Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin Albrecht Dürer
(Woodcut) (1471-1528)
(German)

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"INSPIRÈD MERIT": SHAKESPEARE'S THEOLOGY OF GRACE IN *ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL*

EVER since the publication of Roland M. Frye's *Shakespeare and Christian Doctrine* (1963), interest in the role of theology in Shakespearean drama has suffered an unfortunate decline. Frye made the influential claim that Shakespeare held the mirror "up to nature, and not to saving grace" (267), arguing that Shakespearean drama was autonomous and confined to the temporal sphere "independent of theological systems" (268). The inadequacies of Frye's thesis are manifold,[1] but they become particularly evident when one considers the theological anthropology implicit in Shakespeare's dramatic practice, especially the operations of sin, penitence, and grace, not to mention various religious roles (abbess, pilgrim, novice, friar), confessional scenes, and theological shading of sources.[2] While one can agree with Frye's emphasis on nature, or "virtue's own feature" (*Hamlet* 3.2.22-23), as the main object of Shakespearean mimesis, it seems equally clear that Shakespeare never intended to exclude "saving grace" from his dramatic representations. Theology is reflected in the mirror, not excluded from it.

To be sure, Elizabethan censorship had effectively forced religious and political controversy from the stage. As the role of theology in popular drama was marginalized, the theater took a more ethical turn. In 1572 the Queen's Privy Council instructed London officials to allow "such plays, interludes, comedies, and tragedies as may tend to repress vice and extol virtue" (Yachnin 18-24). A decade later, with more philosophical sophistication, both Edmund Spenser and Philip Sidney laid out a similar program for poetry—the "figuring foorth" or representation of "notable images of vertues, vices, or what els [that is, passions]" so that the audience may see and love "the forme of goodnes" (Smith 1: 160, 166, 173). This is in full accord with Shakespeare's dramatic poetic of "hold[ing] the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn [pride] her own image" (Beauregard, *Virtue's Own Feature* 21-35). Nevertheless, such an ethically focused program, whether for poetry or drama, necessarily carried with it concomitant theological notions of sin, repentance and grace. It would have been virtually impossible for Shakespeare to have remained free of the theological orientation of Elizabethan culture. It is important to realize, moreover, that, as an external regulating force, the official censors were permissive, inconsistent, and often ineffectual, although no doubt their activity had the interior effect of causing writers to exercise some measure of self-censorship

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(Clare 211-15). Thus, in order to escape censorship and personal penalty, Shakespeare had to avoid explicit theological expression, in the form of doctrinal controversy or declamation, but he could expect some latitude and tolerance in the representation of Catholic matters on the stage. The example of *Sir Thomas More* (ca. 1592-3), a play in which Shakespeare had a hand, confirms this. Sir Edmund Tilney, Master of the Revels and censor from 1579 to 1610, wrote in the margin of the manuscript "Leave out the insurrection wholy and the Cause ther off and begin with Sir Thomas Moore att the mayors session [a succeeding scene]" (Clare 32). Tilney objects to potentially seditious matter, but not to the sympathetically portrayed figure of Thomas More (Dutton 81).[3] In other respects as well, we can discern a certain latitude given to theological expression. The final scene of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, for example, is suffused with theological implications regarding prayer, grace, and salvation. And Prospero's project in *The Tempest* (4.1.68-82; 5.1.28-32) is to bring men from sin to "heart's sorrow" and "penitence," the first step in the sacrament of penance. If theological controversy was steadily marginalized on the Elizabethan stage, the formal purpose and the moral images of drama still carried considerable theological force.

All's Well That Ends Well (ca. 1601-5) is a case in point. I shall argue in this essay that Shakespeare was well versed in theology and that a Roman Catholic—and not a Reformed—theology of grace informs the dialogue and action of *All's Well That Ends Well*.[4] This is not to claim that the play is primarily concerned with the explicit representation of Christian doctrine. Rather it is to claim that several references to theological doctrines appear in the speech of both primary and secondary characters, and that, taken in conjunction with Helena's two roles as miracle worker and pilgrim, they present us with a play infused with a Catholic theology of grace.

To be more specific, Shakespeare presents us with a theologically charged drama that holds the mirror up to nature, but also to the operations of grace. His central concern is to represent "ambitious love" ingeniously achieving its deserved reward, but implicit in that representation is a Roman Catholic theology of grace. Thus, Helena, in her two roles as miracle-worker and pilgrim, speaks in the theological language of Roman Catholic doctrine and devotional practice. Basic to both halves of the play is the Catholic notion of merit, of reward given for virtuous behavior, which is dramatically rendered by the heroine's being twice rewarded for accomplishing two impossible tasks, first through divine grace and then through human effort. In part one, the low-born Helena, who ambitiously aspires to the love of Bertram, cures the hopelessly ill King through "inspirèd merit" and so is raised in title and rewarded with the hand of Bertram in marriage. In part two, despised by Bertram who flees to

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Florence and sets impossible conditions for their marriage (to get his ring and produce a child by him), Helena conspires by an ingenious bed-trick to again achieve her reward, the consummation of her marriage to Bertram, who is, as she says in the final scene, "doubly won" (5.3.315). The double victory of the virtuous Helena, then, shows us that, as the King makes clear in his central discourse (2.3.117-44), true nobility lies in virtue, not inherited rank, and that the exercise of virtue merits its reward.

WHAT evidence of Shakespeare's theology is there in *All's Well*? To begin with, it is strikingly evident that the play contains numerous references to Roman Catholic theological doctrines and devotional practices. Since Shakespeare was brought up by Roman Catholic parents and was probably taught by Roman Catholic schoolmasters (Schoenbaum 65-66), the most likely explanation for these various references is that they are either the residue of his background and education or, because *All's Well* is a rather late play, the natural expression of a continuing belief. Revisionist historians of the English Reformation have convincingly argued that considerable popular resistance prevented the old religion from being uprooted until the 1580s, precisely the formative period of Shakespeare's youth (Todd 26-28; Duffy 1-8, 565-93). In any case, for whatever reason, there are undeniably a series of Roman Catholic references in *All's Well*. When Parolles remarks that "virginity murders itself, and should be buried in highways out of all sanctified limit" (1.1.140-42), he refers to the Roman Catholic refusal to allow suicides burial in consecrated ground, a refusal which was still customary but not yet specified in canon law within the Church of England (Noble 84). Later in the play, there are references to pilgrimage (3.4.4-17; 3.5.94-97; 4.3.47-49), to penitential vows (3.4.7; 3.5.95), to penance done in satisfaction for sin (3.4.6-7), to the requirements of auricular confession (4.3.108-11), and arguably to the Blessed Virgin Mary as intercessor (3.4.25-29). These matters were all particularly offensive to the ears of Reformed theologians. Furthermore, in the last act (5.3.57-58), the King remarks that Bertram's love for Helena will strike out numerous of his sins in "the great compt" (i.e., at the Last Judgment, as the great accounting for sin, implying the tallying up of sins over against merits). There is also his description of Helena as swearing by the saints (5.3.109), and there is Parolles' reference to Limbo (5.3. 263). Finally, there is the fact that, in four if not five of her last scenes, Helena appears dressed as a Catholic pilgrim (3.5; 3.7; 4.4; 5.1). On the other side of the question, one might argue that Lavatch's simile "as the nun's lip to the friar's mouth" (2.2.25-26) is an anti-Catholic expression, but this satirical jibe cannot be unequivocally construed as evidence of a Reformed sensibility at work, since it is critical of an abuse of the vow of chastity but not of Roman Catholic religious life in itself.

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Apart from these minor references in *All's Well*, Shakespeare's theology of grace comes into even sharper focus when we direct our attention to four interrelated topics: miracle and merit, pilgrimage and prayer. These four theological topics shape the very substance of the action and characterization. To be sure, Shakespeare took over his story from Boccaccio, but he enhances his source, first making Helena a miracle-worker and then elaborating on her pilgrimage. When the minor references mentioned above are taken in conjunction with the development of Helena's two roles, they point to a Roman Catholic theology of grace informing the speech and action of the play. Moreover, they represent a doctrinal-devotional complex attacked by the Reformers. Fortunately for our purposes, the two-part structure into which the play falls conveniently lends itself to laying out the evidence for these claims. As Helena undertakes the curing of the King, the first part of the play focuses on the topics of miracle and merit, and the second part brings into play the topics of pilgrimage and prayer as she attempts to win back Bertram.

First, then, Shakespeare's treatment of the miraculous. A comparison of the first part of the play with its source points up a significant development that warrants some consideration. In Boccaccio's *Decameron* (3.9) and in William Painter's translation, *The Palace of Pleasure* (1566; rpt. Hunter, *All's Well*), the curing of the king is described some ten times as a "healing," to be accomplished in eight days with the aid of God. But when in *All's Well* Helena proposes to cure the King, she promises to do so in much more rapid fashion. Shakespeare shortens the time of the cure from eight days to less than two days (2.1.162-70). In so doing, he clearly emphasizes its miraculous nature

> There's something in't [Helena's healing "remedy"]
> More than my father's skill, which was the great'st
> Of his profession, that his good receipt
> Shall for my legacy be sanctified
> By th' luckiest stars in heaven . . . (1.3.240-44)

Helena's power to cure is something beyond mere professional skill, something beyond nature and attributable to the order of grace. Thus, when Helena proposes her cure to the King, Shakespeare has her appeal to the miraculous precedent of Moses' parting of the Red Sea (2.1.140-43), and after the king is cured she directly tells LaFew and Parolles that "Heaven hath through me restored the King to health" (2.3.63-64). Shakespeare develops Boccaccio's cursory references to God's "healing" grace into something considerably more miraculous.

Indeed, in order to increase the sense of the marvelous and the miraculous, Shakespeare subsequently adds the choral-like musing of

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LaFew as a reaction to Helena's curing of the King. Appropriately, LaFew's reflections are invested with an appreciative sense of philosophical causality and the limits of human knowledge or "*scienza*":

> 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; see also 2.1.179-80)

Here the relevant question is of course: who are "they"? and who are "our philosophical persons"? LaFew's exchange with Parolles has been taken in part as a reference to the Paracelsian attack on the more academic Galenists, whose herbal treatments are clearly not in line with Helena's more chemically-specific method of curing the king (Stensgaard 173-83). But while this closely argued line of interpretation convincingly makes of Helena a Paracelsian medical practitioner, it also improbably reduces Shakespeare to a mere Paracelsian theologian (183-88). Clearly, the LaFew passage extends to the skeptical minds of the day, whether to the natural philosophers or the followers of Montaigne. The "modern philosophical person," i. e., the natural philosopher or the skeptic, reduces reality, which has its supernatural dimension beyond the senses, to what is "familiar" and "trifling" and "seeming," that is, to secondary causes apparent to the senses. The naturalistic-skeptical mentality is here under attack for its refusal to transcend the senses and for its unwillingness to face the supernatural dimension of reality, which ought to inspire an "unknown fear" because of its terrifying proportions, proportions particularly evident from miracles. The fullest dramatic rendering of this philosophical deficiency is of course the opening scene of Hamlet where the initially skeptical Horatio confronts the ghost of Hamlet's father:

> BERNARDO: How now, Horatio? You tremble and look pale.
> Is not this [the Ghost] something more than
> fantasy? What think you on't?
> HORATIO: Before my God, I might not this believe
> Without the sensible and true avouch
> Of mine own eyes. (1.157-62)

Hamlet's later observation underlines the point: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy" (1.5.175-76). Reality for Shakespeare extends well beyond the confines of human sensibility.

We should note here that Reformed theologians generally rejected post-Scriptural miracles, especially as part of the devotional complex

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generating and sustaining pilgrimages and shrines (Hillerbrand, "Miracles"). They would have particularly objected to the notion of a miracle worked through human agency or the intercession of the saints. Whereas faith in miracles coming directly through God's grace was acceptable to the Reformers, belief in miracles coming through the mediated intercession of saints was not. Thus, Shakespeare's representation of a miracle worked through the mediation of Helena, quite consonant with her later undertaking of a pilgrimage in search of mediatory intercession at the shrine of St. James, suggests a theology that is more than merely Paracelsian and not at all Reformed.

SHAKESPEARE'S second development of his source has to do with the doctrine of merit. Given the proper historical context, the doctrinal perspective operative in the play can be easily determined. Broadly speaking, there were current in the sixteenth century two theologies of grace. One was Roman Catholic and can be found in such sources as Aquinas' *Summa*, the decrees of the Council of Trent, the works of Robert Bellarmine, and so on. The other was the expression of Reformed theology, emanating from the works of Luther and Calvin, in which the Elizabethan settlement was grounded (Wallace 29-78). As the Council of Trent made clear, there were several Roman Catholic doctrines regarding grace and works, but three in particular warrant our attention: one, that in justification God's grace is always primary, since justification is initiated by God and merited by Christ; two, that justification involves a real interior (rather than an imputed and extrinsic) change in the sinner in which he is truly made just and given "new life"; and three, that following justification an increase of grace can be merited by "works" (Molinski 956). Aquinas clearly delineates the nature of merit in relation to justice, taken in the Aristotelian sense as a kind of equality. Where there are equals, merit holds simply and absolutely (*de condigno*), as reward due in justice for work done. Where there are unequals, merit obtains proportionately (*de congruo*), as a kind of reward for which God has allotted one a power of operation:

> Merit and reward refer to the same, for a reward means something given anyone in return for work or toil, as a price for it. . . . Now justice is a kind of equality . . . and hence justice is simply between those that are simply equal; but where there is no absolute equality between them, neither is there absolute justice, but there may be a certain manner of justice
> . . . . Now it is clear that between God and man there is the greatest inequality. . . . Hence there can be no justice of absolute equality between man and God, but only of a certain proportion. . . . Hence

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> man's merit with God only exists on the presupposition of the Divine ordination, so that man obtains from God, as a reward of his operation, what God gave him the power of operation for, even as natural things by their proper movements and operations obtain that to which they were ordained by God. (ST 1a2ae, 114.1)

It is important to note that several of the key words in the play—inequality, "fate" and freedom, merit and reward—resonate with this passage.

Hence, in relation to the first principle, the primacy of God's grace in initiating justification, Luther was in fact recovering an older doctrine over against the semi-Pelagianism of theologians like Gabriel Biel, who maintained that human beings through their own efforts could "earn" the initial grace of justification. In relation to the second and third principles, however, Luther departed from the traditional doctrine in making out justification to be purely extrinsic and imputed. The sinner remained a sinner, and there was no interior change. Furthermore, he allowed no place for human merit since all was due to God's grace (Wallace 63; Allison 178-89). With consummate clarity, Richard Hooker, in his "A Learned Discourse of Justification" (1612), summed up the essential distinction and difference between the two positions, employing a distinction between the grace of justification and that of sanctification:

> The righteousnes wherewith we shalbe clothed in the world to comme, is both perfecte and inherente: that whereby here we are justefied is perfecte but not inherente, that whereby we are sanctified, inherent but not perfecte . . . . This grace they [Roman Catholics] will have to be applied by infusion . . . so the soule mighte be rightuous by inherente grace, which grace they make capable of increase . . . the augmentacion whereof is merited by good workes, as good workes are made meritorious by it . . . . But the rightuousnes wherein we muste be found if we wilbe justefied, is not our owne, therefore we cannott be justefied by any inherente qualitie . . . . Then although in ourselves we be altogether synfull and unrightuous, yett even the man which in him selfe is ympious, full of inequity, full of synne, hym god beholdeth with a gratious eye, putteth awaie his syn by not ymputing it, taketh quite awaie the ponishemente due therunto by pardoninge it, and accepteth him in Jesus Christe as perfectly rightuous as if he had fullfilled all that was comaunded hym in the law. (5:109-13)

In other words, there is a future righteousness which will be perfect and inherent, a present righteousness in this world which is perfect but not inherent (i. e., Christ's perfect righteousness is imputed to sinners), and a

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present sanctification in this world which is imperfect and inherent (i. e., presently man is a sinner imperfectly sanctified; see Gibbs, "Justification" 216). Thus both sides agreed that justification comes through faith in Christ, but they disagreed on the nature of justification (extrinsic vs. intrinsic) and sanctification (imperfect vs. perfect). Moreover, they disagreed on the subject of "good works": on the Catholic side, merit and satisfaction were possible after justification; on the Protestant side, they were not because they appeared to undermine the merits and satisfaction of Christ in effecting salvation.

With these doctrinal differences in mind, we can return to Shakespeare's second development of his source, his greater emphasis on the theological notion of merit. What in Boccaccio and Painter is simply the heroine's clever exercise of human "policy" becomes in Shakespeare a virtuous action meriting reward. (However, Boccaccio's heroine refers to "recompense" [*merito*] twice, and in the original Italian the King possibly plays on the word [*mariteremo*, "we will give in marriage"; *marito*, "husband"] and refers to the husband Giletta has "deserved" [*guadagnato*] as a "reward" [*guiderdon*].) Shakespeare's fuller emphasis required some significant alteration of the action. We have mentioned above the distinction between condign and congruous merit, notions which Shakespeare consciously plays on in *Love's Labor's Lost* (1.2.13, 25) and which depend on equality and inequality between giver and receiver. This distinction, which conditions some courtly literature (Langer 233), enables us to make sense of Shakespeare's more pronounced emphasis on Helena's social inferiority to Bertram. Boccaccio makes little of his heroine's difference in social rank, other than to make it the basis for Beltramo's initially scornful rejection of Giletta as his wife. By contrast, Shakespeare first makes it the basis of Helena's despair over her "ambitious love" before she even sets out to pursue Bertram (1.1.86-94). Then, in view of this disparity of social station, he gives more prominence to the theme of reward and "desert," both with the King's discourse on virtue as the true nobility, justifying his raising Helena to be Bertram's equal in rank (2.3.117-44), and with Helena's final remark on Bertram's being "doubly won" (5.3.315).

The theme of merit extends to other aspects of the play as well. Along these lines, the recent claim that there are certain tensions and oppositions in the play—between divine power and human weakness, election and free will, and grace and earned reward (Lewis 151)—deserves extended consideration. All three of these alleged oppositions touch on the doctrine of merit, and in the light of that doctrine we can perceive a unified theology of grace in the play's dialogue and action. With respect to the first of these supposed oppositions, it seems evident at specific points in

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All's Well that divine power and human weakness are not in oppositional tension—in either Roman Catholic or even Reformed doctrine—but that in a complementary way God's power is mediated through Helena's action. This notion, repeated more than once in the play, would have been acceptable to the Catholic and even perhaps to the Reformed sensibilities in Shakespeare's audience. The complementarity of divine power and human weakness finds its first expression when Helena approaches the King and he refuses her aid:

> He that of greatest works is finisher
> Oft does them by the weakest minister.
> So holy writ in babes hath judgment shown
> When judges have been babes; great floods have flown
> From simple sources, and great seas have dried
> When miracles have by the great'st been denied.
> (2.1.138-43)

Having made her offer to cure the king, Helena uses another telling phrase—"The great'st grace lending grace" (2.1.162)—in claiming to the King that she can cure him in two days. What this phrase indicates is that her gift for healing is simply the power of God enabling her to act. And the notion of such complementarity is repeated in the King's response that "Methinks in thee some blessed spirit doth speak / His powerful sound within an organ weak" (177-78). It reappears two scenes later when LaFew and Parolles remark on the appearance of the "Very hand of heaven. . . . In a most weak—And debile minister" (2.3.31-34). What all these phrases suggest is a complementary relation between divine power and human action rather than an oppositional one, since divine power works through weak human beings, "lending" them grace, and not in spite of them.

If it is difficult to find any real opposition between divine power and human weakness in *All's Well*, so also it is hard to see where election and free will are necessarily at odds. It may seem that Helena at first sounds what from the perspective of Reformed theology appears to be an initially "Pelagian" note of confidence in the power of human action, at odds with the notion of God's grace as accomplishing all without regard to human merit:

> 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.
> (1.1.216-19)

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As Richard Stensgaard has suggested (186), this seems to be inconsistent with Helena's later statement that only with the "help of heaven" has the King's cure been effected (2.1.154). But it is inconsistent only if we assume the perspective of Reformed theology and its doctrine of "*sola gratia*." Here Helena clearly speaks in a manner quite consistent with Roman Catholic theology, in which the mystery of predestination ("The fated sky") does not obliterate free will. Heaven after all "gives us free scope," a phrase clearly expressing divine provision for the exercise of human freedom. The Council of Trent in its sixth session (January 1547) condemned the notion that grace alone is conducive to salvation and that free will is a mere fiction:

> Can. 4. If anyone says that man's free will moved and aroused by God, by assenting to God's call and action, in no way cooperates toward disposing and preparing itself to obtain the grace of justification, that it cannot refuse its assent if it wishes, but that, as something inanimate, it does nothing whatever and is merely passive, let him be anathema. (Schroeder 42-43)

Free will here is something both passive and active—it is "moved" and "aroused," so that it can "assent," "cooperate," "dispose" and "prepare" itself—but it is not something "merely passive." Of further interest are the similar comments of Aquinas that free will is insufficient unless it is moved and helped by God (ST 1a.83.1) and that "we can admit the existence of fate (*fatum*)" inasmuch as "all that happens here below is subject to Divine Providence, as being pre-ordained" (ST 1a.116.1).

A comparable passage from "The Thirty-Nine Articles" will illustrate the difference between the Roman Catholic and Reformed views on free will:

> The condition of Man after the fall of Adam is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith, and calling upon God. Wherefore we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing [i.e., going before] us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will. (Leith, "Of Free Will" 270)

Here the emphasis is on what man cannot do—"turn and prepare himself," "do good works"—so that he is powerless to perform works pleasing to God. It will not do to see an absolute opposition here, but there is clearly a difference of emphasis. Trent is vindicating free will, the Articles are vindicating grace. Trent has a more active conception of human cooperation, the Articles a more passive one. Helena's phrase "gives us

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free scope," suggesting as it does some autonomy in human freedom, seems closer to Trent than to the Articles.

In accord with this conception of the complementary relation between divine power and human weakness, enabling human beings to act freely, is the doctrine of Trent regarding divine grace and human merit. The Council, again in its sixth session (January 1547), dealt with the subject of merit in terms suggestive of the very title of Shakespeare's play:

> . . . *Do not lose your confidence, which hath a great reward* [Heb. 10.35]. Hence, to those who work well *unto the end* [Matt. 10.22] [*Atque ideo bene operantibus "usque in finem"*] and trust in God, eternal life is to be offered, both as a grace mercifully promised to the Sons of God through Christ Jesus, and as a reward promised by God Himself, to be faithfully given to their good works and merits. . . . For since Christ Jesus Himself, as the head into the members and the vine into the branches, continually infuses strength into those justified, which strength always precedes, accompanies and follows their good works, and without which they could not in any manner be pleasing and meritorious before God, we must believe that nothing further is wanting to those justified to prevent them from being considered to have, by those very works which have been done in God, fully satisfied divine law . . . and to have truly merited eternal life . . . . (Schroeder 40-41)

Not surprisingly, Shakespeare seems clearly conscious of the play's title and its connection with salvation, since he plays on the word "well" in relation to "heaven" for a dozen lines in Act 2.4.

As for the doctrine of merit itself, early on in the very first scene there is some suggestion of it in the Countess' description of Helena: "She derives her honesty and achieves her goodness" (1.1.44-45). That is, the inheritance of a good disposition complements virtuous achievement and merit. And later when the King waves Helena's offer of help aside, she herself goes on to use terms that clearly and explicitly unite divine grace and human merit:

> Inspirèd merit so by breath is barred.
> It is not so with Him that all things knows
> As 'tis with us that square our guess by shows;
> But most it is presumption in us when
> The help of heaven we count the act of men. (2.1.150-54)

The meritorious nature of Helena's miraculous cure is here especially apparent in the phrase she uses to describe her action—"inspirèd merit"—

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an action inspired by God and meritorious for herself. Far from accomplishing all without reference to free will, grace—"the help of heaven"—enables Helena to meritoriously cure the King and thus receive her reward, much in the manner described by Trent.

To sum up—certain speeches and phraseology in the first part of *All's Well* create a sense of divine grace that goes well beyond Boccaccio and Painter. The Countess' description of Helena—"she derives her honesty and achieves her goodness"—affirms the value of human effort. More prominently, Helena's remark about "inspirèd merit" is clearly Roman Catholic in its sense of divine grace empowering human meritorious action, and her conception of "the greatest Grace lending grace" suggests a certain autonomy—and therefore human freedom and merit—in human action. All three phrases go beyond the theological commonplace of divine grace working through human agents, implicit in the allusions to the Scriptural figures of Daniel and Moses (2.1.140-43) and such remarks as the King's "Methinks in thee some blessèd spirit doth speak / His powerful sound within an organ weak" (2.1.177-78). Equally important, the play's action precisely and coherently reflects a Roman Catholic theology of grace, with Helena "working" a miracle with the aid of grace and meritoriously being "rewarded" by the King with the hand of Bertram. As a point of comparison, one might cite Spenser's commentary on the Red Cross Knight's victory over the Dragon, described in terms acceptable to Reformed theology:

> Ne let the man ascribe it to his skill,
> That thorough grace hath gainéd victory.
> If any strength we have it is to ill,
> But all the good is Gods, both power and eke will.
> (1.10.6-9)

By contrast with Spenser, Shakespeare seems inclined to acknowledge human weakness in the Reformed manner but in conformity with the Council of Trent to affirm the power of free will and human merit.

In the second half of the play, the Catholic notions of grace and merit carry over, albeit in a minor key, into the themes of pilgrimage and prayer. The action is clearly fashioned in parallel form. Just as Bertram uses deception in going off to war, informing his mother and Helena by letter, so Helena, also informing the Countess by letter, undertakes her pilgrimage as a deceptive ruse that allows her to draw near Florence and Bertram. Both the cowardly braggart Parolles and the fearless but lustful Bertram are duped, the former by the drum incident, the latter by the bed-trick. Again, it seems Shakespeare is primarily interested in Helena's

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"ambitious love" and the ingenuity with which she achieves her desire. But her costume as a pilgrim and her description of her pilgrimage carry with them the undeniable features of the Roman Catholic theology of grace.

With respect to pilgrimages, it is important to realize the confluence of Catholic doctrine and devotional practice. Through the late Middle Ages and and into the Renaissance, when they were reformulated by the Council of Trent, the doctrines of grace were inseparably linked with miracles, saints, shrines, pilgrimages, and vows—and, we might add, with works of satisfaction for sin:

> Two dominant perceptions governed the notion concerning [miracles]: first, that miracles were performed by God through the intercession of the saints; second, that the saints' aid was attained through an exchange. Seeking help in hopeless circumstances, the faithful approached the saints at local shrines with prayers and vows of pilgrimages and votive gifts. In return, they received intercession for their devotion. (Hillerbrand, "Miracles")

All of these elements are captured in part two of *All's Well* when Helena supposedly undertakes "with sainted vow" her pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Jacques (compare Calvin on "votive pilgrimages" [Inst. 4.13.7] as "not only empty and fleeting but full of manifest impiety"). Consistent with her previous phraseology of "inspirèd merit," she is conscious of the meritorious nature of penitential action in the amendment of faults:

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

And clearly her letter expresses the hope that a pilgrimage will obtain intercession from the saint in order to rescue Bertram from "the bloody course of war."

A pilgrimage to Spain, the invocation of Saint James, the penitential practice of walking barefoot on the cold ground, a "sainted vow," the amendment of faults. These notions and practices are not the staples of Reformed doctrine. The Reformers, in fact, considered the intercessory miracles reported at shrines as illusions and frauds, and they attacked the doctrine of intercession as well as the whole complex of doctrines surrounding pilgrimages to the shrines of saints (Hillerbrand, "Miracles"). Moreover, such things were important enough to call forth condemnation in *The Thirty-Nine Articles* appended to *The Book of Common Prayer*:

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> The Romish Doctrine concerning Purgatory, Pardons, Worshipping and Adoration, as well of Images as of Relics, and also Invocation of Saints, is a fond thing, vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God. (No. XXII; Leith 274)

With this article in mind, it is extremely difficult to see Shakespeare's theology as consonant with Reformed doctrine in general and Church of England doctrine in particular.

Furthermore, consistent with this notion of pilgrimage, the conception of prayer in the play is also distinctively Roman Catholic, including as it does some notion of active "works" and satisfaction for sin. Helena undertakes her pilgrimage in order to pray at the shrine of St. Jacques and to do penance. Prayer is conceived of as "working" an effect, as an act of intercession, and as a means to amending faults. Thus, in blessing Bertram, the Countess speaks of what her prayers will "pluck down" (1.1.69), and she later proclaims that she will "pray God's blessing into thy [Helena's] attempt" to cure the King (1.3.253). Such a conception of prayer assigns it an active function of "working" an effect, contrary to the Reformed conception of prayer as a passive and powerless appeal to God for mercy.

This active conception is again in evidence later in the play when, after having received the letter from Helena informing her that she has gone on pilgrimage, the Countess exclaims against Bertram "What angel shall bless this unworthy husband?" She then proceeds to remark that only "her prayers, whom heaven delights to hear / And loves to grant" (either Helena's prayers or more probably the Blessed Virgin Mary's) can "reprieve him [Bertram] from the wrath of greatest justice" (3.4.25-29). The conception of prayer effecting by intercession the "reprieve" of a sinner is distinctly Roman Catholic. Again, the context seems to prevent us reading Helena as the mentioned "angel," since the Countess' steward has just spoken of the impossibility of pursuing and overtaking Helena, who seems to be intent on her own death (17). In the absence of a human means of preventing her, the Countess turns to a supernatural means for solution. Helena's mediation is no longer possible. Therefore the Countess desperately imagines another source of mediation. The lines seem clearly to refer to a woman greater than Helena, a woman of angelic stature, general intercessory power, and unique favor in the eyes of heaven—that is, Mary, the mediatrix of all graces (Hunter, *Comedy of Forgiveness* 129-30). Even if we take the Countess' phrase "what angel" as referring to Helena, her words are not in keeping with the Elizabethan "Homily concerning Prayer," which informs us that

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> . . . we must call neither vpon Angel, nor yet vpon Saint, but onely and solely vpon GOD. . . . For to say that we should beleeue either in Angel or Saint or in any other liuing creature, were mere horrible blasphemie against GOD and his holy Word . . . . (*Certaine Sermons* 1:114)

The tradition of Mary as mediatrix, again a notion repulsive to Reformed theologians, was well known in Shakespeare's time. At about the same time (1608) that *All's Well* was written, John Donne, for example, was writing in very similar terms about Mary as mediatrix:

> As her deeds were
> Our helpes, so are her prayers; nor can she sue
> In vaine, who hath such titles unto you.
> ("A Litanie" ll.43-45; see Dubinski 18-24; Klawitter 131-33)

Donne was aware, as his letter to Henry Goodyere indicates, that in these lines he was striking a "*via media*" between Rome and Geneva, conceding to the former praise of the saints and to the latter a "rectified devotion" by avoiding invocation with the "*ora pro nobis*" refrain (Lewalski 260-61). But Shakespeare's lines contain a more forceful conception of intercession than Donne's: Mary's prayer is envisioned not merely as a suing for grace, but as actually effecting a "reprieve" for Bertram.

FINALLY, in addition to the notion of prayer as working an effect, the conception of satisfaction for sin is operative in Helena's intention to do penance for the sin of her "ambitious love." She writes that she intends "to barefoot plod . . . the cold ground upon, / With sainted vow my faults to have amended" (3.4.4-7), and when she reaches Florence, she is brought to the other "enjoined penitents," i. e., pilgrims who have vowed to do penance. Such physical penance is of course another form of "works" repudiated by Reformed theologians. The notion is not confined to *All's Well*; we find it also in *The Winter's Tale* when Cleomenes exclaims to Leontes:

> Sir, you have done enough, and have performed
> A saint-like sorrow. No fault could you make
> Which you have not redeemed—indeed, paid down
> More penitence than done trespass. (5.1.1-4)

In Cleomenes' eyes, "faults" and "trespasses" can be paid for and "redeemed" by the performance of penitential deeds with "saint-like sorrow." Two of the three parts of the Roman Catholic sacrament of penance—contrition, confession, and satisfaction—are here in evidence:

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namely, sorrow for sin, and the redemptive power of penitential acts, of satisfaction "paid down" for sin. This is not compatible with what we consistently find in Luther's *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, Calvin's *Institutes* (see 3.4.25), Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (5.5.6), and *The Thirty-Nine Articles:*

> The Offering of Christ once made is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction, for all the sins of the whole world, both original and actual; and there is none other satisfaction for sin, but that alone. (No. XXXI; Leith 277)

Since Christ has made satisfaction once for all, there is no need to "pay down" additional human satisfaction for sin. When Reformed theology speaks of "satisfaction," it means not the performance of penitential actions, like Helena's walking barefoot on the cold ground, but rather something quite different: "that we cease from euill, and doe good, and if wee haue done any man wrong, to endeauour our selues to make him true amends" ("The second part of the Homily of Repentance" *Certaine Sermons* 2:269). It should be mentioned that in the interests of a "*via media*," Hooker makes some allowance for works of satisfaction being contrary to and effectually curing the deeds of sin. But he talks in largely the same manner as the homily, distinguishing between satisfaction made to God, man, and Church, the first having been made by Christ, and the latter two consisting of restitution and amendment of life (6.5.2-9, esp. 6-8; see also Gibbs, "Repentance" 68). In neither source is there any mention of penitential satisfaction being undertaken with a "sainted vow."

Both parts of *All's Well*, then, reflect a Roman Catholic theology of grace. In part one, we have the presentation of the King's cure as miraculous, Helena's role as miracle-worker, and her words ascribing her miraculous cure to "inspirèd merit." In part two, we have her role as pilgrim, along with her sonnet-letter describing her pilgrimage as undertaken by "sainted vow" for the amendment of faults, the Countess' allusion to the intercessory power of the Virgin Mary, the conception of prayer as working an effect, and the notion of penance as satisfaction for sin. All these elements in the play, together with the several other references to Roman Catholic doctrine, provide compelling evidence of the sensibility of a "church papist" at work. Moreover, it seems that Shakespeare shaped the action to represent by analogy the operations of merit *de congruo* in part one, with the "unequal" Helena being "proportionately" rewarded with a raise in station by the King, and merit *de condigno* in part two, when having achieved equality of station she fulfills Bertram's terms and so gains a reward due in justice for labor done. In short, a Roman Catholic theology of grace pervades the play at every level.

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In any event, the theological dimension of *All's Well* seriously challenges some conventional views of Shakespeare: that his plays sharply separate the secular order of nature from the order of grace, that he embraced the skepticism of Montaigne and the "new philosophers," and that he was most probably a conforming member of the Church of England. All these views run contrary to what we find in *All's Well*—the notions of miracle, pilgrimage, penitential vows, intercessory prayer, and "inspirèd merit," all emanating from the mindset of a Roman Catholic. Shakespeare again appears here to fit the profile of a discreet "church papist," more than that of a devout member of the Church of England or a secularized skeptic (Taylor 297-98; Beauregard, "New Light" *passim*).

Notes

1) There is something intrinsically problematic in Frye's claim that Shakespeare was "capable of treating the temporal and secular order independent of theological systems" (268). As two of Frye's critics have pointed out, this would have been virtually impossible in Elizabethan England, saturated as it was with liturgical ceremony and theological discourse (Hassel ix-xv; Shuger 46). This deep and central flaw stems from Frye's adoption of certain oppositions in Reformed theology between nature and grace, the temporal and spiritual orders. Thus he argued that Shakespeare's universality stood in opposition to Christianity (conceived of as sectarian by Frye), that classical ethics was more universal than an "exclusively" Christian ethics, that the temporal order is sharply separate from the order of grace, and that, consequently, literature was independent of theology. The complementary relation of these oppositions in Roman Catholic theology was never considered—Aquinas, whose ethics "inclusively" unites classical and Christian sources, was excluded because "his works were not in print in sixteenth century England" (11). But Aquinas' works, often cited by English theologians such as Hooker and Perkins, were printed on the continent and were available in such places as St. Paul's churchyard and St. John's College library, as has been demonstrated by recent scholarship (see Beauregard, *Virtue's Own Feature* 37-40).

Another major flaw in Frye's study is his reductive conception of a "universal" Shakespeare, universal not in the classical sense of representing the essential forms of "nature," but universal in the expurgatory sense of being an uncontroversial poet, undetermined by any theological system, and "equally accessible" to Christians and virtuous heathen (272). Shakespeare's inoffensively "secular" art thus transcends the history and religious divisions of his time, but we are assured that he was a conforming member of the Church of England, whose "broad and inclusive" character, however, prevents us from determining his personal faith (3-4). This conception jars with Frye's eccentric catalogue of theological topics, which shows that Shakespeare had an extensive knowledge of Christian doctrine. But the catalogue excludes theologically specific references to Limbo, pilgrimage, penitential vows, merit, satisfaction for sin, and auricular confession—to name those that occur in *All's Well*—and such crucial theological topics as justification, grace, purgatory, Franciscan religious life, nuns, saints, etc., all of which had been carefully catalogued by Mutschmann and Wentersdorf (213-365). The overall result is to expurgate the scandalously Catholic references from Shakespeare's theology.

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2) See, for example, Shakespeare's toning down of his anti-Catholic sources in *King John*, and his transformation of his sources in *Measure for Measure*. Cinthio and Whetstone present us with a virginal heroine who is seduced by a magistrate and then is married to him. Shakespeare decks Isabella out as a novice in the Poor Clares, preserves her virginity, and has her remain silent when she is offered marriage (Beauregard, *Virtue's Own Feature* 153-55).

3) Tilney seems to have been mainly concerned with inflammatory language and possible insurrections, not with ideas and the promotion of ideological orthodoxy (Dutton 80). It has even been argued that between 1590 and 1625 the theater had come to be seen as politically powerless and disinterested, so that the authorities "do not seem to have thought it possible for the players seriously to disrupt the political order" (Yachnin 2-3, 23). Here we see part of the solution to the problem of how it was that Roman Catholic roles, whether of Helena as miracle-worker and pilgrim or Isabella as novice, were played before an Elizabethan or Jacobean audience. The problem recurs with Shakespeare's favorable portrayal of Franciscan friars—Friar Laurence in *Romeo and Juliet*, Friar Francis in *Much Ado About Nothing*, and Friar Peter in *Measure for Measure*. Except for Shakespeare and John Ford, English Renaissance dramatists depict Franciscan friars as "duplicitous, immoral, and satanic" (Voss 5). Thus, as far as official censorship is concerned, Tilney did not object to certain theologically sensitive roles being played on the stage, but rather to seditious matter.

If we consider the makeup of the audience, several other considerations bear on the problem. First of all, Shakespeare's plays were sometimes put on before Catholic audiences. In 1604 *Love's Labors Lost* was put on at Southampton House, a notorious Catholic center where in 1605 "above two hundredeth pounds worth of popish bookes [were] taken about Southampton house and burned in Poules Churchyard" (Akrigg 255, 181). In 1609-10, *King Lear* and *Pericles* were put on by Catholic players, Cholmeley's Men, at recusant houses in Yorkshire (Milward 78). A more important consideration is that in many respects English audiences were still Catholic or well disposed toward Catholicism. In July of 1603, a Spanish diplomatic report on King James' "Councillors of State . . . and other notables" identified a quarter of them as favorably disposed to Catholicism, and in November of 1604, a second report by the Constable of Castile found "grounds for optimism in the favorable reports about King James and Queen Anne, the known Catholic sympathies among many aristocrats and the increasing number of Catholics" (Loomie 1: 1-10; 26-44, esp. 36). This latter report estimates that the religious makeup of England was one-third Catholic and that, of the other two sects, the Protestants were losing numbers and the Puritans increasing. Since those attending plays cannot have shared the Puritan hostility to the stage, it seems reasonable to suppose that Catholic figures on the stage were simply tolerated (as with Tilney), especially if they were marginal characters or presented in a dramatically ambiguous way. The Protestant revolution was far from complete, and, as Patrick Collinson and others have shown, a truly Protestant literary culture, based on the "plain truth" of the Bible, was still in the process of formation (34-37). Dramatic performance was affected, then, by a variety of complex circumstances that preclude our thinking of Shakespeare's plays as always and everywhere under the eye of rigorous Protestant censorship and a predominantly Protestant audience.

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4) From time to time Shakespearean critics have suggested the relevance of the theology of grace to *All's Well*, but for various reasons have never undertaken a full exploration. In 1950 E. M. W. Tillyard viewed Helena and Bertram broadly as the representatives of "heavenly grace and natural, unredeemed, man respectively" (108), but did not pursue the matter further. Some ten years later, Roland M. Frye made the general claim that "sin is, after all, a universal element of human experience where saving grace is not," and so he concluded dismissively that "the theology of sin thus appears to have been quite serviceable to Shakespeare, whereas the theology of grace was less so," declining to include grace in his list of theological topics (115). Shortly thereafter, Robert G. Hunter also saw Helena as "the instrument of God's grace" (114, 128), but made the questionable claim that the orthodoxy of the English Reformation "was very close to the *Summa* when it came to the forgiveness of sins" (20, 244). More recently, David Palmer has claimed that the play alludes to the Reformed doctrines of man's depravity, "the natural inferiority and weakness of women," and free will "as conformable with God's will" (97-103). Other critics have examined *All's Well* from the standpoint of Scriptural sources, and have discerned in it New Testament images, allusions to Old Testament types of baptism, and types of the Old Testament prophets and the Prodigal Son (Sexton 262-3; Haley 104-5; Milward 172-79). Finally, using a New Critical model of drama taken to its now commonplace skeptical extreme, one critic has conceived the play as presenting the Reformed and "Christian humanist" (i. e., Roman Catholic) conceptions of grace "in consistent tension," claiming that it "first promotes one seeming truth and then substitutes its antithesis" (Lewis 151-56). In short, when it comes to the theology of grace in Shakespeare, some confusion reigns among critics, and the confusion obscures a clearly Catholic feature of Shakespeare's work.

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