

these plays recognize that every "knot" is tied under the pervasive shadow of what is "not," but also that life's cyclical nature not only tarnishes the comic but mitigates the tragic.

## NOTES

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- 6 John Dover Wilson, *Shakespeare's Happy Comedies* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1962), 36, 51; Lisa Hopkins, *The Shakespearean Marriage: Merry Wives and Heavy Husbands* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), 33, 9.
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- 10 David Scott Kastan, "All's Well That Ends Well and the Limits of Comedy," *ELH*, 52 (1985), 579, 576.
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# *All's Well, That Ends Well* and the Art of Retrograde Motion

DEANNE WILLIAMS

It is the backward motion toward the source,  
Against the stream, that most we see ourselves in,  
The tribute of the current to the source.  
It is from this in nature we are from.  
It is most us.

Robert Frost, "West Running Brook"

Helena and Parolles are having their first showdown (see Figure 5.1). The paragon of virtue confronts the libertine, with Helena taking the side of virginity, and Parolles advocating sexuality. Parolles uses the old argument that sex, by producing children, is an agent of progress. A form of "rational increase" according to the "rule of nature" (1.1.126, 133), sexual activity moves the life process forward. Their conversation drawing to a close, Helena comments:

*HELENA:* The wars hath so kept you under that you must needs be  
born under Mars.

*PAROLLES:* When he was predominant.

*HELENA:* When he was retrograde, I think rather.

*PAROLLES:* Why think you so?

*HELENA:* You go so much backward when you fight.

(192-6)

The *OED* defines "retrograde" as "apparently moving in a direction contrary to the order of the signs, or from east to west." In the night sky, planets appear to move from west to east. At times, however, certain planets appear as though they are slowing down, even stopping, and then circling back to the west. The planet forms a complete circle as it returns to its



Figure 5.1 Helena and Parolles (1.1), Gustavus Adolphus College 2005, Robert Gardner (director). Kirsten Kuicken (Helena), Nick Dillenburg (Parolles).

original eastward direction. According to astrology, retrograde motion opposes the principles that are typically associated with the planet. For example, Mars, the god of war, is attached to energy, will, ego, and related powers of force and forward motion. Mars in retrograde therefore concerns introspection, depression, irrationality, and retrospectivity: in other words, moving backwards. When Mars is retrograde, it is best to take time to reconsider and reflect, rather than charge ahead with new projects.

By suggesting that Parolles was born when Mars was retrograde, Helena implies that Parolles might not have the stomach for war ("running away, when fear proposes the safety," 199–200). However, retrograde motion also signals Helena's hopes for Bertram. About to leave his childhood home in Rossillion for the Italian wars, Bertram is sure to gain sexual as well as military experience (going backwards is, among other things, a euphemism for sex). If everything goes according to plan, Bertram will eventually choose a suitable bride and forget all about his childhood friend, Helena. But Helena wants things to move in retrograde. Looking back to her childhood shared with Bertram, to a time when social differences did not force them apart, Helena wants events to run contrary to the progressions of love and war, and politics and class, which cancel her out.

Helena's comment, "when he was retrograde," invokes a key issue in the Copernican Revolution. In *De revolutionibus orbium caelestium* (1543) Copernicus argues that retrograde motion is an optical illusion. He explains how the motion of the Earth and the other planets in their orbits around the Sun produces the impression, from the Earth, that the planets are moving backwards. As the Earth approaches and passes Mars, which takes about twice the length of time as the Earth to revolve around the Sun, the position of Mars in the night sky appears to slow down and move backwards. It is a trick of the eye. With this insight, Copernicus dispensed with the mind-numbing calculations retrograde motion demanded of Ptolemaic astronomers, and called into question the entire world-view that hinged upon a geocentric universe. He undermined the Aristotelian certainties of the Ptolemaic structure, according to which all planets, like all earthly objects, have a particular role and function.

By invoking the discredited Ptolemaic concept of retrograde motion at an early moment in the play, Helena encourages the audience to consider the events that follow in light of a cosmographical concept that was itself retrograde by the end of the sixteenth century. Patricia Parker's reading of the play focuses upon its representations of what Parolles calls "rational increase," with Helena's pregnancy and the King's fistula serving as emblems for the play's concern with processes of rhetorical dilation and narrative forward motion.<sup>1</sup> This interchange between Helena and Parolles, however, establishes a distinction between the principle of amplification represented by Parolles's martial images of "bloody succeeding" (2.3.190),

and the play's contrary inclination, shared by the Countess, the King of France, and Helena herself, to move backwards and to resist, nostalgically, the inevitable, inexorable processes of nature and time.

*All's Well* applies the concept of retrograde motion to plot, character, and the idea of theater. We may think of literary or dramatic genre as a Ptolemaic universe, with comedy or tragedy supplying stock characters and situations, as well as an established, inevitable outcome, in marriage or in death. However, in *All's Well*, Shakespeare presents many of the established elements of comedy in retrograde. Although she is named for Helen of Troy, the play's heroine is the opposite of a *femme fatale*. She is defined, not by her beauty, but by her active participation in shaping her destiny. Like Helen of Troy, she is defined by love, but instead of being the passive object of male rivalry, she doggedly pursues her inferior choice, even going so far as to propose marriage herself (twice). Her beloved Bertram, the play's ostensible hero, could not be less worthy, running away from war as well as from marriage (twice). Moreover, Helena's anticipated westward journey from Paris to Santiago de Compostela shifts into retrograde when she heads back east to Florence to pursue Bertram, replacing penitential pilgrimage with erotic desire and a bedtrick. Retrograde motion offers a paradigm for the play's overarching interest in turning back the clock, as well as for Helena's progressive and constructive action as a female subject, rather than a feminine object, of comedy. *All's Well* demonstrates how, in comedy as in life, it is possible to appear to be moving backward, while actually moving forward.

### THE IMAGINARY DIVORCE

"Retrograde," from the Latin *retro* and *gradus*, meaning a step backwards, first appears in English in Chaucer's *Treatise on the Astrolabe* (1391), a simple, elegant account of the movement of planets. However, "retrograde" came to signify much more than planetary motion. A truly interdisciplinary word, it describes anything that runs against the grain: lines of music and poetry that can read forwards and backwards; military exercises and strategies; geological as well as biological phenomena; amnesia; and (more recently) fashion and style (ie. "retro"). Although the planetary concept of retrograde motion had been disproved scientifically, it retains its imaginative and artistic significance through the sixteenth and early seventeenth century, appearing in the work of Francis Bacon, Gabriel Harvey, Thomas Lodge, Robert Greene, Barnabe Barnes, Michael Drayton, Thomas Churchyard, and Samuel Daniel.<sup>2</sup>

The association of retrograde motion with the Ptolemaic model may have made it more interesting and imaginatively accessible to Shakespeare and his contemporaries. As Keith Thomas observes in *Religion and the*

*Decline of Magic*, "what really destroyed the possibility of scientific astrology was [Copernicus'] undermining of the Aristotelian distinction between terrestrial and celestial bodies, what Bacon called 'the imaginary divorce' between<sup>2</sup> superlunary and sublunary things."<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, just as Copernican science was gaining wide acceptance in England, there was a resurgence of interest in astrology, with nativities and horoscopes an expected part of birth and major life events for the educated Elizabethan. Perhaps the terrifying prospect that the earth was no longer the center of the universe instigated a mental retreat into a system that provided answers where none was otherwise forthcoming. This nostalgia for a familiar and reassuring cosmology is comparable to the rekindling of religious fervor in English Catholics during and immediately after the Reformation. Indeed, if Ptolemy was associated with the old Catholic order, with its structures and certainties, Copernicus, with his connections to Wittenberg and the Lutheran north, was a chilly blast of Protestant air.

Thus, by the late sixteenth century, "retrograde" connotes more than just movement backward, but an entire diminishing world view, as well as the sharp, exquisite sense of the end of an era. This sense of loss inflects Shakespeare's other use of the term "retrograde," in *Hamlet*. Claudius complains that Hamlet is spending too much time mourning his father ("your father lost a father,/ That father lost, lost his . . ." 1.2.292-3) and that "his intent/ In going back to school in Wittenberg,/ It is most retrograde to our desire" (2.1.112-3). Describing Hamlet's proposed return to Wittenberg as "retrograde," Claudius refers to the city where Copernicus's *De revolutionibus* was first printed, and, therefore, to the place where it was first proposed that retrograde motion was an optical illusion. Deploying the concept of retrograde motion at the same time that he mentions the place where it was discredited, Claudius reveals himself as a kind of Ptolemaic throwback. Hamlet's self-projection as the "king of infinite space" (2.2.254) makes him, by contrast, a Copernican.

Claudius's reference to retrograde motion brings *Hamlet*, probably Shakespeare's best-known play, together with the lesser light of *All's Well*.<sup>4</sup> Each depicts the processes of mourning and melancholia, and with living in the past. Each contains a vulnerable king whose life is compromised, after the Arthurian fashion, by means of a physical opening or wound. And each concerns the love of a young woman for her childhood companion: a love for someone who is at once a perfect fit and a problematic choice. The shared appearance of "retrograde" might also lend support to the argument for an earlier date for *All's Well*. It calls attention to their mutual concern with a dynamic described by Leggatt as "a monarch dying and reborn: are we on the cusp between Elizabeth and James?" (10). Each play reflects, in different ways, on time passing: with what could have been or should have been, and with the possibility of turning back the clock, as



Hamlet does with *The Mousetrap*, or of altering the natural course of events, which Helena accomplishes by healing the King's fistula. At a cusp period in England's history, with the map of the universe changing, with Elizabeth on her deathbed or else having just died, with her succession uncertain and unsecured, and with the overarching sense of the end of an era, Shakespeare considers the pleasures and the possibilities of retrograde motion.

### A CALENDAR OF PAST ENDEAVOURS

A perpetual autumn mist enshrouds Rossillion. The Countess's culture of mourning prevails at Rossillion, just as Orsino's culture of lovesickness dominates Illyria. When the Countess looks at her son, she sees only her dead husband, and Bertram's departure makes her think, not of her son's bright future, but of her own sad past: "In delivering my son from me, I bury a second husband" (1.1.1-2). As for Helena, memories of her father ("What was he like? I have forgot him" 80-1) fade in the face of her love for Bertram, her "bright particular star" (85). But no one notices. Melancholy places its sufferer entirely out of touch with reality, as Lafew's comment to Helen illustrates, "moderate lamentation is the right of the dead, excessive grief the enemy to the living," which is then reinforced by the Countess, "if the living be enemy to the grief, the excess makes it soon mortal" (53-7). For Helena, it is not the loss of her father, but erotic passion, with its hoping-against-all-hope for a happy future, which "takes all livelihood from her cheek" (49).

At Rossillion, the grief-stricken and the lovesick persist, like planets, in their endless patterns. This retrospective preoccupation extends to Paris. When he sees Bertram for the first time, the King of France remarks to him, "thou bear'st thy father's face" and muses, "I would I had that corporal soundness now,/ As when thy father and myself in friendship/ First tried our soldiering" (19, 24-6). The King's obsession with the past is, like that of the Countess, just another form of self-absorption: "Methinks I hear him now." When the King wishes that more young men today would emulate his old friend, who could provide "a copy to these younger times," thus making contemporary men "goers backward," he expresses a desire, not for progress, nor even for improvement, but for the return of "younger sons" to the ways of their fathers. Commenting, "it repairs me much to talk of your good father," the King anticipates the extent to which Helena returns his former self to life, moving backwards in time as she counteracts the fistula's relentless process of expansion (1.2.52, 46-8, 30-1). Helena's "receipts," moreover, summon memories of her dead father, whom the King also recalls. And Lafew sees Helena's cure as a blast from the past, describing it as "powerful to araise King Pippen, nay/\*To give great Charlemain a pen in's hand/ And write to her a love-line" (2.1.76-8).

Helena's familiarity with the old Ptolemaic universe is that of a doctor's daughter. Her interchange with Parolles is only the first of her many references to the role of the stars and the planets in shaping human destiny, reflecting not only the intimate connection between early modern medicine and astrology, but also the superstitious occultism of the lovesick. Helena uses the language of Ptolemaic astronomy to describe herself as outside of Bertram's orbit: "In his bright radiance and collateral light/ Must I be comforted, not in his sphere" (88-89). Bertram, who agrees fully with Helena's opinion of him, explains his reluctance to wed her in similarly astronomical terms: "You must not marvel, Helen, at my course,/ Which holds not colour with the time" (2.5.58-60). Helena understands how her ambitious love goes, like a retrograde planet, against the grain: "With true observance seek to eke out that/ Wherein toward me my homely stars have fail'd/ To equal my great fortune" (2.5.74-6).

Helena's Ptolemaic vocabulary looks back to Shakespeare's medieval source material in Boccaccio's *Decameron*. When she hopes, of the King, "that his good receipt/ Shall for my legacy be sanctified/ By th'luckiest stars in heaven" (1.3.239-41), Helena uses the language of Catholicism as well as Ptolemy, highlighting the relationship between the pre-Copernican and the pre-Reformation past. Phrases such as "my idolatrous fancy/ Must sanctify his reliques" (1.1.96-7) place Helena in a medieval and Catholic framework, and align her, as well, with the self-consciously literary archaism of lovers such as Sidney's *Astrophel* (whose name reflects the Elizabethan love for the stars). As her rarified astrological discourse makes Helena retrograde, it also gives her lovesickness a distinguished literary genealogy.

*All's Well* looks back to the classical past as well as to the Middle Ages. With names such as Helen and Paris, wars in Italy, and the idea (recalling Dido) of the woman who loves too much, the play offers a set of variations on a Trojan theme. As Susan Snyder shows, the Trojan history of Helena's name gives her interchange with Parolles a rich intertextual meaning.<sup>5</sup> Helen of Troy's capture by Paris is a case in point for Parolles's argument against virginity: although the affair instigated a long and bloody war, it led to the foundation of Rome. Loyal and chaste where her namesake cheats, Helena represents Helen of Troy in retrograde. For Helena, the shared space of war and sex is only an exercise in futility. She takes the opposite view of the intertwined elements of love and empire, highlighting the destructive nature of military enterprises: "you go so much backward when you fight." Nevertheless, like a retrograde planet resuming its course, Helena's interview with Parolles (whose name is a homophone for "perilous") produces a change in her, and she resolves to go to Paris, named for the original Greek adulterer (a name that also resembles Parolles). Fully aware of the dangers of love, and of following the path forged for



her by her predecessors, Helena throws herself into Helen of Troy's world of love and war.

Although she is named for the most beautiful woman and the most notorious adulteress in history, Helena aligns herself with the Virgin Queen when she protests, "I know I love in vain, strive against hope;/ Yet in this captious and intenible sieve/ I still pour in the waters of my love" (1.3.196-8). Recalling the glory days of Elizabeth I, Helena invokes the tradition of the Sieve portraits, which address the question of female sexuality and its relationship to political power.<sup>6</sup> Produced through the 1580s, the Sieve portraits connected England's growing naval capabilities to Queen Elizabeth's virginity.<sup>7</sup> They draw upon an emblem of chastity made popular by Petrarch's *Trionfo delle pudicizia*, in which a Roman vestal virgin, Tuccia, carries water in a sieve from the Tiber to her temple without spilling a drop. Helena uses the sieve metaphor to insert herself into an Elizabethan discourse concerning female power and chastity: an Elizabethan discourse that is becoming, at the time of *All's Well, That Ends Well*, a thing of the past.

However, as with her namesake, Helen of Troy, Helena moves in opposition to Queen Elizabeth. Helena's sieve, ultimately, holds water: the love that she pours into Bertram is not wasted; in the end, she gets her man. Moreover, Helena's sieve makes a distinction between virginity and chastity: unlike Elizabeth, Helena has no investment in virginity, and unlike Helen of Troy, she dedicates herself to one love. Helena is in full possession of her erotic feelings, which she expresses exquisitely, "'twas pretty, though a plague, to see him every hour" (1.1.91-2). She orchestrates sex, which we must assume she enjoys fully, as Renaissance gynecology taught that women must experience sexual satisfaction in order to conceive, and she arrives, at the end of the play, proudly pregnant. Neither a Helen nor an Elizabeth, Helena has more in common with Diana, the ancient classical mother goddess for whom her Doppelgänger, Bertram's Italian fiancée, is named. The goddess of chastity as well as motherhood, Diana presides over fertility, the moon, and childbirth. She is a fierce huntress and, like the Virgin Mary, a resolute protector of children.<sup>8</sup>

Helena's name, her words, and her actions look backwards to a variety of historical figures. She appears to go backwards geographically, when she takes a backwards course to Santiago, as well as euphemistically, when she facilitates the bed-trick, as well as metaphorically, when she compromises her safety and reputation in order to achieve her goals. However, even as Helena appears to move in retrograde, she rejects the paradigms represented by the past. With Helena, history, however cherished, does not repeat itself. In this respect, Helena is moving straight forward, not going around in a circle.

### THE BITTER PAST, MORE WELCOME IS THE SWEET

As *All's Well* looks to the past in order to establish the character of its heroine, it invokes the history of Troy, so central to the formation of English national identity, as well as the more recent history of the Elizabethan stage. When the Countess requests an interview with Helena, the clown Lavatch sings a little song, "'Was this fair face the cause' quoth she,/ Why the Grecians sacked Troy?" (1.3.68-9), that recalls Marlowe's famous "Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships." Lavatch's allusion compares the grave and purposeful Helena not only with her glamorous, adulterous, classical precedent but also with the Marlovian *chimaera*. The little jingle that immediately follows, "Among nine bad if one be good/ There's yet one good in ten" (1.3.77-8), pursues this dialogue with *Doctor Faustus* as it prepares the audience for Helena's entrance. In *Doctor Faustus*, Marlowe makes a distinction between the wife Faustus longs for "I am wanton and lascivious, and cannot live without a wife" (2.1.142-3) and the Helen he settles for, however fleetingly (5.1.90). Once again, then, Shakespeare is naming Helena in a retrograde manner, for her opposite. *Doctor Faustus* dramatizes love, sex, and femininity through the polarities of the incorporeal Helen and the pregnant Duchess of Vanholt, defined by her physical condition and appetites. Whereas Marlowe's Helen presents the idea that romantic love is an illusion and that all women are whores, Shakespeare's Helena offers the love of a good woman. The revelation of Helena's pregnancy at the end of the play recalls Marlowe's Duchess, whose cameo briefly signals a positive, productive alternative to the frustrations of pursuing Helen of Troy.

Like *All's Well*, *Doctor Faustus* engages the astronomical concept of retrograde motion. In their dialogue on the movement of planetary bodies, Faustus and Mephastophilis touch on the controversial subject. They "reason of divine astrology" (2.3.34) and Mephastophilis gives Faustus a lesson in Ptolemaic cosmology. Marlowe, who would have encountered the New Astronomy at Cambridge, places Faustus's thinking perfectly in line with Copernicus's Wittenberg. In answer to his questions about the cosmos, Faustus receives the traditional Ptolemaic wisdom: Faustus leans towards Copernican possibilities, while Mephastophilis uses terms such as "erring" to describe retrograde motion. When Faustus suggests that planets might have different orbits depending on their distance from the sun, Mephastophilis reinforces Ptolemaic dogma: "All jointly move from east to west in four and twenty hours around the poles of the world" (47-8). Through Mephastophilis, Marlowe attaches the Ptolemaic system to the seductions as well as the imperatives of damnation. Faustus's nascent Copernicanism, which imagines an alternative to the fated universe, implies that there is more in heaven and earth than is dreamed of in his interlocutor's philosophy.

By seeking a return to the sense of wonder that Marlowe portrays so fleetingly and pessimistically, *All's Well* moves in retrograde to *Doctor Faustus*. Faustus chooses magic over faith: his achievements, such as summoning Helen of Troy or a bunch of grapes, are revealed to be fundamentally contingent and illusory party tricks, while grace, although it is hinted at, is frustratingly elusive. Whereas in *Doctor Faustus* the sinner's choices lead to eternal damnation, *All's Well* holds out the possibility that through grace even the most hardened sinner ultimately can be saved. Bertram, like Doctor Faustus, is "wanton and lascivious and cannot live without a wife." Like Faustus, he does everything wrong, up until the very end of the play. Nevertheless, while Faustus appears to be headed straight to hell, Bertram is offered the possibility of salvation. Helen in *Doctor Faustus* is a figure of hopelessness; Helena in *All's Well* is nothing if not hopeful. Like Doctor Faustus (though for different reasons), Helena relies on old books to work her "magic" and shape her destiny. In each case, a "doctor" works for the benefit of the King, be it healing a fistula or entertaining Charles V. But Helena reverses the process of the King's illness: her medical achievements, which bring the near-dead King back to life, anticipate the restorations of Cerimon in *Pericles*. Doctor Faustus's magic, however spectacular, is primarily self-indulgent. The best he can offer is momentary respite from a physical craving. By the end of *Doctor Faustus* we pity the hero for wanting, and settling for, all the wrong things. By the end of *All's Well* we marvel at a woman who is capable of anything.

Unable to decide whether Helena has relied more on miracles or medicine to heal the King, Lafew frames his uncertainty in terms of contemporary cosmological debates, remarking that "miracles are past, and we have our philosophical persons, to make modern and familiar, things supernatural and causeless" (2.3.1-3). Parolles glosses Lafew's comments by referring to Galen and Paracelsus, the ancient and the contemporary physicians. However, Lafew is thinking about heavenly bodies, not human bodies. For Lafew, the "uncertain life, and sure death" from which Helena has liberated the King has also restored his faith in the "very hand of heaven." Invoking the title of a ballad, "A showing of a heavenly effect in an earthly actor" (30, 22-3), Lafew reinforces the sense of a return, not only to health, but also to faith. When Lafew comments, "why your dolphin is not lustier" (25), he is referring, not just to the longstanding Elizabethan pun on the French "dauphin," but also to a common symbol for the Christian soul, with the idea of pursuing love for Christ as, and within, conjugal love. Lafew is acknowledging, even insisting upon, a renewed sense of presence and power of the spiritual and the supernatural in the face of the New Astronomy.<sup>9</sup> In agreement with Lafew, Parolles places Helena's accomplishments in the big picture: "great power, great transcendence, which should indeed give us a further use to be made than alone the recovery of the king" (34-6).

Although Helena's Ptolemaic vocabulary tags her as "retrograde," her actions are Copernican, resisting the inevitabilities of a deterministic universe:

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.

(212-4)

Dismissing the notion that we can find guidance, meaning, or the future in the stars, Helena suggests, instead, that one relies on the self for help; the rest is an illusion or a rhetorical move. Yet Helena acknowledges freedom within heavenly or cosmic determinism here, mirroring traditional Catholic doctrine via Augustine, which accepts human free will and agency within the larger scope of God's design. Moreover, when Helena asserts that the sky "doth backwards/ Pull our slow designs, when we ourselves are dull," she uses the idea of retrograde motion to suggest how the heavens can provide a corrective. Implying faith in a benevolent universe or God, Helena uses retrograde motion to express her faith in the possibilities, not of nostalgia, but for renewal.

The constellation of retrospective glances and overarching retrograde moves of *All's Well* mirror the impulse and conscience of English recusancy. At the same time, however, retrograde motion also offers a comment on the theater and the fated, and therefore wondrous, universe of comedy. For within the comic structure, as well, "the fated sky gives us free scope." The deepest mourning, the worst choice for a match, even unforgivable dishonesty, can all be redeemed and turned to the good. On the one hand, Helena herself makes a retrograde choice, going against all good sense by sticking with Bertram. Like a retrograde planet, Bertram does the opposite of what he should, first running away from Helena, and then moving, once again, into retrograde when he woos Diana, wins her, and then calls her a "common gamester" (5.3.188). As the King points out, Bertram's *modus vivendi* is retrograde motion: "I wonder, sir, sith wives are monsters to you,/ And that you fly them as you swear them lordship,/ Yet you desire to marry?" (5.3.155-7). The play suggests, moreover, that retrograde motion is a fundamental process of the male heart:

PAROLLES: He did love her, sir, as a gentleman loves a woman.

KING: How is that?

PAROLLES: He lov'd her, sir, and lov'd her not.

(5.3.155-7)

The play dignifies Bertram through the love of Helena, who we trust will lead him to the right path. However, the King's wise words on the folly of flighty friends and light lovers, and on the pain of regret, beautifully anticipate the alternative life that awaits him if he persists in his retrograde motion: "Our rash faults/ Make trivial price of serious things we Have,/ Not knowing them until we know their grave" (5.3.60-1).

Whereas Marlowe uses Copernicus as an alternative to scholastic dogma, Shakespeare revisits the Ptolemaic concept of retrograde motion to propose, instead, a return to wonder. Although Helena proceeds as if there were no supreme power or system other than sheer force of will, her retrograde motions restore faith in the possibility of a miraculous reversal of fortune. Retrograde motion in *All's Well* offers the opportunity to look backwards to a past that outshines the present, or to a past that the present opposes. As it provides the chance to move against the grain, so that history is not repeated even as it is invoked, *All's Well* affirms the extent to which any and all backwards glances are illusory, as time moves forward, both on stage and off.

## NOTES

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- 2 See Bacon, "On Ambition" (1597) in *The Essays or Counsels, Civill and Morall* (London, 1625), 224. See also Barnes, *Parthenophil and Parthenophe* (London, 1593), sonnet 35; Churchyard, *A pleasant discourse of court and wars* (London, 1596), unpaginated; Daniel, *The Poeticall Essays of Samuel Daniel* (London, 1599), 95; Drayton, *Matilda: The faire and chaste daughter of the Lord Robert Fitzwater* (London, 1594), E2v; Greene, *Greenes neuer too late. Or, A powder of experience* (London, 1590), 9; Harvey's *Pierce's Supererogation* (London, 1593), 112; *A new letter of notable contents* (London, 1593), B2v.
- 3 Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic. Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1971), 349.
- 4 For a fascinating discussion of the relationship between *Hamlet* and *All's Well*, see Alexander Leggatt, "In the Shadow of Hamlet: Comedy and Death in *All's Well That Ends Well*" in *Re-Visions of Shakespeare: Essays in Honor of Robert Ornstein*, ed. Evelyn Gajowski (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), 231-42. See also Leggatt, "Introduction," *All's Well That Ends Well*, ed. Russell Fraser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 7.
- 5 Susan Snyder, "Naming Names in *All's Well That Ends Well*," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 42 (1992), 272-77.

- 6 For further discussion see Snyder, "Naming Names," and my article, "Dido Queen of England" *ELH*, 71 (2006), 31–59.
- 7 Sir Roy Strong, *Gloriana: The Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), 95–108.
- 8 Snyder, "Naming Names." The goddess Diana also makes an appearance in *Pericles*, reuniting Pericles and Marina with Thaisa.
- 9 For a different reading of this passage, which emphasizes male anxiety about Helena's medical powers, see Harry Berger, Jr. "Making Trifles of Terrors: Redistributing Complicities in Ethical Discourses" in *Making Trifles of Terrors: Redistributing Complicities in Shakespeare* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 288–334, esp. 288–9.