces of the play did your story focus on?
Poster Design

Many of Shakespeare's plays are written very long and complex, so directors will often choose to cut them in such a way as to focus on one or two aspects of the play. Then they will communicate their particular take on the play through the marketing and poster design, so that patrons know what to expect when they go to the theatre.

Instructions

1. Look at Seattle Shakespeare Company’s poster and play description for All's Well that Ends Well:

   All’s Well
   That Ends Well

   A Fairytale of Love and War. It’s a world in decline where leaders are failing and wars loom large. Smart and unwavering, Helena has pinned her heart to Bertram. He wants nothing to do with her and runs off to the wars for adventure and to escape his newly-arranged marriage. So Helena follows him. Overcoming obstacles and aided by a fantastic collection of comic characters, the two begin separate journeys towards each other, both learning about the paradox of holding love tight as well as letting go.

2. Ask students: What do they imagine our production will focus on?

   Note the use of the words smart, heart, adventure, and journeys, as well as the impressionistic, dreamy qualities of the poster image. This director seems to be highlighting the fairy-tale and questing qualities of this play.

3. Then have students look over the plot summary at the beginning of this study guide. There are many pieces of the plot that can be highlighted by how the show is performed, and by which scenes are given the most importance. Here are some suggestions:

   • Focus on the female relationships between Diana, the Widow, and Helena, and how they band together to help each other out.
   • Focus on the Bertram-Helena relationship, and how they both grow and mature throughout the course of the play.
   • Focus on the way status is treated in the play, and use social commentary about how different classes of people need to go about getting what they want.
   • Focus on elevating the Parolles subplot, and drawing parallels between his disloyalty and the problematic relationships that Bertram has.

4. Ask students: Can they think of other pieces of the story to focus on?

5. Once students have decided what the focus of their production will be, have them design a poster and write a short marketing description of their production of the play. They can use images printed from the internet or pulled from magazines and newspapers, or they can draw the posters themselves. Have students think about the words they use to describe the play in a short paragraph. Remember – they do not need to give the summary of the plot, just a taste of what the story is about.

6. Have students present their final work to the class by hanging them around the room for everyone to look at. Ask students – do these all look like the same play? Or could they be very different experiences?
Mission Statement
With the plays of William Shakespeare at our core, Seattle Shakespeare Company engages our audiences, our artists and our community in the universal human experience inherent in classic drama through the vitality, immediacy and intimacy of live performance and dynamic outreach programs.

About Us
Seattle Shakespeare Company is the Puget Sound region’s year-round, professional, classical theatre. The company’s growing success stems from a deep belief in the power and vibrancy of the time-tested words and ideas of Shakespeare and other classical playwrights along with a commitment to artistic excellence on stage. The results have been provocative performances that both challenge and delight audiences while fostering an appreciation for great stage works.

Our combined programs — which include indoor performances, free outdoor productions, regional tours, educator and youth programs — reach across barriers of income, geography, and education to bring classical theatre to Washington State.

Education Programs
In-School Residencies, Matinees, and Workshops
• In-School Residencies bring active, customized curriculum into schools across Washington State. Professional teaching artists plan with teachers to tailor each residency to fit the needs and objectives of the classroom. Seattle Shakespeare Company residencies inject vibrant, active exercises into lessons that unlock the text, themes, and actions of a Shakespeare play.
• Student Matinees bring over 3,000 students annually to our mainstage productions in the Seattle Center. Teachers are provided free study guides, and student groups are invited to stay after the show for a free Q&A session with the cast.
• Pre-show and post-show workshops can be booked to accompany mainstage matinees. These workshops include an introduction to the play itself, student activities, and insights into direction and design choices of our specific production.

Touring Productions
• Fresh and accessible 90-minute productions tour across Washington State each Spring, reaching more than 14,000 students and adults. These nimble productions perform as easily in school gymnasiums as professional theatre facilities. Teachers are provided free study guides and students enjoy free post-show Q&A sessions with the cast.
• Schools have the opportunity to book accompanying in-school residencies with touring productions, led by members of the touring cast and additional teaching artists.

Camps and Classes
• Our summer “Camp Bill” series in Seattle and Edmonds offers young actors a variety of camps to choose from or combine. Camps range from a One-Week Introduction to a Three-Week Production Intensive, with many options in between.
• In our Fall and Spring after-school “Short Shakes” programs, young actors develop their skills and gain hands-on performance and production experience.
• Seattle Shakespeare Company occasionally offers adult classes and workshops to our community featuring guest artists who work on our stage.

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