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Question 3. Study the myth of Psyche, and relate it to All's Well. is the play about how a woman gets her man, or is it about how a heroine performs impossible tasks, and how the human imagination reacts to her achievement? Relate this action to other, similar actions in other plays. In what ways might the heroine symbolize the human soul?

Thesis: Three Shakespearian heroines go through difficult and challenging tasks, compromising their chances with their desired lovers and even their gender. Through patience and endurance, they show their devotion to their men through these challenges and give Shakespeare his “journey’s end in lover’s meeting” endings.

English 355-001 Shakespeare: Histories and Comedies
Professor Paul D’Andrea

Many Greek myths are responsible for backgrounds to stories. Authors take these ideas that present themes and characteristics of people that are still seen today, which teach society about psychology and reasoning. Simple ideas such as good and evil, love, and honor all stem from these ancient tales. Shakespeare uses these Greek myths as the building blocks of his writing, more specifically creating female characters from the myth of Psyche. The story of Psyche begins with the jealous goddess Aphrodite, who commands her son Eros to make Psyche fall in love with the most unattractive male he can find. While attempting to complete this task for his mother, he in turn falls in love with Psyche. He hides himself visiting her after dark, and tells her that she must not look at his face in order for them to be together. After her cruel sisters tempt her, she does in fact look at his face one night by candlelight. He abandons Psyche, and in desperation to get her love back, she goes to Aphrodite for help. Aphrodite describes four tasks that Psyche must complete to prove her love for Eros. Her four tasks began with sorting granules of sand, attain a golden fleece from a deadly and feared ram, gather water from the Styx River, the entrance to the underworld, in a crystal jar, and finally to descend into the underworld to steal a box of sleeping potion from Persephone, the queen of the underworld. All tasks, with the help of ants, a whispering reed nearby, and an eagle aid her in completing Aphrodite's tests. Once Eros sees what devotion this young woman has for him, he goes to Zeus and Athena for help, and they decide Psyche worthy to become immortal and be with Eros eternally. Just like the myth, Shakespeare constructs obstacles for his female characters to overcome in order to show their personal growth as women, making them stronger and even more worthy of their partners when the play ends with

the typical marriage. Three Shakespearian heroines go through difficult and challenging tasks, compromising their chances with their desired lovers and even their gender. Through patience and endurance, they show their devotion to their men through these challenges and give Shakespeare his “journey’s end in lover’s meeting” endings.

The play that relates most to the myth of Psyche is *All’s Well That Ends Well*, with the heroine by the name of Helena going through commendable actions in order to win the heart of her love, Bertram. Her first noteworthy task she does not only in to impress Bertram but to help the dying King of France, is to use her skills of medicine her father taught her to cure him. She states confidently “There is a remedy, approv’d, set down, / To cure the desperate languishings whereof / The King is render’d lost” (I.iii.228-230). A woman during this man dominating time risking to practice medicine on a King is a very daring move. Even the Countess has some doubts when Helena is describing her ideas: “How shall they credit / A poor unlearned virgin, when the schools, / Embowell’d of their doctrine, have left off / The danger to itself?” (I.iii.239-242). Helena is a kind and strong woman, having confidence in her ability to cure the ailing King and impress Bertram, but also she is caring for his health and the safety of the country of France. Helena states in act one, scene one, line 87, “he is so above me,” showing her concern she is not of the same class as Bertram. Once again, this hurdle does not frighten Helena. She goes to the King’s castle and proposes to practice her medicine on him, telling him “But know I think, and think I know most sure, / My art is not past power, nor you past cure” (II.i.157-158). Her courageousness continues to come through, showing the King she is confident in her cure. Through her skills she does cure the King

and he gives her the option of choosing between four men. Her heart is set on Bertram, and after he rejects her due to being “A poor physician’s daughter” (II.iii.115), she devises another plan to win his heart.

Helena’s most resourceful ideas come out after this denial of marriage. She constructs a plan that is called a “bed trick,” by using a widow and her virgin daughter Diana, which the undeserving Bertram is already trying to woo, and has him believe he is going to make love to Diana. After successfully switching herself with Diana, she becomes pregnant and fulfilling Bertram’s two requests to consummate their marriage. The power of resurrection is a technique that Shakespeare uses in his final scene to bring the couples together. This adds dramatic effect to the final scene for the audience, and it also adds meaning to Helena’s character as well. Resurrection’s most famous story comes from the Bible, and to give Helena the image of coming back to life through troubles, it gives her added grace on top of what she has. Helena creates a plan to win her deceiving husband back, asking “Will you be mine now you are doubly won” (V.iii.312), her proudly showing she is successful at completing her tasks not only set by herself, but by Bertram as well. Another heroine that shows devotion to her male counterpart is Viola who appears in *Twelfth Night*.

Viola is a young lady who has no control over the events that she experiences. After shipwrecking on the foreign island of Illyria, she feels she has no choice but to disguise herself as a young man, and this brings in the theme of not only overcoming tasks for the Duke Orsino, but also overcoming the task of finding herself as well. A notable aspect of Viola’s character is how she finds strength within her to keep her grievances inside for

her brother that she thinks is lost at sea. She barely has time to breathe let alone think about where her brother can be before she can mourn her loss. This may be Viola's self-conscious way of grieving, changing not only her identity, but also her gender, to closely resemble her brother. This is where the task becomes difficult for Viola, to mimic what she would do if she were her brother without wearing her feelings on her sleeve and reveal who she truly is. Viola's main challenges however, is when it comes to the Duke has to do with containing her feelings for him while in his presence and successfully try to woo Olivia for him. She says in act one, scene four, line 40, "I'll do my best / To woo your lady. [Aside.] Yet a barful strife! / Whoe'er I woo, myself would be his wife." Viola continues to perform small tasks for the Duke, like bringing her a jewel, which further causes Olivia to fall for Cesario. Her final overall task is complete when her true identity is revealed in act five. Her ability to not crumble under the characters securitizations, like Olivia professing she just recently wed Cesario and angering the Duke for supposedly befriendng Antonio, she still keeps her composure. Once the identities are set straight, Viola is able to in a way set up each of the couples at the end thanks to her real gender being revealed. Without her being a female and Sebastian's existence, or Cesario's wooing of Olivia, the world Shakespeare creates could not end in the "lover's meeting." The final female that goes through daunting tasks for the well-being of others is Rosalind from *As You Like It*.

Much like Viola, Rosalind sacrifices her identity for the majority of the play in order to be effective in her endeavors. She and her cousin Celia both take on the identities of young males once inside of the forest of Arden. She is falling for a young and handsome

male that goes by Orlando, and she soon finds that he is concerned more with the sappy aspects of love, and on top of that, does not know how to correctly show his admiration for his beloved Rosalind. Much of Rosalind's character comes from her realistic view on life and love, and she sees Orlando's praising her somewhat over the top. She designs a plan to drive her "suitor from his mad humor of love to a / living humor of madness, which was, to forswear / the full stream of the world, and to live in a nook / merely monastic" (III.iii. 417-421). It is a difficult task behold a characteristic of the person you are in love with, dislike that characteristic, and try to change it for what one thinks is better. She wants him to focus more on the important aspects of love, like when Orlando is late for an appointment; she says "Break an hour's promise in love! He that / will divide a minute into a thousand parts, and break but a part of the thousand part of a minute / in the affairs of love, it may be said of him that / Cupid hath clapp'd him o' th' shoulder..." (IV.i.44-48). Writing poetry and trying to flatter his lover is not something of concern, it is never to keep them waiting, no excuses. Rosalind herself too is responsible for the bringing together of all the couples, saying, "I can do strange things" (V.i.59). She does in fact bring together all of the married couples at the end of the play, even bringing a man representing Hymen to wed them. To be able to resist chastising the man she loves, and instead slowly changing him for the better, is a task that she over comes, as well as bringing on the extra task of being the stage master in the end with the marriages. From all of her work, she too overcomes obstacles to get the man she desires.

The heroine symbolizes the human soul by representing overall growth. All three of these women go through some type of transformation, whether it is small like a change of

clothes, or maybe transforming others around them for their benefit, or even themselves undergoing a psychological change that clears up uncertainty in their lives. For Psyche, her tasks were very difficult to overcome, and these women too had to get past some obstacles. In the end, their journey did end with the two lover's meeting.