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"Thy physic I will try": Art, Nature, and Female Healing in Shakespeare

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As one reads in Aristotle's *Physics*, art both imitates and completes nature, being not only a *ministra naturæ* but also a 'corrector' of nature. Through the major influence of Paracelsianism, in Shakespeare's England the art of medicine was closely associated with alchemy. The latter, as William Newman has noted, "provided a uniquely powerful focus for discussing the boundary between art and nature". By considering the characters of Marina (*Pericles; Prince of Tyre*) and Helen (*All's Well That Ends Well*), this essay investigates the two women's relation to the healing arts and to nature in the light of coeval alchemical and Paracelsian doctrines. The two Shakespearean women employ their healing powers, i.e. their "artificial feat", as well as their knowledge of nature's occult sympathies and antipathies, in the service of a "kingly patient": Pericles and the King of France. The *topos* of the healing of the king is a common trope in Renaissance alchemical literature, where the 'king' represents gold *in potentia* and, thus, the raw matter that has to be purified by Lady Alchymya. In the light of their privileged access to nature's secret workings, women could manipulate nature and heal the human body. The analysis will focus on Marina's homeopathic and, therefore, Paracelsian healing of her father Pericles and on Helen's still controversial medical practice, which seems to exceed both the Galenic and the Paracelsian paradigm.

Keywords: Alchemy, Paracelsian medicine, Galenism, Healing women, Shakespeare's last plays, *Pericles*, *All's Well That Ends Well*

Moving from the Aristotelian claim that art both imitates and completes nature, being not only a *ministra naturæ* but also a 'corrector' of nature, the Swiss alchemist and physician known as Paracelsus writes that "[t]he book of medicine is nature itself" (Paracelsus 1979, 86)[1]. Through the major influence of

[1] The thesis according to which art imitates and perfects nature (which Aristotle expounds in his *Physics*) was taken to justify the practice of alchemy and also "to attack the Galenic medical art in so far as this art admits to its inefficacy through acknowledging the incurable nature of some illnesses" (Maclean 2002, 75-76).

Paracelsianism, in Shakespeare's England the art of medicine was closely associated with alchemy[2]. The term "chymistry", in particular, indicates "the sum total of alchemical/chemical topics as understood in the seventeenth century" (Principe 1998, 9). William Newman has pointed out that "alchemy" (or chymistry) "provided a uniquely powerful focus for discussing the boundary between art and nature" (Newman 2004, 8). By considering the characters of Marina (*Pericles; Prince of Tyre*) and Helen (*All's Well That Ends Well*), this paper investigates the two women's relation to the healing arts and to nature in the light of coeval alchemical and Paracelsian doctrines. As we shall see, in the two plays, the term "art", regularly employed by the doctors of the London College of Physicians in order to promote "an elitist, patriarchal model of medical work" (Pettigrew 2007, 43), is instead associated with women healers.

In Stuart England, iatrochemical medicine had important religious and political implications and the diseased body was an object of fascination to poets, visual artists, and dramatists, as testified, among others, by Shakespeare's last plays, dominated by supposed deaths and magical reanimations[3]. Most significantly, in the late plays the task of healing is performed by women[4]: Helen, Marina, and Paulina are central in the regenerative pattern of the

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2 As Paracelsus writes, "I praise the art of alchemy because it reveals the mysteries of medicine and because it is helpful in all desperate illnesses" (Paracelsus 1979, 60).

3 "Iatrochemistry" indicates "[t]he theory or school of thought that existed in the 16th and 17th centuries and regarded medicine and physiology as subjects to be understood in terms of the chemistry of the time" (*Oxford English Dictionary* 1989, 7:592). Recent criticism has drawn attention to the topic of medicine and Paracelsianism in the Bard's later canon. See, among others, Healy 2017; Iyengar 2014, 245-47; Zamparo 2022. On the presence of medical issues in Shakespeare's comedies, see Camaiora and Conti 2016. On the relationship between the history of medicine and the visual arts, see Minni 2019.

4 McMullan highlights the problems in establishing which works belong to the group of the so-called 'last plays' (or 'late plays') and posits that *All's Well That Ends Well* could very well be included in this category, being roughly contemporary with *Pericles* and sharing some of the themes and images of Shakespeare's 'late work' (McMullan 2009), a definition which should of course also comprise the plays written after *The Tempest*.

dramas in which they appear[5]. Recent scholarship has revealed that alchemical and Paracelsian philosophy provides a fundamental paradigm through which to discuss the role of female healing in the early modern period. Margaret Healy, among others, highlights "the privileged position of female nature in the new alchemical medicine so closely associated with Paracelsus at the turn of the seventeenth century" (Healy 2013, 77). If Paracelsus writes that "woman is […] superior to man" (Paracelsus 1979, 26), female characters appear in coeval alchemical treatises as representing the art of alchemy, Lady Alchymya, who cooperates with "Dame Nature" (see Figure 1)[6].

Fig. 1. "Alchymya". Title page of George Baker, *The newe Iewell of Health* (London, 1576). Courtesy of the Wellcome Collection.

As will be considered, Marina and Helen employ their healing powers, their "artificial feat" (Shakespeare and Wilkins 2004, V.i.65), as well as their knowledge of nature's occult sympathies

[5] I have discussed elsewhere Paulina's role as Leontes's "physician" (Shakespeare 2010, II.iii.53) in *The Winter's Tale*. See Zamparo 2022.

[6] In his prolegomena to *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*, Elias Ashmole announces that his readers will "learne the *Language* in which they [our *Hermetique Philosophers*] woo'd and courted *Dame Nature*" (Ashmole 1652, sig. B4v).

and antipathies[7], in the service of a "kingly patient" (64): Pericles and the King of France. The *topos* of the healing of the king is a common trope in Renaissance alchemical literature, where the 'king' (or *rex chymicus*) represents gold *in potentia* and, therefore, the raw matter that has to be purified and transmuted by Lady Alchymya (Abraham 1998, 110-13). In alchemical writing, the so-called *rex chymicus* epitomises the condition of perfection that every element aspires to reach, i.e. the 'royal', perfect state of gold. The English alchemist Thomas Norton writes in his *Ordinall of Alchimy* that "Evermore one Element desireth to be Kinge" (Ashmole 1652, 67). Thus, in curing their royal patients, the two Shakespearean healers also perfect and 'mend' nature. The alchemical pattern of the curing of an ailing king, whose restoration helps to ensure the play's final reconciliations, recurs also in *The Winter's Tale*, a work roughly contemporary with *Pericles*. The Sicilian King Leontes is the rusty metal that has to undergo transmutation. When he acknowledges his faults and decides to repent in Act III, he compares himself to a base metal that has to submit to purification. Speaking of Lord Camillo, the king comments thus:

> LEONTES
> […] How he glisters
> Through my *rust*! And how his piety
> Does my deeds make the blacker!
> (Shakespeare 2010, III.ii.167-69, emphasis mine).

In the alchemical language, the term "rust" signifies "the 'infection' or imperfection of the base metal before purification, before the transforming medicine or philosopher's stone has been applied to it" (Abraham 1998, 175). According to Paracelsian theory, in particular, alchemy is a method of perfection: "For [nature] brings nothing to light that is complete as it stands. Rather, the human being must perfect [its substances]. This completion is called *alchimia*" (Paracelsus 2008, 211). Employing the celebrated words of King Polixenes in Act IV of *The Winter's Tale*, it can certainly be argued that alchemy "is an art / Which does mend Nature – change

[7] On Renaissance notions of sympathies and antipathies in nature, see Floyd-Wilson 2013, 1-27.

it rather – but / The art itself is Nature" (Shakespeare 2010, IV.iv.95-97).

The role of female practitioners in the healthcare system of Elizabethan and Jacobean England has emerged to the foreground and has been a subject of considerable interest to critics: historians have demonstrated that women healers were highly respected as caregivers, nurses, housewives, and also alchemists[8]. More particularly, alchemical writings demonstrate that a close connection existed between chymical practices and the chores women daily performed in their households:

> Doe wee not see that women and ordinary Cookes haue attained this knowledge of Fermentation: and thereby prouide for sicke persons, Iellyes made of flesh of foules, and such like, to restore and strengthen them in the time of their weakenesse? (Duchesne 1605, "The Conclusion of this Treatise")[9]

Several emblems in Michael Maier's renowned collection *Atalanta fugiens* (1617) portray women intent upon performing different alchemical tasks (see Figure 2)[10].

[8] See, among others, Archer 2010; Fissell 2008; Harkness 2002; Harkness 2008; Healy 2013; Hunter and Hutton 1997; Ray 2015.

[9] Where there are reliable signature marks or page numbers in early modern sources, I will use them; otherwise, I will refer to chapter titles or chapter numbers. As Wear explains, "[k]nowledge of medicines was […] both a medical and household matter, which meant that medicine became associated with female household skills, and women, the kitchen and the garden were linked to medicine" (Wear 2000, 55).

[10] Maier invites the alchemical adept to do "women's work": "When you have obtained the white lead, then do women's work, that is to say: COOK" (Maier 1969, 176). On women in alchemical imagery and on the relationship between alchemical and female skills, see Warlick 1998.

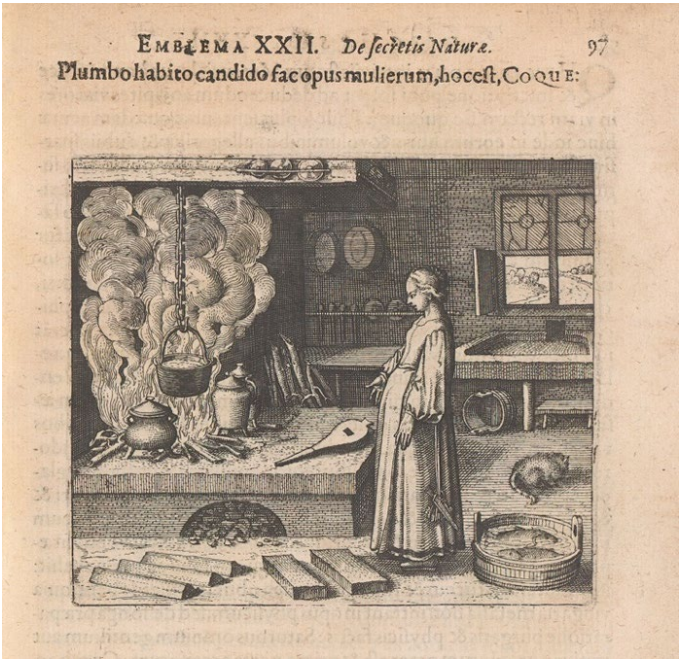

Fig. 2. Emblem 22. From Michael Maier, *Atalanta fugiens* (Oppenheim, 1617). Foundation of the Works of C. G. Jung, Zurich, https://doi.org/10.3931/e-rara-7300.

Given their status as "both occult objects and instruments of occult knowledge" (Floyd-Wilson 2013, 15), women had a privileged access to nature's secret workings and could perform wondrous cures. Paracelsus and his followers ascribed to female healers a sort of arcane knowledge of nature that could be traced back to the Egyptians and therefore prompted physicians to learn their art from cunning women:

> [A] Physitian ought not to rest only in that bare knowledge which their Schools teach, but to learn of old Women, Egyptians, and such-like persons; for they have greater experience in such things, than all Academians. (Paracelsus 1655, 88)

At the time when *All's Well That Ends Well* (1605-6), *Pericles* (1607-8), and *The Winter's Tale* (1609-10) appeared on the London stages,

Paracelsian medical theories were thriving in the country[11]. The Paracelsian enthusiasts Richard Bostocke (1585) and John Hester (1583), in particular, contributed much to the diffusion of iatrochemistry in England[12]. It is worth recalling here that Paracelsians promoted homeopathic healing, i.e. curing by similitude, or *similia similibus curantur*: "therefore it must needes be that all health must consist only in vnitie. And in and by this vnitie health is to be sought, and not in contrarietie, as the *Ethnikes* doe" (Bostocke 1585, Chapter second). In doing so, chemical doctors objected to Galenic, humoral, allopathic therapeutics, which relied upon the assumption that every disease is expelled by its opposite: *contraria contrariis curantur*. In the words of Galen, "euery thing perisheth or is ouercome of his contrary" (Galen 1586, 47)[13]. University-trained and licensed physicians, whose academic education was rooted in the Galenic and Hippocratic tradition, prescribed those remedies that had opposite effects to those produced by the distempered humours. According to the Paracelsians, on the contrary, "[e]very like knoweth its like" (Paracelsus 1657, 37) and thus illnesses should be purged with medicines that resemble the illnesses themselves. Bostocke makes it clear that "lyke are to be ioyned with ther like, & like are cured with their lyke: and that all health consisteth in vnitie and agreement" (Bostocke 1585, Chapter fifth). Each sphere of the universe (Paracelsus explains) is in sympathy with all other parts as well as with the human body (Hunt 1989, 77). It follows that "[t]he medicine must be adjusted to the disease, both must be united to form a harmonious whole" (Paracelsus 1979, 74). Thanks to a close perusal of nature, the chymist could harness these unseen sympathies and thus manipulate nature and heal the human body. In the words of Paracelsus, one "becomes a physician only when he knows that which is unnamed, invisible, and immaterial, yet efficacious" (64).

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11 On the reception of Paracelsianism in England, see, among others, Kocher 1947, Debus 1965, Webster 1979, and Wear 2000, 39-40.

12 Several Paracelsian treatises were translated into English by John Hester and were published in London in the late sixteenth century. See Kassell 2011, A1-A38.

13 On Galenic, allopathic medicine, see Wear 2000, 37-40.

Interestingly enough, Shakespeare's familiarity with chemical medicine also came through Doctor John Hall. The latter was a celebrated physician in Stratford-upon-Avon and married Shakespeare's daughter Susanna in 1607, the same year in which *Pericles* was written. This is the reason why the character of the physician Cerimon in *Pericles* has been read as a wedding gift to John Hall, who reflected the increasing interest in chemical pharmacy that was displayed by a number of licensed doctors at the turn of the century[14]. A perusal of John Hall's medical casebook actually reveals that he relied on both Galenic therapies and on Paracelsus's unorthodox, and yet thriving, theories. In several of the cases recorded in his diary, "Paracelsus laudanum" and "Paracelsus's laudanum pills" figure among the remedies he prescribed to his patients[15]. As it has been pointed out, Hall was neither a Galenist dogmatist nor a Paracelsian, but, rather, a "Chymiatrist" (Wells and Edmondson 2020, 15), drawing on both according to need and "integrating the two competing medical philosophies with little difficulty" (Iyengar 2014, 5).

The very Susanna Hall played a paramount role as a healer in her household as well as in her community. As stated in the epitaph on her gravestone in Stratford-upon-Avon, Susanna dispensed "comforts cordial" and was "[w]itty above her sex": "but that's not all", so the epitaph reads, "[w]ise to salvation was good Mistress Hall" (Wells and Edmondson 2020, 17). In other words, she was both "the famous local poet's daughter, and the physician's wife" (18). It is thus reasonable to wonder whether the figure of Susanna Hall inspired her father in the creation of such powerful characters as Helen, Marina, and Paulina, and whether this might be one of the reasons behind the salvific role of women in the plays Shakespeare wrote or co-wrote at the end of his career. I contend that Marina and Helen, in particular, contribute towards establishing harmony and concord within both the human and the natural spheres and thus reinforce the alchemical imagery of reunion and reconciliation that is at the core of the two plays. As

[14] See Wilson 1993, 176-77. Gossett likewise highlights the parallels between Shakespeare's son-in-law and Cerimon (Shakespeare and Wilkins 2004, 293n).

[15] See Wells and Edmondson 2020, 144 (case 73), 194 (case 123), 202 (case 131), 269 (case 172).

the English lawyer Richard Bostocke explains, Galenic physic is based upon "dualitie, discord and contrarietie" and "maketh warre and not peace in mans bodie" (Bostocke 1585, sig. B1v). Instead, Paracelsian homeopathic and alchemical ideology properly teaches how everything in nature strives toward "unity, concord and agreement" and shows how God "hast ordeyned all thinges in vnitie peace and concorde" (sig. A6v and A7r).

"Thy sacred physic": Marina's Homeopathic Healing of Pericles

Critics have variously noted the influence of Paracelsian, alchemical, and Hermetic philosophy on the character of Lord Cerimon of Ephesus[16]. He first appears in Act III of the play, where he is presented as a chymist, engaged in the distillation of herbal and chemical compounds, and entirely devoted to searching the secrets of nature as well as studying the "disturbances" she works and her "cures" (Shakespeare and Wilkins 2004, III.ii.37-38): a practice that gives him "more content and cause of true delight / Than to be thirsty after tottering honour" (39-40). As Iyengar observes, "it is certainly possible to detect in Shakespeare's aristocratic physician in *Pericles*, Cerimon, the type of the 'good' Paracelsian physician who refines chemical medicines from nature" (Iyengar 2014, 5). Recalling the Hermetic concept of man as a "mortal god", Cerimon famously declares that "[v]irtue and cunning were endowments greater / Than nobleness and riches" (Shakespeare and Wilkins 2004, III.ii.28-29). "Careless heirs", he says, "May the two latter darken and expend, / But immortality attends the former, / Making a man a god" (29-32). The idea of the human being as a god on earth is clearly developed in the eighteen treatises that compose the *Corpus Hermeticum*, traditionally attributed to the 'thrice great' Hermes:

> [T]he human rises up to heaven and takes its measure and knows what is in its heights and its depths, and he understands all else exactly and […] he comes to be on high without leaving earth behind, so enormous

[16] If Healy defines Cerimon as "a charitable Paracelsian-type physician" (Healy 2011, 197), Iyengar highlights how the Shakespearean healer "enjoys almost supernatural Paracelsian powers" (Iyengar 2014, 255).

> is his range. Therefore, we must dare to say that the human on earth is a mortal god but that god in heaven is an immortal human. (Copenhaver 1992, 36)

In the light of this renewed faith in human potential stemming from the Hermetic tradition, Paracelsus reinforced the belief according which the physician is a helper of God: "the Scriptures say that God created the physician and endowed him with his mercy that he might help his fellow men" (Paracelsus 1979, 69)[17]. Calling for some viol music and, therefore, evoking those Egyptian rituals of statue animation described in the Hermetic treatise *Asclepius*[18], Cerimon eventually manages to "awake Nature" and revive Pericles's wife, Queen Thaisa, who supposedly died in a sea storm: "Gentlemen, this queen will live. Nature awakes; / A warmth breathes out of her!" (Shakespeare and Wilkins 2004, III.ii.91-92)[19]. However, it seems to have been overlooked by scholars that Shakespeare displays a precise knowledge of Paracelsian medical pharmacy also through the character of Marina, Pericles's daughter. I argue that Marina relies upon her knowledge of Paracelsian, homeopathic medicine in order to heal her father.

In the final act of the play, the action shifts to the coast of Mytilene, on the island of Lesbos, where Pericles has arrived on a

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[17] The Paracelsians (just like the Helmontians after them) placed emphasis upon divine enlightenment and Christian charity and believed "to be directly illuminated by God with medical knowledge" (Wear 2000, 354).

[18] Hermes Trismegistus explains to his disciple Asclepius how ancient Egyptian priests infused life into the statues of their gods by means of "hymns, praises and sweet sounds in tune with heaven's harmony" (Copenhaver 1992, 90), a passage that is considered to be one of the sources for the statue scene in *The Winter's Tale*. In order to reanimate Thaisa, Shakespeare's Cerimon asks for a viol to play: "The rough and woeful music that we have, / Cause it to sound, beseech you. [*Viol music sounds and stops*] / The viol once more. How thou stirr'st, thou block! / The music there!" (Shakespeare and Wilkins 2004, III.ii.87-90). The Greek *Corpus Hermeticum* comprises seventeen tracts of Neoplatonic and Gnostic origin dating from the second and third centuries AD, to which is added the *Asclepius*. The latter was purportedly translated into Latin by Apuleius and its original version is not extant.

[19] A few lines above, Cerimon alludes to Egyptian magical rituals: "Death may usurp on nature many hours / And yet the fire of life kindle again / The o'erpressed spirits. I heard of an Egyptian / That had nine hours lain dead, who was / By good appliance recovered" (III.ii.81-85).

ship after "thwarting the wayward seas" (IV.iv.10) and where he would be reunited with his daughter. Marina was actually left in Tarsus with her nurse Lychorida fifteen years before, when her mother Thaisa supposedly died in a sea storm, and has been growing as "the heart and place / Of general wonder" (IV.Chorus.10-11) in the care of Cleon and his wife Dionyza. The latter, prompted by an "envy rare" (37) and unable to tolerate that Marina's excellent qualities overshadow the "graceful marks" (36) of her own daughter Philoten, commands her servant Leonine to have the foster child murdered. In spite of Dyoniza's hopes that "her daughter / Might stand peerless by this slaughter" (39-40), the murderous plan is thwarted by the entry of some "roguing thieves" serving "the great pirate Valdes" (IV.i.92). Marina, the 'girl from the sea', is thus abducted and carried to Mytilene, where she is sold as a prostitute in a brothel. Just like Perdita in *The Winter's Tale*, Marina is key to the regenerative pattern of the play. Jonathan Bate associates *Pericles*'s heroine with Ovid's Proserpina and reads her story as a vegetation myth: like her mythological prototype, the Shakespearean maid finally emerges from the "sexual underworld" and evokes images of fertility and rebirth (Bate 1993, 221). While in the brothel, a place where "[d]iseases have been sold dearer than physic" (Shakespeare and Wilkins 2004, IV.v.102), Marina displays her healing virtues and, speaking "holy words" to the governor of the city Lysimachus (138), she amends her customer's "corrupted mind" and manages to be released: "Had I brought hither a corrupted mind", the man claims addressing the honourable lady, "Thy speech had altered it" (108-9). After leaving that "unhallowed place" (104), the girl is hosted in "an honest house" (V.Chorus.2), where "[d]eep clerks she dumbs and with her nee'le composes / Nature's own shape of bud, bird, branch or berry" (5-6). Meanwhile, the King of Tyre Pericles sails towards Tarsus in order to be reconciled with his daughter, "all his life's delight" (IV.iv.12)[20]. Once arrived, however, he is shown Marina's tomb and, "in sorrow all devoured" (25), embarks again, swearing

[20] As Gossett explains, "Pericles's title and status waver throughout the play" (Shakespeare and Wilkins 2004, 168). He is referred to as both "Prince" (possibly as a synonym of 'ruler') and as "King" of Tyre.

"[n]ever to wash his face nor cut his hairs" (28). Pericles and his counsellor Helicanus eventually land on the island of Mytilene during the city's annual festivities devoted to the god Neptune. Displeased at the sight of "the king's sorrow" (V.i.55), Lysimachus sends for the "gallant lady" Marina (59), in the firm belief that her 'art' will cure the grief-stricken king. If Thaisa is magically recreated thanks to Cerimon's "secret art" (III.ii.32) and resolves to live as a votaress of Diana in Ephesus, Pericles is ultimately healed by his daughter's "sacred physic" (V.i.67). At the end of the play, the king celebrates Cerimon's ability to equal the power of the divine: "The gods can have no mortal office / More like a god than you" (V.iii.63-64). Likewise, Marina's "artificial feat" is a "sacred physic", i.e. it is approved by the gods, as Lysimachus observes:

> LYSIMACHUS
> Fair one, all goodness that consists in bounty
> Expect even here, where is a kingly patient.
> If that thy prosperous and *artificial feat*
> Can draw him but to answer thee in aught,
> Thy *sacred physic* shall receive such pay
> As thy desires can wish.
> (V.i.63-68, emphasis mine)

The syntagma "artificial feat" applies to the musical talents of Marina, who "sings like one immortal" and "dances / As goddess-like to her admired lays" (V.Chorus.3-4). However, given the presence of medicine-related language, 'artificial' might have been understood in a medical context, referring to the girl's healing art and to her "utmost skill" in curing the "kingly patient" Pericles. At Lysimachus's request, Marina replies that she will employ her "utmost skill" in the king's "recovery":

> MARINA
> Sir, I will use
> My utmost skill in his recovery, provided
> That none but I and my companion maid
> Be suffered to come near him.
> (V.i.68-71)

The Latin term *ars* may actually mean a physician's cunning and thus the English 'artist' may be a medical practitioner[21]. Considering that the *topos* of the healing of the king is typical of Renaissance alchemical allegories, *ars* might as well indicate the alchemists' art, most frequently defined as *ars sacra*. The Paracelsian Richard Bostocke writes that "[t]he true and auncient phisicke which consisteth in the searching out of the secrets of Nature" has been traditionally referred to as "*Ars sacra*, or *magna*, & *sacra scientia*, or *Chymia*, or *Chemeia*, or *Alchimia*, & *mystica*, & by some of late, *Spagirica ars*" (Bostocke 1585, Chapter first).

What is noticeable about Marina's healing of Pericles is that her treatment rests upon Paracelsian tenets and specifically upon the theory that like cures like. George Puttenham illustrates this principle very clearly in his *Arte of English Poesie*, when he discusses the response a literary complaint should elicit in the reader:

> Lamenting is altogether contrary to reioising, euery man saith so, and yet is it a peece of ioy to be able to lament with ease, and freely to poure forth a mans inward sorrowes and the greefs wherewith his minde is surcharged. This was a very necessary deuise of the Poet and a fine, besides his poetrie to play also the Phisitian, and not onely by applying a medicine to the ordinary sicknes of mankind, but by making the very greef it selfe (in part) cure of the disease […] not with any medicament of a contrary temper, as the *Galenistes* vse to cure [*contraria contrarijs*] but as the *Paracelsians*, who cure [*similia similibus*] making one dolour to expell another, and in this case, one short sorrowing the remedie of a long and grieuous sorrow. (Puttenham 1589, 37-39)

Paracelsian sympathetic therapy, unlike Galen's allopathic medicine, works by "making one dolour to expell another" and "by making the very greef it selfe (in part) cure of the disease" so that to "poure forth a mans inward sorrowes and the greefs wherewith his minde is surcharged"[22]. Edgar's lines in Shakespeare's *King Lear* echo Puttenham's words and draw upon the same homeopathic

[21] See Gossett's critical commentary in her edition of *Pericles* (Shakespeare and Wilkins 2004, 375n).

[22] On Puttenham's idea of grief as a therapy for the self and for others, see Pigman 1985, 44-45. On the significance of Paracelsian homeopathy for poets, dramatists, and literary critics in early modern England, see Grudin 1979.

rationale: "When we our betters see bearing our woes, / We scarcely think our miseries our foes" (Shakespeare 1997, III.vi.99-100). In *The Winter's Tale*, Paulina treats her patient homeopathically, requiring Leontes to cure his melancholic state with sufferance and lamentation, with "nothing but despair" (Shakespeare 2010, III.ii.207). Hunt rightly observes that homeopathy offered the dramatist a way of comprehending the influence of the spiritual world upon mankind (Hunt 1988, 56)[23]. In *Pericles*, the King of Tyre is not recovered by means of Marina's "sweet harmony" (Shakespeare and Wilkins 2004, V.i.37), as Lysimachus expects[24], but, rather, thanks to the girl's holy, medicinal, and 'sympathetic' words. Far from being merely metaphorical, such entrenched beliefs in hidden resemblances and attractions, which were especially exploited on the early modern stage, were part of a wider alchemical and Neoplatonic worldview according to which man and nature constitute one great body in which "all the members doe agree"[25]. As one reads in one of the most renowned alchemical treatises of the English Renaissance, pseudo-Roger Bacon's *The Mirror of Alchimy*: "Every like rejoiceth in his like: for likeness is saide to be the cause of friendship" (Bacon 1992, 14)[26].

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[23] Hunt explores the presence of matters related to Paracelsian homeopathy in *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, but he does not mention *Pericles*.

[24] "She questionless, with her sweet harmony / And other choice attractions, would allure / And make a battery through his deafened ports / Which now are midway stopped. / She is all happy as the fairest of all, / And with her fellow maid is now upon / The leafy shelter that abuts against / The island's side. Go, fetch her hither" (Shakespeare and Wilkins 2004, V.i.37-44).

[25] "[T]he more witty and learned sort of Philosophers, holde & affirme, that this world, which comprehendeth in the circumference and compasse therof the fowre Elements, & the first beginnings of nature, is a certaine great bodie, whose partes are so knitte together among themselues, (euen as in one bodie of a liuing Creature, all the members doe agree) that there is no one part of the parties, of that great body, which is not inlyned, quickened, and susteined, by the benefite of that vniuersall soule, which they haue called the soule of the world" (Duchesne 1605, sig. B3v/B4r).

[26] *Speculum alchemiae* was first printed in the alchemical compendium *De Alchemia* (1541) and it was later translated into English as *The Mirror of Alchimy* and published in London in 1597. The treatise, traditionally attributed to Roger Bacon, was very likely written by an anonymous in later times. On this work's

Marina's sacred medicine, which heals "the king's sorrow" (Shakespeare and Wilkins 2004, V.i.55), works in a Paracelsian way, i.e. by making one grief to drive out another, or, in Puttenham's words, "one short sorrowing the remedie of a long and grieuous sorrow". In hearing his daughter's story of loss and woe, Pericles is at last able to expel, deliver his long suffering. Addressing her royal patient, "A man who for this three months hath not spoken / To anyone, nor taken sustenance / But to prorogue his grief" (20-22), Marina carefully applies her homeopathic treatment and says that she will first disclose the reasons behind her state of affliction, a condition which 'equals' the king's misery:

> MARINA
> […] She speaks
> My lord, that may be hath endured a grief
> Might *equal* yours, if both were justly weighed.
> (77-79, emphasis mine)

This certainly resonates with the description of Susanna Hall as one "that wept with all / That wept" and "yet set herself to cheer / Them up with comforts cordial" (Wells and Edmondson 2020, 17). Further highlighting the affinity that binds them, Marina declares to be of 'equivalent' derivation with mighty kings: "My derivation was from ancestors / Who stood *equivalent* with mighty kings" (Shakespeare and Wilkins 2004, V.i.81-82, emphasis mine). In noticing the girl's similitude to his deceased wife, Pericles suddenly resumes talking: "My fortunes – parentage – good parentage – / To *equal* mine. Was it not thus? What say you?" (88-89, emphasis mine). Impressed by her 'sameness', the king invites the maiden to reveal her origins to him: "Pray you, turn your eyes upon me. / You're like something that – what countrywoman?" (92-93). "No, nor of any shores", the young lady replies, "Yet I was mortally brought forth and am / No other than I appear" (94-96). Given that, in Paracelsian terms, grief can cure itself, the king ultimately unburdens himself of the agony that previously oppressed him, Marina fulfilling the function of a midwife: "I am great with woe,

authorship, see Linden's introduction to his edition of *The Mirror of Alchimy* (Bacon 1992).

and shall deliver weeping" (97)[27]. Acknowledging Marina's resemblance to her mother and the affection, or sympathy, that unites them, Pericles is enticed by her 'relation', i.e. her story as well as their being connected by blood[28]:

> PERICLES
> Prithee speak.
> […]
> […] I will believe thee
> And make my senses credit thy *relation*
> To points that seem impossible. For thou look'st
> Like one I loved indeed.
> (110, 113-16, emphasis mine)

Marina's homeopathic remedy clearly works a positive change upon her father. As Benvolio says to Romeo, in the attempt to relieve his friend's torments of love: "One pain is lessened by another's anguish" (Shakespeare 2012, I.ii.45). Pericles, who recognises that his "dearest wife was like this maid" (Shakespeare and Wilkins 2004, V.i.98), urges Marina to report her background and unfold her misfortunes, which 'equal' his own pains:

> PERICLES
> Report thy parentage. I think thou saidst
> Thou hadst been tossed from wrong to injury,
> And that thou thought'st thy griefs might *equal* mine
> If both were opened.
> (120-23, emphasis mine)

Homeopathic therapeutics implied the existence of certain secret similitudes, and even visual resemblances, between specific remedies and those parts of the human body that were affected by illness: by manipulating these signatures, the physician could

[27] Birth imagery recurs in the play and is primarily associated with Marina, who symbolically restores her father to life. As Pericles exclaims: "Thou hast been godlike perfect, the heir of kingdoms, / And another life to Pericles thy father" (V.i.196-97).

[28] As Gossett stresses, "OED does not record *relation* meaning 'kinship' before 1660, but as 'a person related to one by blood or marriage' *relation* was already current" (Shakespeare and Wilkins 2004, 381n).

ascertain which cures best agreed with a certain affliction (Floyd-Wilson 2013, 4). What I argue is that Marina's 'likeness', the visual resemblance to her mother that immediately strikes Pericles, as well as the hidden 'sympathy' coursing through father and daughter, can be understood in a medical, alchemical, and Paracelsian context: "Every like knoweth its like" (Paracelsus 1657, 37).

"Thy resolved patient": The Paracelsian Context of Helen's Cure

It is a well-known fact that Shakespeare dramatises the controversy between the Galenists and the Paracelsians in the comedy *All's Well That Ends Well*, where Paracelsus is mentioned by name along with Galen. The reference to the two rival medical schools is made explicit by Paroles in a dialogue with Bertram and Lord Lafeu where we are told that the "learned and authentic fellows" have relinquished the possibility of healing the King, declaring his malady to be incurable:

> PAROLES
> Why, 'tis the rarest argument of wonder that hath shot out in our latter times.
> […]
> LAFEU
> To be relinquished of the artists –
> PAROLES
> So I say, both of Galen and Paracelsus.
> LAFEU
> Of all the learned and authentic fellows –
> (Shakespeare 2019, II.iii.7-12)[29]

[29] Stensgaard points out that Lafeu's utterance "Of all the learned and authentic fellows" is spoken contradictorily and is not intended to support Paroles's intrusive remark, "[s]ince only the Galenists […] enjoyed the august reputation glanced at in Lafew's directly rejoined 'of all the learned and authentic Fellows'" (Stensgaard 1972, 180). And indeed, as the scene unfolds, it becomes clear that Lafeu is trying to speak to Bertram, but he is continuously interrupted by Paroles, a situation that creates a comic effect (see Shakespeare 2019, 195n). It should be highlighted that "[t]o an English audience", as Gossett and Wilcox stress in their edition of the play, "these ['the learned and authentic fellows'] would be the *fellows* or members of the Royal College of Physicians"

Jones-Davies has noted that "[a]lchemy doesn't work miracles in Shakespeare, but does create wonder" (Jones-Davies 2017, 115)[30]. It will be my argument that Helen's wondrous treatment of the King hints at alchemical and Paracelsian tenets that were well known to Jacobean audiences. Significantly, the play's subject matter is once again the curing of "the King's disease" (Shakespeare 2019, I.i.224) and the subsequent "recovery of the King" (II.iii.37), or, in alchemical terms, the perfecting of matter through the salvific intervention of a woman. Just like Pericles is Marina's "kingly patient", so the King of France resolves to be Helen's patient: "Sit, my preserver, by thy patient's side" (Shakespeare 2019, II.iii.48). It is reasonable to surmise that the alchemical *topos* of the cured king and the explicit mention of Paracelsus would have prompted the onlookers to wonder whether the young healer performs an alchemical cure.

Shakespeare immediately places the drama within the coeval medical debate. The unlicensed practice of the "poor unlearned virgin" Helen is contrasted with the erudition of the "schools":

> COUNTESS
> […] He and his physicians
> Are of a mind: he that they cannot help him,
> They that they cannot help. How shall they credit
> A poor unlearned virgin, when the schools,
> Embowelled of their doctrine, have left off

(Shakespeare 2019, 195n). The latter "saw the propagation of Galenic learned medicine as its mission" (Wear 2000, 36). The theme of the inability of "the beste renowned Phisitions" (Painter 1575, 88) to cure the king derives from the main literary source of *All's Well That Ends Well*: Boccaccio's novella "Giletta of Narbona", included in William Painter's translation *The Palace of Pleasure* (1575). Shakespeare reworked the original material and took the opportunity to place emphasis upon coeval medical issues by juxtaposing Galen and Paracelsus and therefore prompting the audience to reflect upon the renowned debate.

30 The pun on the words "admiration", "wonder", and "wondering" foreshadows the astonishing and marvellous nature of Helen's cure. King of France: "Now, good Lafeu, / Bring in the *admiration*, that we with thee / May spend our *wonder* too, or take off thine / By *wondering* how thou took'st it" (Shakespeare 2019, II.i.85-88, emphasis mine). See also Gossett and Wilcox's critical commentary in their edition of *All's Well That Ends Well* (Shakespeare 2019, 180n).

> The danger to itself?
> (Shakespeare 2019, I.iii.234-39)

Somewhat surprisingly, the "simple maid" Helen (II.iii.66), a "poor physician's daughter" (115)[31], succeeds in "cur[ing] the desperate languishings whereof / The King is rendered lost" (I.iii.226-27) and enables her royal patient to recover his "corporal soundness" (I.ii.24). Conversely, the "learned and authentic fellows" (II.iii.12) fail to treat the sovereign's "malignant cause" (II.i.109). The image of a king "near death" (129) who is miraculously recovered calls to mind those alchemical illustrations that depict the restoration to life and health of the *rex chymicus* (see Figure 3). As one reads in the celebrated alchemical treatise *Pretiosa margarita novella* (1546), the Great Work consists in the restoration, or transmutation, of the chemical king: "In the eleventh mansion the servants pray God to restore their king. Henceforth the whole work is concerned with his restoration" (Bonus of Ferrara 1894, 44).

[31] The girl's social status in the play is not clear, as it has been pointed out by Gossett and Wilcox. She is referred to as a "gentlewoman" (Shakespeare 2019, I.i.16) by the Countess, a definition which indicates that Helen is either a "woman of good birth or breeding" or a "female attendant […] upon a lady of rank" (Shakespeare 2019, 127n).

Fig. 3. "The Resurrection of the King". From Petrus Bonus of Ferrara, *Pretiosa margarita novella* (Venice, 1546). Foundation of the Works of C. G. Jung, Zurich, https://doi.org/10.3931/e-rara-7472.

The inefficacy of traditional, established medicine is made clear at the outset of the comedy. As Lafeu observes addressing the Countess: "He [the King] hath abandoned his physicians, madam, under whose *practices* he hath persecuted time with hope" (Shakespeare 2019, I.i.12-14, emphasis mine). Gossett and Wilcox point out that the term "practices" also "carries overtones of *OED n. 3b*, 'an established procedure or system. Usually with negative connotations in early use'" (Shakespeare 2019, 126n). This remark anticipates the King's explicit reference to the Royal College of Physicians, the renowned institution founded in 1518 on the model of Italian city colleges of physicians (Wear 2000, 25). By refusing to hand over his "past-cure malady / To empirics" (Shakespeare 2019, II.i.119-20), the French sovereign opposes Helen's medical expertise to the art of the "most learned doctors" and of the "congregated college", i.e. the 'authentic' fellows:

KING
We thank you, maiden,
But may not be so credulous of cure,
When our most learned doctors leave us, and
The congregated college have concluded
That labouring art can never ransom nature
Form her inaidable estate. I say we must not
So stain our judgement, or corrupt our hope,
To prostitute our past-cure malady
To empirics.
(112-20)

Helen is thus presented as an empiric who has learned her art from her deceased father, the much-famed physician Gérard de Narbonne[32]. She could well have been one of those two hundred and fifty unlicensed practitioners working in London, several of whom were women (Wear 2000, 23-24). The very term "empiric", as noted by Pettigrew, "is ideologically weighted, and was routinely used by learned medical authorities to denounce those practitioners who wrongly thought (so *they* thought) that experience alone could stand in place of rigorous education" (Pettigrew 2007, 35)[33]. Rather surprisingly, this is the only case where Shakespeare uses the word "empiric" "to describe a practitioner" (35), which invests the term with a peculiar significance and highlights the relevance of the contemporary debate on medicine. Initially sceptical about the healing abilities of the young maid, the King of France eventually accepts the girl's treatment: "Sweet practiser, thy physic I will try" (Shakespeare 2019, II.i.183). Scholars have long debated about the nature of Helen's physic. Floyd-Wilson comments thus:

[32] Helen immediately introduces herself as the daughter of Gérard de Narbonne: "Ay, my good lord. / Gérard de Narbonne was my father, / In what he did profess, well found" (Shakespeare 2019, II.i.98-100).

[33] See the definition of "empirics" in Iyengar 2014, 118-19. Empirics were often women and "Paracelsians and alchemists were also invariably and pejoratively called empirics" (Iyengar 2014, 118-19). On the hostility between licensed doctors and female healers, see also Wear 2000, 47-48.

> She has been identified as a cunning woman associated with fairy magic, a Paracelsian, a domestic medical practitioner, and a student of her father's medicine. […] To some degree, all of these critics are correct. (Floyd-Wilson 2013, 28)

I argue that the young lady embodies the type of female knowledge of nature's occult operations and hidden sympathies that was praised by the alchemists and the Paracelsians. Moreover, as we shall see, she displays some specific themes related to chemical medicine. John Hester's definition of the art of alchemy is illuminating in order to understand the alchemical context of the King's healing in Shakespeare's play:

> *Alchymie* […] serueth not to transmute Mettalles, but it serueth to helpe those diseased bothe inwardly and outwardly: who of the common Chyrurgions are counted vncurable, and also giuen ouer of the Phisitions. (Paracelsus 1580, "To the Reader")

In the same way as Paulina commits herself to the "great errand" (Shakespeare 2010, II.ii.45) of curing King Leontes from his "unsafe lunes" (29) and convincingly remarks that "[t]he office / Becomes a woman best" (30-31), so Helen announces her 'curative project' at the outset of the comedy: "The King's disease – my project may deceive me, / But my intents are fixed and will not leave me" (Shakespeare 2019, I.i.224-25). As Gossett and Wilcox put it, "Helen dominates the play" (Shakespeare 2019, 37). It may also be argued that, by transcending the orthodox medical paradigm, she is the symbol of that syncretic approach to medicine that was supported by several doctors in early seventeenth-century England. Recent studies have shown that, "by the Stuart century, many established doctors in Britain tempered their Galenism with new theories about specific cures for specific diseases" (Furdell 2009, 48)[34]. Two leading

[34] See also Boyle 2018, 216; Healy 2001, 6-7; Harris 2004, 16; Wear 2000, 4-7. As a case in point, the Paracelsian Joseph Duchesne invites his contemporaries not to reject Galen and Hippocrates altogether, but, rather, to integrate their theories with the Paracelsian ones: "If *Hypocrates* or *Galen* himselfe, were now againe aliue, they would exceedingly reioyce to see art so inlarged & augmented by so great and noble addition […]. […] And albeit, it may be said, that it is an easie

figures epitomised "this eclectic approach to healing" (48): Doctor John Hall and the Huguenot physician Sir Theodore Turquet de Mayerne. The latter was one of the leading Paracelsians in Europe and arrived at the Jacobean court from France in 1611, when he was appointed court physician to the Stuart family. Importantly, the first London *pharmacopoeia* integrating Paracelsian remedies into the traditional Galenic system appeared in 1618, during the reign of the Stuart monarch James I, who was also the first British sovereign to appoint Paracelsian doctors at court (Trevor-Roper 2006, 212). Far from being a criticism of "the dubious art of the alchemists" (Jones-Davies 2017, 104), as it has been claimed, Helen's art embodies the innovative approach to medicine that was promoted by a considerable number of chemical doctors, one according to which "lyke are to be ioyned with ther like" (Bostocke 1585, Chapter fifth) and one that offered a paramount role to female agency.

The Paracelsian context of Helen's cure is highlighted in the very first act of the play, when the girl describes her father's medical practice, grounded on both "reading" and "manifest experience":

> HELEN
> You know my father left me some prescriptions
> Of rare and proved effects, such as *his reading*
> *And manifest experience* had collected
> For general sovereignty.
> (Shakespeare 2019, I.iii.218-21, emphasis mine)

This passage is usually regarded as a further evidence of Helen's empiricism given her focus on "manifest experience" and on the "proved effects" of her father's prescriptions. In the words of Floyd-Wilson, "Helena's triumph over the Galenists and Paracelsians in particular valorises experiential knowledge over theoretical frameworks" (Floyd-Wilson 2013, 36). As I posit, more complex issues seem to be investigated here. By pairing "experience" with "reading", the young healer makes it clear that

matter to adde to that which is inuented, yet both the Inuentors, and also the augmentors, are to be thankfully imbraced" (Duchesne 1605, sig. B2v-B3r).

her father's medical expertise derived from 'learning' *as well as* from 'experience', thus rejecting the derogative definition of "empiric" attributed to her by the King. As the English surgeon Thomas Gale puts it, "an Empericke" is he who "hath not reason annexed and ioyned to his experience" (Gale 1563, f. 11v). However, Paracelsus himself advocates that "[t]heory and practice should together form one, and should remain undivided" (Paracelsus 1979, 51)[35]. Helen's words echo a passage from the almost contemporary play *Pericles*, where the physician Cerimon illustrates his own idea of physic, his "secret art":

> CERIMON
> […] 'Tis known I ever
> Have studied physic, through which secret art,
> *By turning o'er authorities*, I have,
> *Together with my practice*, made familiar
> To me and to my aid the blest infusions
> That dwells in vegetives, in metals, stones,
> And I can speak of the disturbances
> That nature works and of her cures, which doth give me
> A more content and cause of true delight
> Than to be thirsty after tottering honour.
> (Shakespeare and Wilkins 2004, III.ii.31-40, emphasis mine)

The Ephesian doctor explains that he has acquired his knowledge thanks to both "authorities" and "practice", thus comparing and perusing multiple texts rather than merely depending upon old models[36]. It is certainly true that, as Gossett highlights, "Cerimon reflects the growing importance of experimentation in seventeenth-century medicine, exemplified in the career of John Hall" (Shakespeare and Wilkins 2004, 293n). The very title of Hall's casebook, whose notes are dated between 1611 and 1635, is particularly relevant: *A Little Book of Cures, Described in Case*

[35] The Swiss doctor stresses this concept in several passages: "There should be nothing in medicine except what results from both word and deed […]. Therefore study and learn that words and deed are but one thing; if you fail to understand this, you are not a physician" (Paracelsus 1979, 71).

[36] See Gossett's critical commentary in her edition of *Pericles* (Shakespeare and Wilkins 2004, 293n).

Histories and Empirically Proven, Tried and Tested in Specified Places and on Identified People[37]. Likewise, Helen clarifies that her father's treatment has been "approved" and "set down" (Shakespeare 2019, I.iii.225), i.e. 'tested'. Since nature's signatures were occult to men in general, the chemical physician was required to privilege direct experience over a blind reliance upon the authorities of the past. Importantly, as Wells and Edmondson attest in their edition of Hall's medical casebook, the Stratfordian doctor also "wanted to demonstrate that he was a learned physician who was conversant with the best minds of his time" (Wells and Edmondson 2020, 5). As a matter of fact, Hall's notebook is composed of a high number of unattributed borrowings from both Latin and English sources, which highlights his outstanding medical training and his willingness to prove that he was a cultivated doctor. Likewise, both Helen's father and Cerimon are learned physicians, perfectly acquainted with the most eminent medical authors, but simultaneously relying on the careful perusal of nature and on "manifest experience". The two Shakespearean physicians can thus be seen to represent the new type of doctor that emerged at the turn of the century on the wave of a growing interest in the chemical medicine related to Paracelsus[38].

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[37] See Wells and Edmondson 2020. This is the first authoritative English edition of Hall's original manuscript since 1683. John Hall's casebook was written in Latin and later translated into English by the surgeon James Cook (Hall 1657). Cook's version was later revised and augmented in 1679 and 1683.

[38] As one reads in Bernard Georges Penot's preface to Hester's collection of Paracelsian cures, "so must the speculation and practise, reason and the worke concurre and ioyne together, because iudgement without practise is barren" (Hester 1583, sig. B3r). The explicit association of theory and practice, or "reason" and "worke", was still regarded as an innovation in the medical paradigm of the period. The German alchemist and court physician Martin Ruland the Elder, one of John Hall's reference authors and a disciple of Paracelsus, was among the first to underscore the necessity to conjoin rational teaching with practice and manage them by method: "I call those cures empiric, not because they are based on experience only as the empiric sect declares, but those which combine simultaneously rational teaching with practice, and are managed by method" (Ruland 1628, sig. A3v, quoted in Wells and Edmondson 2020, 11). The title of John Hall's medical casebook in in fact based on Ruland's *Curationum empyricarum et historicarum, in certis locis et notis personis optime expertarum, et rite probatarum* (see Wells and Edmondson 2020, 11).

It is also of note that a Jacobean theatre-goer would have easily associated Helen's father, so "excellent" (Shakespeare 2019, I.i.26) and "famous […] in his profession" (24), with the French Joseph Duchesne, also known as Quercetanus, "the most famous Paracelsian and Hermetic physician of the time"[39] and court doctor of King Henri IV of France from 1593 (Bayer 2010, 168). Selected passages from two important works by Duchesne were translated into English by Thomas Tymme and published in London in 1605 (Duchesne 1605). Gérard de Narbonne does in fact have the features of the typical Paracelsian physician: honor, charity, and such a great art that would cure all diseases. The Countess observes that his "skill was almost as great as his honesty. Had it stretched so far, would have made nature immortal, and death should have play for lack of work" (Shakespeare 2019, I.i.17-20). Interestingly enough, Bayer has documented "[t]he actuality of women alchemists in the circle around Joseph du Chesne" (Bayer 2010, 166). Beside highlighting how female alchemists often acted as the counterparts to licensed doctors, the scholar draws attention to the existence of Quercitan's daughter as a historical person with an actual interest and heightened expertise in alchemy. The annotation "Mr de Chenis Quercitan's daughter" appears on a manuscript of English verses from the renowned alchemical text *Rosarium philosophorum* (1550), now preserved in the Oxford Bodleian Library[40]. As Bayer points out: "It seems that in a few instances alchemical 'masters' taught or included in their circle women who took on the mantle of a special sort of 'daughter'" (171). Considering the alchemical-Paracelsian context of the play, Helen can certainly be regarded as just such a "philosopher's daughter", who received the secrets of medicine from her father/teacher as part of a revealed knowledge[41]. Female expertise was particularly valued in the alchemical

[39] See "Mayerne, Sir Theodore de" (*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* 2004, 37:578).

[40] "This suggests that the daughter of Joseph du Chesne either translated the two verses of the *Rosarium Philosophorum* in this manuscript, as indicated by William Black, Ashmole manuscript cataloguer, or that she transcribed or owned it" (Bayer 2010, 176n49).

[41] Bayer also remarks that "[t]hese manuscripts suggest a father/teacher-daughter/student relationship for the passing on of alchemical secrets that has affinity with that of the traditional alchemist master-son" (Bayer 2010, 165).

entourage of Joseph Duchesne and Theodore de Mayerne. A female alchemist known by the pseudonym of Neptis ("female descendant" or "grand-daughter") appears in the Mayerne papers in relation to a secret alchemical circle which involved Duchesne (172-73). It is especially worth noting that the status of "Philosopher's daughter", or "Daughter of Philosophy" (171) in a few instances, has a certain affinity with the alchemical symbolism of the philosopher's stone, also known as *filius philosophorum*. The latter was "also sometimes personified as a female child representing sophia or wisdom" (see Abraham 1998, 149; Bayer 2010, 172). Thus, Helen's reference to "the dearest issue" (Shakespeare 2019, II.i.104) of her father's medical practice becomes even more significant: since "issue" also means "children", the term refers both to the receipt and to Helen, the 'philosopher's daughter' and also the philosophical child who perfects nature and cures the sick king:

> HELEN
> […] On's bed of death
> Many receipts he gave me, chiefly one
> Which as *the dearest issue of his practice*,
> And of his old experience th'only darling,
> He bade me store up as a triple eye.
> (102-6, emphasis mine)[42]

In refusing to rely upon Helen's "senseless help" (122), the King of France remarks that "[t]he congregated college have concluded / That labouring art can never ransom nature / From her inaidable estate" (115-17). The fact that the term "inaidable" is very likely a Shakespearean coinage, being the only recorded citation for the term in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is certainly noteworthy. The learned and authentic fellows of the College of Physicians have decreed "the impotence of hard-working *art* to overcome an incurable natural disease" (Shakespeare 2019, 182n). According to the Paracelsians, however, there is no such 'inaidable' state in nature:

[42] On the significance of the term "issue" in Helen's lines, see Gossett and Wilcox's critical commentary to *All's Well That Ends Well* (Shakespeare 2019, 181n).

> [T]here is no disease that is inevitably mortal. All diseases can be cured, without exception. Only because we do not know how to deal with them properly, because we are unable to understand life and death in their essence, can we not defend ourselves against them. (Paracelsus 1979, 73)

With the meaning of "that cannot be aided or assisted"[43], the adjective "inaidable" hints at one of the most discussed topics in alchemical writing: the issue of nature versus art (Abraham 1998, 11-12). According to alchemical philosophers, art always assists nature in attaining its highest degree of completion and excellence. The Elizabethan alchemist Edward Kelley describes the alchemical work as a process "in which Art assists Nature and Nature assists Art" (Kelley 1893, 127). In showing that Helen succeeds in curing the seeming desperate malady that affects the King, Shakespeare calls into question the presumed inefficacy of art before nature and the belief that women are not 'authentic' practitioners. In her reply to the King, Helen dismisses both ideas:

> HELEN
> I am not an *impostor* that proclaim
> Myself against the level of mine aim,
> But know I think, and think I know most sure,
> My *art* is not past power, nor you past *cure*.
> (Shakespeare 2019, II.i.153-56, emphasis mine)

The girl clarifies that she is not an impostor and presents herself as an 'authentic' practitioner, thus defying all prejudices against female healing. Emphasising that the King is not beyond hope of "cure", the maid focuses on the positive results her healing will effect on her patient. This is, in Paracelsus's view, what truly defines a physician: "It is therefore to be concluded that healing is what defines a physician and that results are what define the master and the doctor. Not the emperor, not the pope, not the faculty, not *privilegia*, nor any university whatsoever" (Paracelsus 2008, 87). Echoing Paracelsus's theories, Helen suggests that her "cure" will

[43] See "inaidable", *adj.* (*Oxford English Dictionary* 1989, 7:771).

prove the legitimacy and efficacy of her "art". The very term "art" was employed by licensed doctors to debase women abilities and to highlight, instead, the 'authenticity' of their medicine (Pettigrew 2007, 42-43). In Thomas Gale's English translation of Galen's *Methodus Medendi*, the reader is offered a description of some of "the foolish and mischiuous abuses, & misuses" (Galen 1586, f. 32r) that have corrupted the art of medicine and surgery and that have been carried out especially by women:

> All these were brought to this mischiefe, by witches, by women, by counterfait iauills, that tooke vpon them to vse the Art, not onely robbing them [their patients] of their money, but of their limmes, and perpetuall health. (f. 32v)

Margaret Healy discusses how early modern descriptions of female medical practice were underpinned by "perceptions about the inability of women – aligned with unruly nature – to undertake intellectual and professional activities that required art" (Healy 2013, 76). However, as Shakespeare shows us, Helen is neither 'unlearned' nor 'unskilled'. Moreover, the connection between the art of medicine and feminity in the play is made explicit by the expression "Doctor She" (Shakespeare 2019, II.i.77), which "juxtapos[es] […] the learned with the female" (Pettigrew 2007, 42) and therefore legitimises Helen's art.

As we have seen, in alchemical literature women are presented as being particulary suited to acting as healers in view of their connection with nature's secrets. The writings of the alchemists and the Paracelsians, in particular, "offer[ed] a positive rendition of female-gendered nature" (Healy 2013, 76), as documented by the following excerpt:

> Who is a better teacher in this than nature itself? Nature has knowledge of such things and nature provides for a palpable understanding of all things. From the palpable understanding, the physician is instructed. Insofar as nature alone knows these things, it must be nature that composes the prescriptions. […] From nature proceeds the art and not from the physician. (Paracelsus 2008, 111)

Helen herself is associated with the natural dimension by the King of France: "She is young, wise, fair; / In these to Nature she's immediate heir" (Shakespeare 2019, II.iii.131-32). Just like Paulina invokes "good goddess Nature" in *The Winter's Tale* (Shakespeare 2010, II.iii.102), so Helen trusts nature's 'power' "to unite sympathetic entities" (Floyd-Wilson 2013, 35):

> HELEN
> What power is it which mounts my love so high,
> That makes me see, and cannot feed mine eye?
> The mightiest space in fortune nature brings
> To join like likes, and kiss like native things.
> […]
> The King's disease – my project may deceive me,
> But my intents are fixed and will not leave me.
> (Shakespeare 2019, I.i.216-19, 224-25)

It follows that the healing of the King is instrumental to fostering nature's tendency to promote "sympathy and mutual agreement" (Lemnius 1658, 198; Floyd-Wilson 2013, 7-8) between naturally related entities. Richard Bostocke explains that "the Phisition knoweth what things haue affinity together, and ought to be coupled and ioyned together in vnitie […] to defend nature" (Bostocke 1585, Chapter fifth). These hidden affinities are, in Paracelsus's view, the "microcosmic forces" that "the common people regard as magical, witchcraft-related, [or] diabolical. All things of this kind are only *natural*" (Paracelsus 2008, 849, emphasis mine). It is very likely to ward off the possible charge that she is assisted by devilish powers that Helen clarifies that she is simply a maid: "I am a simple maid, and therein wealthiest / That I protest I simply am a maid" (Shakespeare 2019, II.iii.66-67). More particularly, the King's cure becomes part of a wider design that will allow her to attain a husband, thus joining 'like with like'. The girl is aware that, when "nature recognizes two people as similar, *likes*, the gap in fortune can be overcome so they can unite" (Shakespeare 2019, 145n). Helen thus entrusts herself to nature,

assisting the latter in the project of overcoming the distance between her, a 'baser star'[44], and Bertram, "a bright particular star":

> HELEN
> […] 'Twere all one
> That I should love a bright particular star
> And think to wed it, he is so above me.
> In his bright radiance and collateral light
> Must I be comforted, not in his sphere.
> (I.i.85-89)

However, a few lines below the maid argues that "[t]he fated sky / Gives us free scope" (213-14) and, in the role of a *ministra naturae*, she uses her art to foster nature's ability to unite like with like. The Shakespearean healer seems to act in the light of the Paracelsian tenet that "natural loue is the cause of perfection" (Bostocke 1585, Chapter fifth). As the Countess suggests, Helen's love for Bertram is "nature's", it "rightly belong[s]" to it, being the "seal of nature's truth"[45]. Furthermore, by relating "the King's disease" with her 'natural' attraction for Bertram and describing her love in astronomical terms, Helen reminds us of Paracelsus's definition of the art of medicine. The Swiss chymist writes that healing is a matter of "contemplating the stars together with medicine: warm to warm, cold against cold […]: for each man his woman, for each woman her man" (Paracelsus 2008, 197).

Helen's intimacy with nature's occult workings is highlighted also from a linguistic point of view. Gossett has noted that after the King of France claims that she is "without knowledge or *art*"[46], the girl's "language becomes incantatory" (Shakespeare 2019, 183n),

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44 Helen: "That wishing well had not a body in't / Which might be felt, that we the poorer born, / Whose baser stars do shut us up in wishes, / Might with effects of them follow our friends / And show what we alone must think, which never / Returns us thanks" (Shakespeare 2019, I.i.178-83).

45 Countess: "If ever we are *nature's*, these are ours: this thorn / Doth to our rose of youth *rightly belong*. / […] It is the show and seal of *nature's truth*" (Shakespeare 2019, I.iii.126-27, 129, emphasis mine). See Gossett and Wilcox's introduction to their edition of *All's Well That Ends Well* (Shakespeare 2019, 40).

46 King: "But what at full I know, thou knowst no part; / I knowing all my peril, thou no art" (II.i.130-31).

almost prophetic. Imitating the King's use of couplets, she reminds her reluctant patient that "great floods have flown / From simple sources, and great seas have dried / When miracles have by the greatest been denied" (II.i.137-39). It has been suggested that "early modern drama often foregrounds the woman healer as socially marginalised yet possessing an oracular nature and heightened spiritual and curative powers" (Healy 2017, 96-97). In her analysis of *Quercitan's Daughters Letters* and other documents attributed to female practitioners, Bayer observes that the woman alchemist, either as a real author or as a symbol of alchemical wisdom, is usually invested with the qualities of a prophetess (Bayer 2010, 173). A passage from Chiara Crisciani's seminal study on the connections between alchemy and prophecy is most pertinent to understand Helen's role as both prophetess and healer in Shakespeare's play:

> [I]f prophecy is knowledge, interpretation and annunciation of the future, but also and above all insight into the *occulta*, these features belong to the knowledge of the alchemists too. They must reach the deepest and most secret principles of nature. (Crisciani 2008, 22)

As we have seen, Paracelsian doctors, just like Hermetic, alchemical, and Neoplatonic philosophers, believed in the existence of hidden correspondences, or sympathies, between the microcosm and the macrocosm[47]. These *occultae qualitates*, otherwise known as signatures, would have been embedded in all things by God and could be accessed by the physician[48]. Therefore the alchemists considered that it was the heavens that determined which herbal, mineral, or metallic substances were in sympathy with a certain disease. Helen makes it clear that her healing treatment, handed down to her by her father, is in accord with the heavens:

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47 "[S]eeing that all thinges doe hang together in one chayne […] & man is partell of that chaine, and *Mycrocosmus* hauing in it the properties of the great world spiritually, therefore there is in the greate worlde, that which is agreeable to the nature of man" (Bostocke 1585, Chapter fifth).

48 "The mysteries of the firmament are revealed by the physician; to him the mysteries of nature are manifest" (Paracelsus 1979, 63).

HELEN
[…] his good receipt
Shall for my legacy be sanctified
By th' luckiest stars in heaven.
(Shakespeare 2019, I.iii.241-43)

Paracelsus actually teaches that "medicine lies in the will of the stars and is led and guided by the stars. […] The heavens must direct it for you. […] If you want to have them in the way you intend, you need favorable heavens" (Paracelsus 2008, 217). Helen clearly underlines the relation between her medicine and the *astra*. The so-called *astrum* "is the art of the wisdom of the heavens, this is what the physician should be" (173-75). Thus, the girl invites the King to trust the heavens: "Of heaven, not me, make an experiment" (Shakespeare 2019, II.i.152). In asserting that the luckiest stars will bless her remedy, the young healer is also foreshadowing that everything will indeed end *well*, having "well" both the meaning of "a state of good fortune" and of "sound in health; free or recovered from sickness of infirmity"[49]. Not surprisingly, the 'sacredness' of her art is repeatedly emphasised in the play. Just like Marina's physic is "sacred", so Helen is referred to as the "[v]ery hand of heaven" (Shakespeare 2019, II.iii.31) and her healing is described as a "showing of a heavenly effect in an earthly actor" (21). She actually defines herself as a humble minister of God, the great "finisher": "He that of greatest works is finisher / Oft does them by the weakest minister" (134-35)[50]. Moreover, by promising a treatment by a specified day and hour, Helen further highlights the correspondence between her cure and the macrocosmic forces of nature:

[49] See "well", *adj.*, definitions 1 and 5.a. (*Oxford English Dictionary* 1989, 20:112-13).

[50] Acting as a helper of God and healing the King by "[i]nspired merit" (Shakespeare 2019, II.i.146), Helen epitomises the definition of alchemy given by Thomas Tymme in his dedication to Sir Charles Blunt: "This Phylosophy […] is not of that kind which tendeth to vanity and deceit, but rather to profit and to edification, inducing first the knowledge of God, & secondly the way to find out true medicine in his creatures" (Duchesne 1605, "To the right honorable, Sir Charles Blunt").

> HELEN
> […] I'd venture
> The well-lost life of mine on his grace's cure
> By such a day, an hour.
> (I.iii.244-46)

This echoes once again the Paracelsian claim that "God has created remedies against the diseases […] but He holds them back until the hour predestined for the patient. Only when the time has been fulfilled, and not before, does the course of nature and art set in" (Paracelsus 1979, 81-82).

A few lines pronounced by Helen are worth quoting in order to shed further light upon the role of iatrochemical medicine in the play and upon Shakespeare's familiarity with it:

> HELEN
> What is *infirm* from your *sound* parts shall fly,
> *Health* shall live free, and *sickness* freely die.
> (Shakespeare 2019, II.i.165-66, emphasis mine)

By pairing "infirm" with "sound", "health" with "sickness", the young lady suggests a process of chemical refinement, based on separating the pure from the impure: "There where diseases arise, there also can one find the roots of health. For health must grow from the same root as disease, and whither health goes, thither also disease must go" (Paracelsus 1979, 78)[51]. In a longer passage, the Swiss doctor discusses how health and disease struggle within the human body:

> *Contraria à contrariis curantur*: […] this is untrue, and it has never been the case in medicine. Instead [it is the case] that *arcanum* and disease are the *contraria*. [For] the *arcanum* is health and the disease is counter to health. These two things expel one another, each the other. They are the opposites that dispel one another, each of them the other, *with death* […]. The [true] art of expulsion requires that what is expelled should never return. (Paracelsus 2008, 157, emphasis mine).

[51] As Iyengar explains, "[c]hemical refinement could separate the germs of disease from the curative element within the material" (Iyengar 2014, 5).

Certainly, Helen's claim that "[h]ealth shall live free, and sickness freely *die*" (Shakespeare 2019, II.i.166, emphasis mine) acquires a specific significance if viewed from within a Paracelsian context. The very King of France laments that health (i.e. physical strength) and disease are battling in his body: "Nature and sickness / Debate it at their leisure" (I.ii.74-75)[52]. By allowing "the death of the King's disease" (I.i.21-22) and "his majesty's amendment" (11), Helen also demonstrates that there is no 'inaidable' state in nature and that medical art can lead nature to greater perfection[53]. More particularly, when she argues that "[w]hat is infirm from your sound parts *shall fly*" (II.i.165, emphasis mine), the Shakespearean heroine draws upon one of the central tenets of Paracelsian therapeutics, i.e. the idea that sickness is caused by external contagion rather than by an inner state of imbalance, as the Galenists claimed. According to iatrochemical physicians, disease was produced by *semina*, or "seeds", invading the human body from the outside:

> He is the verie Physitian that with his owne hande purgeth his medicines from their venim, and being so prepared with sharpe iudgement doeth applie them to their proper diseases, that *the seede of the disease* may bee pulled vp by the rootes. (Hester 1583, 9, emphasis mine)

Styling herself as an expert chymist[54], then, Helen highlights the exogenous origin of the King's disease. Paracelsus stresses that

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52 Paracelsus writes that, "when a disease is in the body, all the healthy organs of the body have to fight against it. […] For a disease is the death of them all. Nature is aware of this; and for this reason it sets itself against the disease with all the force it can muster" (Paracelsus 2008, 443).

53 Speaking of the late Gérard de Narbonne, Lafeu remarks that "He was skilful enough to have lived still, if knowledge could be set up against mortality" (Shakespeare 2019, I.i.27-29), thus introducing the topic of nature versus art. See Gossett and Wilcox's critical commentary in their edition of *All's Well That Ends Well* (Shakespeare 2019, 127n).

54 Helen's cure presents all the typical elements of Paracelsian therapeutics: "Astronomy (knowledge of the macrocosm), virtue (the moral character of the healer and the power or strength of the purest form of a substance), alchemy (the chemical refinement of pure substances from nature), and natural

"there is no sickness against which some remedy has not been created and established, *to drive it out* and cure it" (Paracelsus 1979, 77, emphasis mine). Likewise, the King of France suggests that his malady is of an exogenous nature and that illness has 'besieged' his body:

> KING
> […] and yet my heart
> Will not confess he owes *the malady*
> *That doth my life besiege.*
> (Shakespeare 2019, II.i.8-10, emphasis mine)

Harris explains that for the Paracelsians "disease […] is not endogenous; it is an entity in its own right, whose origins lie outside the body in a foreign invader" (Harris 1998, 23). Arguably, the fact that the King of France and his lords discuss "warlike principles" (Shakespeare 2019, II.i.1) suggests a parallel between military activity and the King's condition, thus placing further emphasis upon the idea of disease as an enemy to be driven out[55]. Most significantly, the above-quoted lines pronounced by the King of France in Act II of the comedy recall a passage from King James's *Counterblaste to Tobacco* (1604). Espousing the Paracelsian tenet that disease is exogenous, the monarch stresses that sickness makes its "assault" upon such parts of the body that are weaker or less able to resist:

> For euen as a strong enemie, that inuades a towne or fortresse, although in his siege thereof, he doe belaie and compasse it round about, yet he makes his breach and entrie, at some one or few speciall parts thereof, which hee hath tried and found to bee weakest and least able to resist; so sickenesse doth make her particular assault, vpon such part or parts

philosophy (experimental investigation of cures) provided the foundation for all Paracelsian cures" (Iyengar 2014, 267).

[55] Lord G. is hopeful that upon their return from the Florentine wars as "well-entered soldiers", the King will be healed: "'Tis our hope, sir, / After well-entered soldiers, to return / And find your grace in health" (Shakespeare 2019, II.i.5-7).

> of our bodie, as are weakest and easiest to be ouercome by that sort of disease. (James I 1604, sig. C2r/v)[56]

If considering that, as Gossett and Wilcox attest, *All's Well That Ends Well* was composed early in James's reign, most probably between late 1605 and early 1606 (Shakespeare 2019, 23), one can certainly wonder to what extent the king's treatise, published in London in 1604, influenced Shakespeare's comedy. It should also be pointed out that the exact nature of the King's malady in *All's Well That Ends Well* is never revealed and that the healing is set off-stage, thus highlighting the scene's 'occult' implications (Floyd-Wilson 2013, 37). Some scholars have assumed that the "fistula" (Shakespeare 2019, I.i.32) that affects the sovereign would have reminded Jacobean audiences of plague diseases[57]. In early modern England, a fistula was "an abscess or sore not unlike that caused by plague" and "the Paracelsian writers had made fistula of noteworthy importance as one of a group of disorders […] which like plague were thought to be especially susceptible to chemical treatment" (Stensgaard 1972, 174). Lafeu actually highlights the notoriety of the disease in a dialogue with Bertram: "I would it were not notorious" (Shakespeare 2019, I.i.34)[58].

Further evidence for an alchemical reading of the King's cure is offered by Lord Lafeu. The latter describes Helen as the "medicine" that is able to restore life and focuses on the death-resurrection motif that is central in alchemy:

> LAFEU
> […] I have seen a medicine
> That's able to *breathe life into a stone*,
> Quicken a rock and make you dance canary
> With sprightly fire and motion; whose simple touch

[56] For a study of the presence of Paracelsian issues in King James's treatise against tobacco, see Zamparo 2022.

[57] On the medical concept of 'fistula', see Gossett and Wilcox's critical commentary to *All's Well That Ends Well* (Shakespeare 2019, 128n) and Iyengar 2014, 137-39.

[58] The Paracelsian context of the play is further reinforced if taking into account that the outbursts of epidemic diseases such as syphilis and the bubonic plague (which hit London in 1603) undermined the general faith in Galenism, which could not account for the transmission of infectious illnesses (Harris 2004, 15).

> Is powerful to araise King Pépin […].
> (II.i.70-74, emphasis mine)

It will be remembered that in alchemical writing the term "stone" is synonymous with "king". Lafeu's lines therefore allude to the stage of 'fixation'. In the alchemical language, the tincture (or elixir) is produced out of a process, known as *fixatio*, which presupposes the reintegration of the volatile spirit within the purified body (Abraham 1998, 78). According to the alchemists, the spirit of life flies from the body during the stage of *nigredo* and descends again at the end of the alchemical process. Only then life is restored and the chemical king is healed. This is the divine breath and universal spirit that vivifies all bodies:

> [Nature] is not visible, though it operates visibly; for it is simply a volatile spirit, fulfilling its office in bodies, and animated by the universal spirit – the divine breath, the central and universal fire, which vivifies all things that exist. (Paracelsus 1894, 1:289)

Helen's alchemical and Paracelsian art, "able to breathe life into a stone", brings about the complete restoration of the King. As the French sovereign remarks, "she has *raised* me from my sickly bed" (Shakespeare 2019, II.iii.111, emphasis mine), thus reiterating those images of resurrection that recur in the play and attributing to Helen the qualities of the *filius philosophorum* who transforms and perfects matter[59]. The verb "to raise" actually appears in alchemical literature to indicate the process through which matter "is raised to a higher degree of purity and potency" (Abraham 1998, 72) and thus becomes the resurrected body of the philosopher's stone. In his poem "Resurrection, Imperfect", John Donne describes the crucifixion of Christ in alchemical terms, using the verb "to raise" in order to indicate the ascent towards the final stage of the *opus alchymicum*, the so-called *rubedo*, which is regarded as a rebirth, or resurrection, of matter: "He was all gold when he lay down, but *rose*

[59] On the play's images of resurrection, see Gossett and Wilcox's critical commentary to *All's Well That Ends Well* (Shakespeare 2019, 178n). In alchemy, the term "stone" refers both to the elixir that cures all diseases and to the 'king' or perfected matter (Abraham 1998, 110 and 145-48).

/ All tincture" (Donne 1986, 328, lines 13-14, emphasis mine). In Shakespeare's comedy, the King of France is 'raised', exalted, purified, and transmuted, in the same way as Helen is 'raised' in status. In asking his "preserver" (Shakespeare 2019, II.iii.48) to sit by his side, the King highlights Helen's 'ennoblement': "Onstage this arrangement creates a strong visual confirmation of Helen's advance in rank" since "normally only a queen sat by a king" (Shakespeare 2019, 198n). The girl has been "ennobled" from her "base" state, as Bertram observes expressing his dissent:

> BERTRAM
> […] I find that she, which late
> Was in my *nobler* thoughts most *base*, is now
> The praised of the King who, so *ennobled*,
> Is as 'twere born so.
> (II.iii.171-74, emphasis mine)

Just like in alchemy the transformation of base matter always corresponds to the adept's symbolical metamorphosis, so the healing of the King allows Helen to raise to a higher state of perfection, culminating in the marriage with Bertram and in the accomplishment of her homeopathic vision of reality and of nature, i.e. "[t]o join like likes, and kiss like native things" (I.i.219)[60]. "In administering medicine" – Paracelsus writes – "we must always set entity against entity, so that each becomes in a sense the wife or husband of the other" (Paracelsus 1979, 96). Furthermore, Helen's claim that "[o]ur remedies oft in ourselves do lie" (Shakespeare 2019, I.i.212) resonates with the alchemical idea that nature always strives to achieve its highest degree of perfection and that "by art

[60] As it has been noted, "[w]hile the first half of the play is decidedly medical, the second half is decidedly social, driven as it is by Bertram's refusal of Helena on the basis of social class. And indeed, poor female medical practitioners were treated in a way wholly different from their aristocratic counterparts" (Pettigrew 2007, 48). Importantly, both halves of the play (which are tied together by the King's healing) are part of Helen's project to bring about the marriage with Bertram and to accomplish her 'metamorphosis' into a wife (see Shakespeare 2019, 109). She actually leaves Roussillon and stages the 'bed-trick' scene with the aim to (as she says) "*perfect* mine intents" (IV.iv.4, emphasis mine).

one affords assistance to nature" (Trismosin 2019, 146)[61]. It is not a matter of chance that almost at the end of the play the King of France addresses "Plutus himself / That knows the tinct and multiplying medicine" (Shakespeare 2019, V.iii.101-2). Given that the alchemical term "tincture" also has the meaning of "spiritual 'signature'" (Iyengar 2014, 337), it can be argued that the kind of therapeutic magic that restores the King to health rests upon Paracelsian and alchemical tenets according to which the cosmos was made of hidden harmonies that the female healer could grasp in view of her connection with nature. Helen, just like Marina and Paulina, cooperates "[w]ith great creating Nature" (Shakespeare 2010, IV.iv.88) and shows how "health consisteth in vnitie and agreement" (Bostocke 1585, Chapter fifth).

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[61] Aware of the fact that her attraction for Bertram stems from a natural affinity, Helen knows that she has the power to overcome the social distance between them through her own agency and 'art', thus 'completing' nature's work. At the core of Paracelsian thought is the idea that "the human being is involved in the act of completing nature" and that the individual plays the "alchemical role of perfecting and unfolding creation" (Moran 2022). Moran remarks that this also worked in a social way for Paracelsus, who extended his gigantic program not only to the material but also to the social world: "overall there is a definite sense of being with people in order to reform or change the situation of their lives as well as the material world around them" (Moran 2022). It is apparent that Shakespeare's version of Boccaccio's novella acquired a new relevance with the advent of Paracelsianism in early modern England.

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