

The Experiment Entrusted to Helen in *All's Well That Ends Well*: The Shift from Geocentric to Heliocentric Outlook

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William Shakespeare's *All's Well that Ends Well* (*All's Well* hereafter), which Frederick S. Boas named a 'problem play' because it was neither a comedy nor a tragedy, has been classified as both his last comedy and one of his problem plays.¹⁾ This article contends that *All's Well*, when examined through an astronomical lens, can be interpreted as a comedy that utilizes experimentation to bring about the marriage of the character Helen—a union that conventional thinking would deem impossible in reality.

1. Helen: A Modern Heroine

Helen from *All's Well* is an unusual heroine for a Shakespeare play, as she has the greatest number of lines of dialogue. The number of lines she speaks is 16% of the total number of lines compared to the talkative Paroles, who speaks 13% of the total number of lines.²⁾ The uniqueness of Helen as a character is not solely the amount of dialogue she has, however. If that were the case, Rosalind in *As You Like It* would be equally unusual, as she speaks for 25% of the entire play.³⁾ Even in comparison to Rosalind, who has more dialogue, Helen stands

out. As Suzanne Gossett and Helen Wilcox state, Helen soliloquises at the end of Act 1, Scene 1, which is unusual for a heroine, as most soliloquies in Shakespeare's works are for male characters.⁴⁾ Helen's soliloquy is as follows:

HELEN. Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie
Which we ascribe to heaven. The fated sky
Gives us free scope, only doth backward pull
Our slow designs when we ourselves are dull.
What power is it which mounts my love so high,
That makes me see, and cannot feed mine eye?
The mightiest space in fortune nature brings
To join like likes, and kiss like native things.
Impossible be strange attempts to those
That weigh their pains in sense and do suppose
What hath been cannot be. Who ever strove
To show her merit that did miss her love?
The King's disease—my project may deceive me,
But my intents are fixed and will not leave me. (1.1.212–25)

Helen's late father was a renowned physician. She was brought up by a countess as her adopted daughter. The countess is predeceased by her husband and is forced to send her only son, Bertram, to his guardian, the King of France. Meanwhile, Helen secretly loves Bertram, and laments that she will be separated from Bertram when he goes to the King. She also laments that her own unrequited love will not bear fruit due to differences in status. However, in the abovementioned soliloquy, she confides her desire to shape her destiny. This soliloquy is ambitious and re-

calls Iago's determination to undermine the Moorish officer Othello in *Othello*, or Richard III, who declares on stage that he will become a villain to usurp the throne. As such, Helen, like Iago and Richard III, can be described as Machiavelian.

Although *All's Well* is classified as a comedy in the *First Folio* and placed between *The Taming of The Shrew* and *Twelfth Night*, critics have historically argued that it cannot be categorised as a comedy. Boas labelled *Troilus and Cressida* (c. 1602), *All's Well* (1603–06), *A Measure for a Measure* (1604) and *Hamlet* (1600–01) as problem plays as plays that are neither comedy nor tragedy. The influence of Boas with regard to the works continues to this day—although *Hamlet* is excluded.

Despite the play's cheerful title, many critics have suggested that *All's Well* is hardly a comedy. Some say that the aftertaste of the bed trick Helen uses to solve the difficulties imposed on her by Bertram is unacceptable. Nonetheless, according to Geoffrey Bullough, 'no Elizabethan audience would feel great repugnance at Helena's means of getting herself married or of getting her marriage consummated: The idea was too old and well-known to cause lifting of eyebrows' (Bullough 379).⁵⁾ Others lack an understanding of Bertram's reasons for the rejection of the virtuous Helen as a marriage partner, despite the support of the king. Samuel Johnson's opinion of *All's Well* is a prime example of those critics' lack of understanding of Bertram:

I cannot reconcile my heart to Bertram; a man noble without generosity, and young without truth; who marries Helen 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 whom he has wronged, defends himself by

falsehood, and is dismissed to happiness. (Johnson 150)

The RSC Complete Edition's Introduction to *All's Well* also notes it is 'one of the least loved comedies in Shakespeare's oeuvre, being performed very rarely' (Bate and Rasmussen 574). However, they go on to call it 'a very charming and curious modern production' (Bate and Rasmussen 574). Earlier, I described Helen as Machiavellian, but she could be considered modern. She is modern in the sense that she tries to make her own way in life rather than leaving it to a predetermined fate. *All's Well* is also modern in that it presents a style of courtship that was not generally possible in Shakespeare's time; specifically, Helen chooses Bertram and successfully arranges things in such a way that she can marry him. Even more significant is the heroine's success in rising in the social hierarchy through marriage in a society where everything's existence is defined by 'order'.

Society in early modern England had an 'order' for everything and the source of that 'order' was the collective view of the universe. In Act 1, Scene 3 of *Troilus and Cressida*, written close in time to the composition of *All's Well*, in the former play, Ulysses makes a 103-line argument for order, using the word 'degree'.

Ulysses. ...Degree being vizarded,
Th'unworthiest shows as fairly in the mask.
The heavens themselves, the planets and this centre
Observe degree, priority and place,
Insisture, course, proportion, season, form,
Office and custom, in all line of order.
...
... O, when degree is shaken,
Which is the ladder to all high designs,

The enterprise is sick...

...

Take but degree away, untune that string,

And hark what discord follows... (*Troilus and Cressida* 1.3.83–111)

Ulysses says he is concerned about the disobedience of the officer Achilles to the commander-in-chief Agamemnon and cites the order of the cosmic spheres of the universe. Suggesting that the order of the army should also follow the cosmic order of the celestial spheres, he warns once ‘degree is shake [n]’ (*Troilus and Cressida* 1.3.101), everything in the world will go into ‘discord’ (*Troilus and Cressida* 1.3.110). It can be said that in *All's Well* Helen plans to ‘shake’ the order to marry Bertram. Therefore, when audiences of *All's Well* in early modern England heard about Helen’s plot, which is in a sense aimed at undermining the hierarchy, they would have been surprised by her audacity and would have been deeply interested in the outcome of her plot.

2. Cosmology in Early Modern England

Astronomy in early modern West was based on the ideas of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322BC) and the cosmology described in the *Almagest* by the Greek astronomer, mathematician, and geographer Ptolemy (C.100–C.170). The cosmology described in the *Almagest* is used in this study. With its idea that the heavenly bodies revolved around the Earth, the *Almagest* was regarded as the greatest book on astronomy in the preceding 1,500 years. According to Ptolemy’s cosmology, the universe consists of nine to twelve layers of celestial spheres with the Earth at its centre.⁶⁾ In particular, the cosmos is divided into superlunar bodies and sublunary bodies, bounded by the celestial sphere of the



Fig. 1. System of the World according to Ptolemy

Moon. The sublunary world consists of the four elements: earth, water, wind and fire; moreover, it is a world of life and death. This is depicted in cosmological images as four concentric celestial spheres. The superlunar spheres are filled with the 'ether', which is the everlasting and unchanging celestial material. The celestial spheres above the Moon include Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, and the Primum Mobile; a motor sphere that moves the celestial spheres, according to Ptolemy. It was thought that the Primum Mobile was the driving force that transmitted power from the outer to the inner celestial spheres and the Earth. The celestial spheres form an order, with the outermost being at the top, and the hierarchy descends as the celestial spheres move inwards. This order has also been applied to the human world and served to define social hierarchies. It was also believed that the date and time of a person's birth determined the stars which were believed to affect them and their personality, and that the source of astrology,

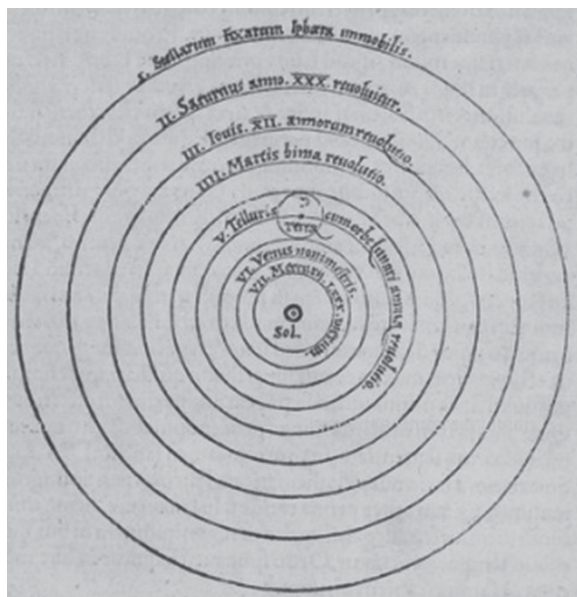


Fig. 2. Copernican world system

which divines their relationship with the stars, was also an Earth-centred cosmological model of the universe.

However, these could not be explained by Ptolemaic cosmology, or the geocentric theory. It was observed that twins born at the same time and on the same day had very different personalities, and that comets appeared in the skies above England in 1577 and 1607, coming from the permanent, unchanging superlunary world. Meanwhile, about 70 years before these incidents, which could not be explained by conventional cosmology in England, Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543) devised a new cosmology called the heliocentric theory. This new theory was publicised in his famous work, *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres*.⁷⁾

How was Copernicus's heliocentric theory accepted in England? The helio-

centric theory was first discussed in Robert Record (C.1512–1558)’s *The Castle of Knowledge* (1556), in which Record casts doubt on Aristotle and Ptolemy’s theory. Record was followed by the mathematician John Dee (1527–1609), who introduced the Copernican theory as useful in the preface to his astronomical tables. Following this, Thomas Digges (C.1546–1595) translated parts of the Copernican theory in his *Prognostication Everlasting* 1576, which went through several editions; which indicates that the Copernican theory had reached a reasonable number of people. William Gilbert (1544–1603), one of the physicians of Elizabeth I in her final years (1601–1603), wrote about his belief in Copernicus in his book *De Magnete* (1600). Furthermore, Giordano Bruno (1548–1600) lectured on the Copernican theory at Oxford University and published seven books in London between 1583 and 1585. Neither the lectures nor the publications had a major impact, but it is thought that Copernicus’s theory of the heliocentric spread quietly among intellectuals (Weber 363).

The observer Tycho Brahe (1546–1601), the greatest practical astronomer before the use of the telescope, was already aware of the Copernican theory but did not want to invite opposition from theologians. He created a compromise between the Ptolemaic and Copernican theories. The centre remained on the Earth, and he drew a rotation of the Sun, Moon, and stars, which is consistent with observations.⁸⁾

Johannes Kepler (1571–1630), assistant to Brahe in his observations, modified Copernicus’s and Brahe’s theories. While observing Mars, he proved that its orbit is an ellipse rather than a circle, as previously thought, and that the sun is its focus. His ideas were published in *New Astronomy* in 1609.⁹⁾

Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) observed a nova in 1604. He departed from the cosmological views of Aristotle and Ptolemy as he observed a nova in supposedly

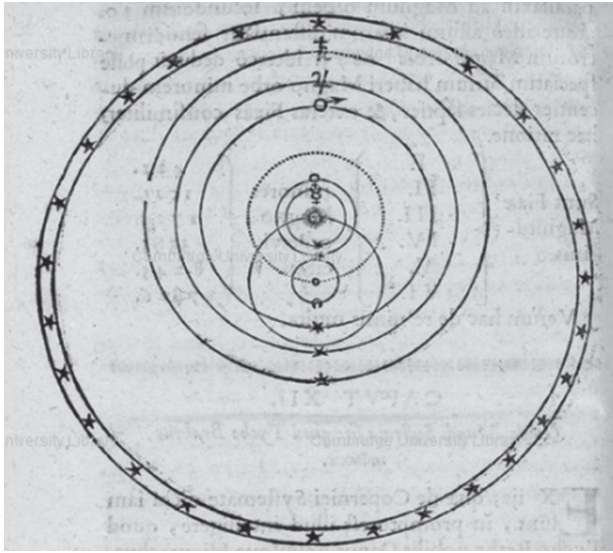


Fig. 3. 'System of the World according to Tycho Brahe'

constant and unchanging heavens.

As mentioned above, the period in which Shakespeare wrote his plays was a transitional period in astronomy, when the old Aristotelian and Ptolemaic theories of geocentricism were being replaced by Copernicus's heliocentrism and the two cosmologies coexisted in society.

Henry Janowitz points out that Shakespeare became aware of Copernicus's cosmology through Michel de Montaigne's *Essays* (1603).¹⁰⁾ In *Essays*, de Montaigne expresses a sceptical view of Copernicus's heliocentric theory. Janowitz argues that Shakespeare, who read *Essays*, distanced himself from the new cosmology. Alan S. Weber also concludes that Copernicus's heliocentric theory was a topic of conversation among a limited number of intellectuals in Europe and England at the time, and it did not spread rapidly.¹¹⁾

3. Cosmology Expressed in Shakespeare's Works

Shakespeare's works have been discussed from an astronomical perspective as many critics have read and considered the cosmology presented in them. This includes John Candee Dean (1924), Nakano Haruo (2002, 2005), Peter D. Usher (2010), David H. Levy with Judy A. Hayden (2016), and Bradd Shore (2022).

In *All's Well*, we see passages in which cosmology has been discussed. In Act 1, Scene 1, after Bertram finishes greeting his mother on his departure for the French court, Helen says the following:

HELEN. I am undone: there is no living, none,
If Bertram be away. 'Twere all one
That I should love a bright particular star
And think to wed it, he is so above me
In his bright radiance and collateral light
Must I be comforted, not in his sphere. (1.1.84–89)

These lines were written with geocentrism in mind as Bertram is likened to 'a bright particular star' (1.1.86), which suggests that Bertram belongs to the super-lunar sphere and Helen to the sublunary sphere. Helen laments that because of her sublunary sphere, she is only affected from above, and she can only look up as humans look up at the night sky; in no way can she elevate herself to Bertram's sphere.

After this monologue, Helen, not being outdone, discusses virginity with the outspoken Paroles. Her lines illustrate that Helen is strong minded and is not easily defeated. She asks Paroles the way to defend a maiden's virginity; given this,

Paroles states that maidens cannot escape from losing their virginity and should give up virginity quickly and increase their natural assets for their husbands. Accepting that she cannot keep her virginity, she asks him, 'How might one do, sir, to lose it to her own/liking?' (1.1.149–50). Here, Helen reveals that she wants to marry according to her wishes. While bickering without being beaten by the chatty Paroles, she suddenly becomes weak-kneed at the thought of her own fruitless love and laments with a metaphor drawn from conventional cosmology.

HELEN. That wishing well had not a body in't
Which might be felt, that we the poorer born,
Whose baser stars do shut us up in wishes,
Might with effects of them follow our friends
And show what we alone must think, Which never
Returns us thanks. (1.1.178–83)

This monologue assumes an Earth-centred model of the universe as forces move only from above downwards and never backwards from below moving upwards. Therefore, Helen laments that her wish in the sublunary world of reaching Bertram in the superlunar world will never be achieved.

However, in the superlunar world, in which not all things go backwards, a metaphor for going backwards appears in the dialogue which follows:

HELEN. Monsieur Paroles, you were born under a charitable star.
PAROLES. Under Mars, I.
HELEN. I especially think, under Mars.
PAROLES. Why under Mars?

HELEN. The wars hath so kept you under that you must be born under Mars.

PAROLES. When he was predominant.

HELEN. When he was retrograde, I think rather.

PAROLES. Why think you so?

HELEN. You go so much backward when you fight. (1.1.187–97)

It is the words ‘predominant’ (1.1.194) and ‘retrograde’ (1.1.195) that are of interest in the exchange here. Both are astrological terms, with ‘predominant’ indicating a strong positive influence of the stars, which is exactly the example given here in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED).¹²⁾ ‘Retrograde’, by contrast, expresses a negative meaning, as the *OED* defines as following ‘of a planet, temporarily appearing to move across the sky in the reverse direction to that which is usual for it; that is, from east to west, across the celestial sphere. Some astrologers consider a retrograde planet to be inauspicious or to have a weakened influence’.¹³⁾ According to conventional thinking, the date and time of a person’s birth determine the stars that influence them and astrology, which divines the influence of the stars, is prevalent in this situation. In the celestial iconography of the Earth-centred theory, constellations are marked on the outer, or more influential, celestial spheres, and represent their influence on the inner spheres. In fact, both the subjects and even Queen Elizabeth I relied on astrology. The queen employed an astrologer, John Dee, who is mentioned above as the mathematician and evaluated Copernicus early in England, and made national decisions based on astrological predictions (Shore 65). Paroles uses ‘predominant’ as an astrological term and says that he was born when the influence of the military god Mars, was strong, so his strength is endorsed. Helen, on the other hand, uses ‘retrograde’ as an astrological and astronomical term, and argues that because he was born under Mars

when the power of the stars is weak, Paroles 'retrograde [s]' backwards when he should be moving forward. However, according to Usher, retrograde Mars was observed in England between 1 March and 19 May 1604. Usher also claims that Kepler's 1604 nova observation is represented in the line quoted by Helen earlier, wherein she refers to Bertram as 'a bright particular star' (1.1.86).

It is noteworthy that during the time Shakespeare was writing his plays, various observations were being made in the real world that contradicted the explanations provided by prior cosmological theories. As a result, the intellectuals of the time recognized the necessity of a new cosmological theory to account for the workings of nature. It is assumed that Shakespeare affirmed the need for a new idea to explain nature and used the astrological term 'retrograde', which is both an astrological and an astronomical term. In other words, Helen uses the astrological meaning to ostensibly praise Paroles as 'born of Mars, the god of war', and uses the astronomical meaning to cast him as a coward who retreats when he should be advancing in battle.

After seeing Paroles off, Helen delivers her famous soliloquy, as mentioned above.

HELEN. Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie
Which we ascribe to heaven. The fated sky
Gives us free scope, only doth backward pull
Our slow designs when we ourselves are dull.
What power is it which mounts my love so high,
That makes me see, and cannot feed mine eye?
The mightiest space in fortune nature brings
To join like likes, and kiss like native things.

Impossible be strange attempts to those
That weigh their pains in sense and do suppose
What hath been cannot be. Who ever strove
To show her merit that did miss her love?
The King's disease—my project may deceive me,
But my intents are fixed and will not leave me. (1.1.212–25)

Helen delivers this soliloquy in the form of heroic couplets, while she had previously spoken in blank verse. Heroic couplets are an orderly metre, with rhymes every two lines. As William Bowman Piper mentions, the use of heroic couplets was rather unfashionable in Shakespeare's time (Piper 4). It is ironic that, contrary to the order of society, Helen professes her passionate desire to marry Bertram, a desire for boundary transgression in orderly and unfashionable rhymes.

'Heaven' (1.1.213) in the above quotation represents God and at the same time evokes the celestial spheres of the celestial chart. Helen reveals her plans to marry Bertram, a man of the upper class, and the audience would have regarded Helen as an ambitious heroine upon hearing her deliver this soliloquy on stage. Later in Act 3, Scene 4, Helen refers to her wish as 'Ambitious love' (3. 4. 5); therefore, she herself is aware of the nature of her love. In the real world, the strict order of things defined the place of every thing in existence; and in human society, as in the universe, the place of birth and the time of birth defined a person's class, character, and future through their astrological stars. Helen's wish is far outside the bounds imposed by the notion of order prevalent in Shakespeare's time.

In the soliloquy quoted above, Helen invokes conventional Ptolemaic cosmology to the audience, the common belief in society that from birth, they are influenced by the stars and can descend to the lower class but never rise. But at the

same time, she challenges it by saying ‘The fated sky/Gives us free scope...’ (1.1.212–23) and with the rhetorical question ‘Who ever strove/To show her merit that did miss her love?’ (1.1.222–23). This rhetorical question expresses her determination to make every effort to obtain Bertram. Helen boldly rejects the common astrological model which ruled people’s lives by the star under which one was born and declares that if she has the will, even a woman should be able to marry as she wishes. She reveals her plan to cure the king of his incurable illness with the prescription she inherited from her father and to bring about her marriage to Bertram with the king’s help.

Helen then cures the king’s illness and restores his health, and Lafeu tells the audience the following:

LAFEU. They say miracles are past, and we have our
philosophical persons to make modern and familiar,
things supernatural and causeless. Hence is it that we
make trifles of terrors, ensconcing ourselves into
seeming knowledge, when we should submit ourselves
to an unknown fear. (2.3.1–6)

Lafeu describes how the awe of conventional religious and natural views has waned in recent years as various discoveries by scientists have revealed miracles—the supernatural or the unexplainable—which cannot be confirmed by conventional science. There, Helen cures the king’s illness, and Lafeu sees Helen as a miracle-worker, a saviour who restores faith in old ideas. Helen challenges the conventional discipline of society, curing the king’s illness with the power of science inherited from her father. It is ironic that Helen acts on new ideas, but is per-

ceived by those around her as a revival of religious ‘miracle’ and the embodiment of old ideas.

After gaining the king’s patronage, Helen appoints Bertram as her marriage partner, but Bertram rejects Helen on the grounds of her low status; notably, this is a reminder for the audience and reader that status is key to this play. The obstacle that Helen is trying to overcome the existing order, is not only embodied by the social order but also by the person she loves. Helen knows from the beginning that her status is insufficiently high, so she tries to compensate for this by gaining the king’s patronage. However, her plans do not work, as Bertram imposes two impossible conditions for marriage. The first condition is that Helen obtain a ring that has been in Bertram’s family for generations. The second one is having Bertram’s child. He leaves France for the Italian war zone, and says that he will marry Helen if these two conditions are met. Helen, who regrets sending her loved one to war, embarks on a pilgrimage to Italy after leaving a message: ‘Ambitious love hath so in me offended’ (3.4.5). Coincidentally, with the help of a maiden named Diana, whom Bertram seduces, Helen attempts a bed trick and successfully solves the two difficulties imposed by Bertram. At the French court, Helen is presumed dead, whereupon she appears ‘resurrected’ before the king and Bertram. Bertram expresses remorse for his thoughtless actions, including leaving for war in Italy immediately after marrying Helen without consummating the marriage, seducing Diana in Italy, and denying his involvement with her when confronted by the king. Bertram promises to marry Helen and the play comes to a close with their marriage and Helen’s subsequent rise to a higher social class.

The fluidity of real-world social hierarchies is prevalent in this work, along with the oscillation from Earth-centred to Sun-centred theories. Helen humbly speaks of her low status on many occasions yet desires a marriage that will raise

her above her class. In a letter to the countess, in which Helen tells her that she is going on a pilgrimage, Helen is aware of her desire for 'Ambitious love' (3.4.5). Helen fulfils this ambitious desire by enduring adversity.

How is marriage conceived of across hierarchies? Class mobility emerged in early modern England. John D. Cox describes Bertram and Helen's marriage as unwelcome in real life (Cox 135). In the 16th century, class mobility emerged, particularly among those who rose through the ranks and struggled to maintain the rank. Quoting John Ferne, Cox states cross-class marriages at the time were frowned upon (Cox 135). In fact, a king should marry his vassal to a person of the same rank as his nobleman, and taking a wife of a lower rank than the nobleman would bring dishonour not only to the man himself, but to his entire house. Furthermore, according to Ferne, the responsibility for inappropriate marriages lay with the king, who dishonours himself as well as his vassal's family (Cox 135–36). On the other hand, Lawrence Stone provides an example of a marriage that transcends class, in which a nobleman in financial difficulty receives the daughter of a wealthy merchant (Stone 287). Judging from Bertram's statement, Helen is not extremely wealthy, and Bertram's house is not in economic difficulty. Therefore, their marriage is not a typical example of a cross-class marriage in early modern England. However, Haruo Nakano calls Helen's father, a physician, a 'new gentleman', drawing on William Harrison's *The Description of England* (Nakano 2008, 253, Harrison 114). *All's Well* presents the setting in which a maiden from the 'new gentleman' class, at the second level in the social hierarchy of the time, desires to marry a genuine gentleman, marries him, and successfully rises to the top stratum.

4. Conclusion

The period in which Shakespeare wrote his plays was a transitional period when, with the development of observation, events could no longer be explained by existing cosmologies. During this time, the new Copernican Sun-centred theory was in the process of replacing the Aristotelian and Ptolemaic Earth-centred theories. It is not possible to decide from reading *All's Well* which cosmology Shakespeare supported. However, as has been mentioned, the playwright has Helen deliver lines that incorporate the new heliocentric theory.

The work ends with the king's line, 'All yet seems well, and if it end so meet,/The bitter past, more welcome is sweet' (5.3.330–31). Anne Barton states that Helen's saying 'All's well' has a different meaning from the one uttered by the king. Helen utters 'All's well that ends well' twice. First, Helen delivers the line in the scene where, with the help of Diana, she tricks Bertram into believing that the lady he lies in bed with is Diana, whom he was courting in Florence after freeing from the forced marriage with Helen as arranged by the king. This allows Helen to spend the night with Bertram. After the success of the bed trick, Helen asks Diana for her continued help, and says that 'All's well that ends well; still the fine's the crown./Whate'er the course, the end is the renown' (4.4.35–36). The second line appears soon after the first line is uttered. After spending the night with Bertram, becoming pregnant, and solving one of the difficulties Bertram imposed on her, Helen attempts to meet the king, but accidentally the king leaves before her arrival. At that point, Helen expresses her refusal to give up, saying 'All's well that ends well yet,/Though time seems so adverse and means unfit' (5.1.25–26). According to Barton, while 'all's well' indicates that the story Helen is engaged in is fictitious, the ending lines of the play uttered by the king remind the

audience that in reality it does not work like Helen says it does (Barton 537). Indeed, it could be argued that the story of her marriage is fictional and that the king's final lines bring the audience back to reality, where females cannot choose their marriage partner nor court them for marriage. However, the playwright, who observed social trends and thought about creating something that would attract the audience, included strange natural phenomena, fluctuations in cosmology, and the social stratification which was derived from this cosmology. In reality, Shakespeare and his father applied for a coat of arms, and attempted to rise in the hierarchy, and succeeded. The fluidity of the hierarchy observed in early modern England contradicts the conventional cosmological theorem. Nonetheless, if the order of the universe were to change, and the Earth-centred theory were replaced with a Sun-centred theory, people might be freed from the order that governs them from birth. *All's Well* is an experimental work that demonstrates what can happen when the hoops of the world's order are slightly broken, in accordance with the fluctuations of cosmology. When the order breaks down, a real-life rise in social hierarchy is publicly allowed to take place. As such, *All's Well* portrays a marriage that successfully elevates the social status of the bride; moreover, it utilizes its fictional nature to present itself as a fantasy tale about a woman's yearning to wed a man of a higher social class, an unattainable prospect in reality during the time period in which it is set. However, the fact that Helen is from the second highest stratum of gentlemen and rises a stratum is an ingenious method of ensuring that marriage on stage seems plausible. By doing so, the playwright creates a sense of liberation from the real world while still engaging the audience with the play. This effect is not limited to the duration of the performance, but can also be experienced afterwards. Subsequently, the audience left the theatre and returned to the real world with a faint hope of liberation from the shackles of the real world.

Notes

This article is based on the presentation ‘*All’s Well that Ends Well*—in the swing from geocentric to heliocentric theory’ at the 94th Conference of the English Literary Society of Japan (2022), with additions and corrections.

- 1) Boas categorized *All’s Well* as a problem plays along with *Measure for Measure*, *Troilus and Cressida* and *Hamlet*. Frederick S. Boas, *Shakespeare and His Predecessors*. Gordian Press, 1968, p. 345
- 2) The ratios of characters’ lines in *All’s Well* are from *William Shakespeare Complete Works*, ed. by Jonathan Bate, Eric Rasmussen and others, 2nd edn. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022, p. 576.
- 3) *William Shakespeare Complete Works*, ed. by Jonathan Bate, Eric Rasmussen and others, 2nd edn. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022, p.466.
- 4) Gossett and Wilcox note in their textual note. William Shakespeare, *All’s Well That Ends Well*, ed. by Suzanne Gossett and Helen Wilcox, The Arden Shakespeare, 3rd edn. Bloomsbury, 2019, p. 144.
- 5) Bullough refers to the heroine as Helena. I follow the Arden Shakespeare, third edition, and refer to her as Helen in this paper.
- 6) Fig. 1 is ‘System of the World according to Ptolemy’ (M.9.37), University of Cambridge Digital Library, <<https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/PR-M-00009-00037-00003/1>> Accessed 22 April. 2023.
- 7) Nicolaus Copernicus, *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium*, 1543. This book was published in the year of Copernicus’s death. Copernicus hesitated to publish his new theory because it was inconsistent with Christianity.
Fig. 2 is ‘Copernican world system, first edition’ (F154.b.1.1), University of Cambridge Digital Library, <<https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/PR-F154-B-00001-00001-00001/1>> Accessed 22 April. 2023.
- 8) Fig. 3 is ‘System of the World according to Tycho Brahe’ (M.9.37), University of Cambridge Digital Library, <<https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/PR-M-00009-00037-00002/1>> Accessed 22 April. 2023.

- 9) Johannes Kepler, *Novaeastronomiae*, 1609.
- 10) Henry Janowitz, 'Some Evidence on Shakespeare's Knowledge of the Copernican Revolution and the "New Philosophy"'. *The Shakespeare Newsletter*: Iona College, 2001, Fall, pp. 79-80.
- 11) Alan S. Weber, 'What Did Shakespeare Know about Copernicanism?' 2012. DOI: 10.2478/v10319-012-0031-x.
- 12) Oxford English Dictionary Online, 'predominant, adj.' 1. a. Having ascendancy, supremacy, or prevailing influence over others; superior, predominating. In early use esp. with reference to the supposed influence of bodily humours or (in Astrology) of planets. <www.oed.com/.> Accessed 25 April. 2023.
- 12) Oxford English Dictionary Online, 'retrograde, A. adj.' 1. a. <www.oed.com/.> Accessed 25 April. 2023.

Quotations from the original text of *All's Well That Ends Well* in this paper are from the third edition of the Arden Shakespeare: William Shakespeare, *All's Well That Ends Well*, edited by Suzanne Gossett and Helen Wilcox, the Arden Shakespeare, 3rd ed., Bloomsbury, 2019.

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ヘレンに託された実験的結婚：
地球中心説から太陽中心説への揺らぎの中で

大住 有里子

ウィリアム・シェイクスピアの『終わりよければすべてよし』（1603—06）は、陽気なタイトルとは裏腹に、喜劇とはいいがたいと「問題劇」とも呼ばれる。問題劇という括りを取り払っても、シェイクスピア作品の中で評価は決して高いとは言えない。本稿では、この劇作品のメイン・プロットであるヘレンのバートラムとの結婚を、イギリス初期近代の天文学の観点から読み、劇作家が現実には起こり得なかった結婚を実験的に成就させた喜劇と論じる。

初期近代イングランドにおいて、人は生まれた場所（家、長男か否か）によって社会階層での位置が決まり、階層の移動は理論上不可能であった。その社会階層は天体の階層を源とし、アリストテレスやプトレマイオスの天文学、つまり地球中心説に基いていた。しかし、現実には従来の地球中心説では説明できない現象が起こっていた。変化が起こらない不動の天球とされる月上界から彗星がおりてくる様子が観測されたことが大きな事例として挙げられる。一方、シェイクスピアが劇作する時期より約 70 年前にニコラス・コペルニクスが太陽中心説を考案し、この新しい宇宙論がイングランドにも入ってきていた。宇宙論が変わるのならば、従来の宇宙論をもとに築かれていた社会階層も変わることになる。

本作のヒロイン、ヘレンは宇宙論を思わせる台詞を発する。第 1 幕第 1 場最後の独白で「意思がない者は不可能と諦めていることを、意志があれば、成し遂げられるはず」と宇宙論を持ち出し、従来の地球中心説に基づく社会階層への挑戦を語る。そもそも、シェイクスピア作品の中で独白をするヒロインは珍しい。その独白で、ヘレンは自分の結婚計画を観客に明かし、身分違いの伯爵バートラムとの結婚を目指すのである。

現実には社会階層の流動化は起こっていた。財を成した商人は紋章を購入して第一階層のジェントルマンになり、裕福な商人の娘は経済危機に瀕しているジェントルマンに嫁ぎ階層を上がった。社会階層制度の源である

地球中心説が揺らぎ始めているのならば、社会階層の流動性は肯定されうる。シェイクスピアは、地球中心説から太陽中心説への揺らぎを意識し、ヘレンに新しい結婚を託したと言える。ヘレンは医者で、新参ジェントルマンに位置する。新参ジェントルマンの女性が、結婚相手を自分から選び、難局を乗り越え、見事結婚して生粋ジェントルマンになるのである。女性から結婚相手を選び、加えて身分の上の相手と結婚することが不可能であった初期近代社会の中で、劇作家はヘレンの実験的結婚を見せ、束の間、観客を現実から解放したのである。

(英語英米文学専攻 博士後期課程3年)