

SHAKESPEARE'S MEASURE FOR MEASURE:

AN INQUIRY

INTO THE PURPOSE OF POWER

by

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## ABSTRACT

William Shakespeare's Measure for Measure has defied categorization regarding its genre and definitive interpretation concerning its ultimate meaning. Although various "schools" of approach and interpretation have emerged, consensus in terms of the underlying concerns of the play has not been reached. For these reasons, critical examinations of certain aspects of the play continue to proliferate.

This thesis proposes that a play in which the protagonist, a Duke, abdicates temporarily, moves among his subjects, and reappears to exercise his long neglected duties suggests a concern with administrative authority. A deliberate examination of those events in the play which throw light on possible problems arising out of neglect or over-zealousness in the administration of civil government shows that, indeed, the play presents a logical, fascinating, and honest inquiry into the purposes of power. Since the Duke of Vienna is the man in whom power is vested, the play--and this thesis--revolves around him.

This thesis suggests that the Duke, ineffectual because overly lenient for over a decade, learns during

his temporary absence from office that authority must be exercised for the well-being of a society and that power must be used to purposes which serve that end. The Duke proposes, for example, the morally objectionable "bed-trick," which involves sending a spinster to the bed of a corrupt deputy, in order to save a life, uphold honour, and bring justice in Vienna. Contrary to prevalent critical opinion, this thesis submits that the Duke--as well as Shakespeare's audience--knows that the substitution scheme is illegal.

Having briefly surveyed critical opinions regarding the protagonist of the play, the thesis examines in the first chapter the inconclusive manner in which Angelo is made deputy. He is left by the Duke with absolute authority but no specific instructions. Chapter two is concerned with the Duke's actions as friar and the possible reasons for his hitherto lax rule as head of state. In his disguise the Duke is witness to a moral dilemma confronting two of his subjects and decides to resolve it by "craft." To an examination of that aspect of his action the third chapter is devoted. The next chapter deals with Vincentio's growing realization that, although fraught with hazards from a personal, ethical point of view, a ruler must govern firmly if human dignity and a civil society are to be preserved. How the Duke has

resolved to put the authority vested in him to use is the subject matter of the fifth chapter. He is shown to act decisively by dealing equitably with all offenders. Measure for Measure, considered as an inquiry into the nature of administrative power, is a coherent and meaningful play.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Chapter I: The Deputization	17
Chapter II: The Death Sermon	62
Chapter III: "Craft Against Vice"	87
Chapter IV: "He Who The Sword of Heaven Will Bear"	124
Chapter V: The Integration	152
Selected Bibliography	175

## INTRODUCTION

Commentary written on Shakespeare's Measure for Measure in the twentieth century is remarkable for its diversity of approach, intensity of argument, and incompatibility of opinion. The play has been read as explicitly Christian in its concerns,<sup>1</sup> as a vehicle for ideas,<sup>2</sup> as a sociological document,<sup>3</sup> and even as an adroitly fashioned bauble to delight James I.<sup>4</sup> Thus some critics see the dramatis personae as representations of concepts or as mouthpieces for opinions conventional or unconventional in Shakespeare's time; others focus on the play as an illustration of the socio-economic facts of life in Elizabethan London or as comment on the new King's writings and his well-documented idiosyncracies. The rivalry of opinions stems from the diversity of approaches to the play. But often a certain approach dictates a certain opinion, especially if the framework for the analysis is taken from outside the play. Despite the various critical presuppositions, however, one expects some basic aspects of the play to emerge on which, more or less, all critics can agree. This is not the case. Commentators disagree regarding the characters, the issues, the structure, and the underlying meaning of the play. The divergent

readings of the play imply--and this has been stated openly by many critics--that we are confronted with an imperfect play.<sup>5</sup>

However, an analysis of the play's characters and their text yields a coherent, intelligible, and intellectually sound examination into the nature of authority and power. An approach to Measure for Measure through a study of its characters--particularly the Duke--forces the reader to stay within the play and to see its concerns clearly. An analysis of the characters, while avoiding Bradleyan excesses, as imaginative representations of what we know about man in actual life is possible. After all, whether condemning or approving, critics have filled volumes with discussions of Shakespeare's characters. This is, no doubt, due to Shakespeare having confined his concerns "not only within a pattern of events but within a series of sharply individualized characters, who have always aroused the impulse to praise or to blame."<sup>6</sup>

Yet, critics generally believe that in Measure for Measure Shakespeare fell short of the art and care with which he usually brought characters to life. Thus Mark van Doren faulted Shakespeare for not concentrating "with his usual success upon the figures in the fore-



ground, the persons of the play."<sup>7</sup> Although W. W. Lawrence found the play "real through the brilliancy and veracity of the portraiture of most of its characters,<sup>8</sup> he saw the Duke as an "essentially artificial figure,...as a deus ex machina."<sup>9</sup> He thought best to "sum the whole matter up by saying that Shakespeare drew the Duke as he did because he needed him, and that he drew the main protagonists and the low-comedy people as he did because they interested him."<sup>10</sup> Over twenty years later Lawrence was harsher. "The women in the play," he says, "like the men, change when the plot requires it, chameleon-fashion."<sup>11</sup>

Another view is presented by L. C. Knights who argues that "the strain and conflict" in Measure for Measure are "in fact embedded in the themes of which the characters are made the mouthpieces."<sup>12</sup> A similar opinion is voiced, although not as strongly, by E. M. W. Tillyard who thinks that Shakespeare was concerned with "religious dogma or abstract speculation or both." His concerns in Measure for Measure, in contrast to the tragedies, "were new and urgent in [his] mind, demanding at this point statement and articulation rather than solution and absorption into other material."<sup>13</sup> Although Tillyard does not judge the characters "by the

standards of actual life,"<sup>14</sup> he finds them inconsistent within the structure of the play.<sup>15</sup>

Ernest Schanzer moves from character analysis to source or theme and back again, but he is the rare critic to whom it seems "wisest to approach the question of Shakespeare's concerns and attitudes in [Measure for Measure] by way of a discussion of its five main characters...."<sup>16</sup> This approach was not chosen by two other critics, one of whom found that the characters assume "substance...only to surrender it and lapse into two dimensions,..."<sup>17</sup> and the other that "characters become puppets,...and manipulated."<sup>18</sup> A. Caputi says that "Shakespeare has used his principal characters so irregularly as to imply unmistakably that character was not his primary concern."<sup>19</sup> Josephine Waters Bennett attacks the entire notion to examine characters since "the basis of comedy...is plot."<sup>20</sup> The characters do not trouble her because "in comedy the characters are more lightly sketched, more typical, more obviously the product of the plot."<sup>21</sup> Miss Bennett, however, pleads a special case. Since she is determined to see Measure for Measure as comedy, written to amuse James I, the Duke's death-sermon is "more comic than serious," Isabella's angry reproach to her brother "both very human

and comic," and "she has no dilemma, faces no serious problem."<sup>22</sup> To see the characters and their actions as consistently comic does not, of course, in any way explain away the difficulties other commentators have encountered in examining the play and its characters.

David L. Stevenson, in his careful study of the play, finds "the chief characters...suspended in favor of coldly comic irony and paradox." This is so "because Measure for Measure is structured as an intellectual counterpoise of moral concepts and ideas."<sup>23</sup> He calls the play "overtly, almost grossly, schematic in its architecture."<sup>24</sup> Therefore he sees the characters as "deliberately simplified and made less interesting in themselves than is Hamlet,...or Falstaff...."<sup>25</sup> Since the play is an intellectual comedy, the characters "stubbornly resist analysis in isolation from the design of the play, where they are made viable in complementary relationship to each other."<sup>26</sup> In contrast to Stevenson's view, the editor of the Arden edition, J. W. Lever, says that "the focus of interest is on the inner tensions and interactions of the three leading characters, Claudio, Isabella, and Angelo."<sup>27</sup> Lever does not think that the pattern of ideas takes precedent over, or is developed at the expense of, character development. The concepts are incorporated into character and action.<sup>28</sup> Lever's

point of view makes it possible, without falling to extremes like J. W. Bennett or the theological exegetists, to see the play, its concerns, and the characters as an organic whole.

Despite the opinion of many critics that Shakespeare only partially succeeded in fusing the concerns of the play with its characters, I believe that Measure for Measure can only be apprehended through a study of the characters. Miss Lascelles, who sees the characters in the play as two-dimensional, expresses the general hesitations regarding the matter of character analysis:

Character, and its power to turn the scale in human affairs--these were long acknowledged to be Shakespeare's abiding concern. Nevertheless, interpretation in terms of character is not very favourably regarded in the world of Shakespearian criticism at present. We have been frightened away from it. Bradley's persuasive charm has made it seem hardly less dangerous than magic. It is dangerous. To enter imaginatively into others' experience may be one of the more admirable activities permitted to human beings; to draw the creatures of another's imagination into the orbit of our own experience--this is not admirable at all. And only a very slender line divides the two exertions.<sup>29</sup>

The reluctance to interpret drama "in terms of character" is not only an issue in Shakespeare criticism in general but one particularly relevant to an examination of Measure for Measure. Too many critics have either

neglected or purposely denied interest in the characters because of their concern with the play's "intellectual" nature.<sup>30</sup> Some have devoted much labour to the apprehension of the "design" in the play which, if viewed (in the words of one critic) in "the role of omniscient outsider and observer,"<sup>31</sup> will be "the most easily apprehended of all Shakespeare's comedies."<sup>32</sup>

Miss Lascelles counsels against drawing "the creatures of another's imagination into the orbit of our own experience." (She courageously broaches the problem. Other critics seem to think that there is no problem.) How do we feel, see, or understand but by referring events to our own experience? Total aloofness may be desirable in the social sciences but when confronted with "the human condition"--a phrase which even the most consciously and conscientiously objective critics are fond of using--it is our own experience, the sum of our perceptions and feelings, that provides the frame within which what we read or see on the stage can acquire meaning. No one would advocate a return to Bradleyan speculations and begin to enquire into the number of illegitimate children Lucio might have had or whether the Duke is too old to marry Isabella. But it is surely justified to draw the characters in Measure for Measure into the orbit of our own experience if for no other reason

than to relate them to life as we, in the twentieth century, know it. To look to Shakespeare's work to learn of the mystery of man does not mean that we should look to him for an answer to the question: "what shall we do and how shall we live?"

The petulant tone in the defense of my approach to an interpretation of Measure for Measure through its characters is due, by and large, to the frustrating dilemma which confronts the twentieth century critic. Interpreters of imaginative literature are pulled simultaneously in two directions. On the one hand the critic is influenced by science and its demands for facts and evidence based on analysis of individual components; on the other there is a strong feeling that literature is about men, emotions, life as it is lived and that the artistic creation transcends those limitations the analytical mind tends to impose. It is not only the action which interests the reader or playgoer but also the motivation underlying the action.

Motivation is commonly defined as the "justification of the action of a character in a plot by the presenting of a convincing and impelling cause for that action.

...Motivated action...is action justified by the make-up of the character partaking in the activity."<sup>33</sup> We

expect, then, from a well conceived character that the reasons for his actions are grounded in his nature and personality and that his nature and personality make his actions inevitable. Whether the character remains static or changes, either possibility has to be prepared for by, or must emerge from, his general disposition. The audience will be dissatisfied with a character on the stage if it cannot perceive fairly readily what social, philosophical, or psychological motives propel the individual to action. Drama fascinates not only by showing how men behave, but by making evident why they behave as they do. A character's social position may also indicate why he behaves a certain way. However, when we speak about characters in Shakespearean drama, recent scholarship has taught us not to rely absolutely on either what the character says or what, socially, he is. With a modicum of knowledge about conditions and prevailing opinions in Elizabethan England we may infer motivation for a character although the concern with the world-view of a particular time should never blind the critic to other possibilities in interpreting a character's motivation.

For instance, when Prince Hal has become Henry V and banishes Falstaff, we assume today that he was not

merely motivated by momentary anger over the old man's disrespectful remarks to the new king as he passes in procession but by a long tradition which held court and tavern to be incompatible. Since the text itself gives us no cause to recognize the latter as Henry's motivation, the patient investigation of scholars has given the critic additional information with which to view the young king's reaction. A somewhat similar example may be cited from King Lear. The king's division of the kingdom with the attending love test and his subsequent mulish behaviour may, among other possibilities, be motivated by his lack of self-knowledge. Goneril's "yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself" takes for granted the entire Renaissance concept of self-government and government of others. A twentieth century student, reading the play for the first time and with no background in Elizabethan "psychology," invariably reads over the line without attaching any significance to it. Yet another example is Caliban. When he appears on the stage in The Tempest, the very fact that the creature is not quite human would have told an Elizabethan audience that it is motivated mainly by the appetites. A knowledge of the Elizabethan view of man as between beast and angel adds, therefore, to the possibilities of interpreting Caliban's actions.



For a character assessment of Vincentio I will assume that Shakespeare created him as a character in the play and not as a puppet manipulating the strings of comedy to ensure a happy ending. To examine him as a person and not as a stage convention means that the motives underlying his actions are important. Two considerations are necessary: what, in his personal make-up impels him to act; and what, in terms of his social position, is the goal of his action. What he says about himself and what other characters say of him will provide insights into his character. Ultimately, however, in order to assess his character one must examine what he does, his doings in the play.

To infer motivation from action and position in the social hierarchy does not mean to speculate about the character's motives. Speculation, for instance, would lead us to surmise that the Duke decides to save Claudio because he has fallen in love with Isabella. "Inferred motivation," in contrast, means:

to have textual evidence to support a conclusion or a judgment regarding either the Duke's nature or his aims;

to have a number of statements in the text, scattered over the entire play and not necessarily made by one and the same person, which lead to a conclusion about the Duke's nature or his aims;

to take into consideration his social position as father of his subjects, God's deputy on earth, the head of the body politic, or, when he is in disguise, the ecclesiastical obligations of a friar.

One may, of course, infer a motive at a particular time, say the beginning of Act III, from some textual evidence earlier in the play. Thus, to give an extreme example, early in the play the Duke admits to have governed for over a decade with little élan. In Act III, then, the "Be absolute for death"<sup>34</sup> speech can be read as revealing a particular worldview which may have formed the basis for his former inaction. The inference is that, irrespective of the social function Vincentio is fulfilling at the moment, only a person profoundly sceptical of the worth and purpose of human life can formulate the thoughts expressed in the exhortation.

Notes to the INTRODUCTION

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- 2 Sir Walter Raleigh, "Measure for Measure" (1907), in Discussions of Shakespeare's Problem Comedies, ed. Robert Ornstein (Boston, 1961), pp. 69-72. L. C. Knights, "The Ambiguity of 'Measure for Measure'" (1942), in The Importance of Scrutiny, ed. Eric Bentley (New York, 1948), pp. 141-150. E. M. W. Tillyard, "Measure for Measure," Shakespeare's Problem Plays (London, 1950; 1964), pp. 118-138. Raymond Southall, "'Measure for Measure' and the Protestant Ethic," Essays in Criticism, XI (1961), 10-33. Anthony Caputi, "Scenic Design in 'Measure for Measure'" (1961), in Twentieth Century Interpretations of 'Measure for Measure', ed. George L. Geckle (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1970), pp. 86-97. David Lloyd Stevenson, The Achievement of Shakespeare's 'Measure for Measure' (New York, 1966).

- 3 Southall, op. cit. Robert D. Callahan, "The Theme of 'Government' in 'Measure for Measure,'" Paunch (Buffalo), no. 25 (February 1966), 31-52. Terence Eagleton, "Chapter 3" Shakespeare and Society (London, 1967), pp. 66-97.
- 4 Notably Josephine Waters Bennett whose entire book is based on this proposition. "Measure for Measure" as Royal Entertainment (New York, 1966). See also W. W. Lawrence, Shakespeare's Problem Comedies, 1931 (New York, rev. ed. 1960); D. L. Stevenson, "Appendix: The Historical Dimension," op. cit.; Peter Alexander, "'Measure for Measure:' A Case for the Scottish Solomon," MLQ XXVIII (1967), 478-488; and Herbert Howarth, "Shakespeare's Flattery in 'Measure for Measure,'" SQ, XVI (1966), 29-37.
- 5 Raleigh, p. 70. A. Quiller-Couch, Introduction to the New Cambridge Edition of 'Measure for Measure' (1922), p. xxvii. W. W. Lawrence, p. 111. Mark Van Doren, Shakespeare (New York, 1939), p. 185. Tillyard, pp. 121; 123; 134. Wylie Sypher, "Shakespeare as Casuist: 'Measure for Measure'" (1950) in Essays in Shakespearean Criticism, eds. J. L. Calderwood and H. E. Toliver (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1970), p. 330. Mary Lascelles, Shakespeare's 'Measure for Measure' (London, 1953), pp. 140; 163. Francis Fergusson, "Philosophy and Theater in 'Measure for Measure'" (1957) in Twentieth Century Interpretations, p. 79. Peter Ure, Shakespeare: The Problem Plays (London, 1961; rev. ed. 1964), pp. 24; 27. J. W. Lever, Introduction to the Arden Edition of Measure for Measure (London, 1965), pp. xcvi. Marco Mincoff, "'Measure for Measure': A Question of Approach," Shakespeare Studies, II (1966), p. 145.
- 6 Peter Ure, p. 22.
- 7 Shakespeare, p. 186.
- 8 Problem Comedies, p. 121.
- 9 Ibid., p. 110. See also M. Mincoff, p. 149 and Elmer Edgar Stoll, From Shakespeare to Joyce (New York, 1944), p. 253.

- 10 Problem Comedies, p. 110.
- 11 "'Measure for Measure' and Lucio," SQ, IX (Autumn 1958), p. 448.
- 12 "The Ambiguity . . .," p. 141.
- 13 Problem Plays, p. 3.
- 14 Ibid., p. 118.
- 15 Ibid., p. 126.
- 16 The Problem Plays of Shakespeare (New York, 1963), p. 73.
- 17 M. Lascelles, p. 1.
- 18 Kenneth Muir, Shakespeare's Sources: Comedies and Tragedies (London, 1957), p. 109.
- 19 "Scenic Design," p. 87.
- 20 Royal Entertainment, p. 5.
- 21 Ibid., p. 5.
- 22 Ibid., p. 37; p. 38; p. 21.
- 23 Achievement, p. 12.
- 24 Ibid., pp. 9-10.
- 25 Ibid., p. 12.

- 26 Ibid., p. 13.
- 27 "Introduction," p. lxxv.
- 28 Ibid., p. xcii.
- 29 Shakespeare's 'Meas.,' p. 141.
- 30 see p. 1, n. 2.
- 31 Stevenson, The Achievement, p. 13.
- 32 Ibid., p. 1.
- 33 W. F. Thrall and A. Hibbard, A Handbook to Literature,  
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Cambridge, Mass., 1965).

## CHAPTER I: THE DEPUTIZATION

The Duke hands power to the "precise" Angelo. The terms of his acting in office are left vague and the Duke leaves law enforcement to the deputy's discretion. What is the nature and extent of the power he has delegated? In the first scene of Measure for Measure the Duke praises Escalus, "an ancient Lord," for his great knowledge in the art of government. Yet he appoints not Escalus as substitute but Angelo, and him solely on the basis of the man's character. Escalus is made second in command to the deputy. Neither has been told what specific functions the Duke expects to have carried out.<sup>1</sup> To say or imply that Vincentio commands his deputy to enforce laws is tantamount to saying that he actually governs, because he would then govern by fiat.<sup>2</sup>

The Duke sends an attendant to summon Angelo. Even before he has explained to Escalus the purpose of bidding Angelo to him, the Duke asks: "What figure of us think you, he will bear?" (I.i.16) Rather than ask the wise Escalus for a judgment regarding Angelo's administrative abilities, Vincentio seems more concerned with the kind of authority "figure" Angelo will present to the people. However, the Duke gives Escalus no time

to reply and informs him of the care taken in selecting Angelo as deputy:

For you must know, we have with special soul  
 Elected him our absence to supply;  
 Lent him our terror, drest him with our love,  
 And given his deputation all the organs  
 Of our power. What think you of it? I.i.17-21

Escalus seems to endorse the Duke's choice by replying:

If any in Vienna be of worth  
 To undergo such ample grace and honour,  
 It is Lord Angelo. I.i.22-24

With this answer Escalus does not commit himself to any predictions based on a judgment of Angelo's ability to govern. Angelo is worthy to be honoured with the stewardship of Vienna. The answer is given in terms of Angelo's character. The Duke's "we have...Lent him our terror, drest him with our love" does not suggest that Angelo is to act within the framework of the people's nature, their customs, or Vienna's law but according to what precedents the Duke's terror and love have set. Angelo's character, not his competence, is the Duke's criterion.

The first three lines of Vincentio's "deputization



speech" show again his concern with "character":

Angelo:  
 There is a kind of character in thy life  
 That to th' observer doth thy history  
 Fully unfold. I.i.26-29

Critics have been unable to come to an agreement regarding the implications of the Duke's words. W. Smith has stated succinctly why it is important to determine whether Vincentio knows or does not know that Angelo is not the virtuous man he appears:

...because they are aware, as the duke could not be at this point in the play, that Angelo is guilty of having previously deserted and slandered Mariana, many commentators make the unwarranted assumption that Vincentio is equally well informed. ... They suggest that the duke makes the appointment because he is in full possession of the facts about the character of the new deputy, whom he knows to be merciless, self-righteous without cause, knavish, casuistic, hypocritical. The plot of Measure for Measure is thereby in danger of becoming little else than the unmasking of Angelo by one who is already aware of the man's shady behavior five years before. Hence, the duke leaves the office to Angelo...only to bring to light the younger man's evil past.<sup>3</sup>

Critics are not always as definite about Angelo's character as those cited by W. Smith. Nevertheless, a good many of them<sup>4</sup> are also convinced that the Duke "knows" and seem to agree with the view expressed, for

instance, by N. Coghill:

Of course, the Duke knows, before the play begins, that there is some reason to suspect Angelo's integrity; indeed he gives him the strongest possible hint that he knows of his not wholly creditable past when he tells him that one who has observed his history could unfold his character. The hint wears a polite veil of ambiguity, but is a warning to him none the less.<sup>5</sup>

The opposition is best represented by Clifford Leech who thinks that "the Duke is presumably serious in his profession of trust in Angelo. If he were not, the appointment of Angelo would be inexcusable."<sup>6</sup> Since the Duke at no time explicitly states that he knows Angelo for a fraud, I see no reason to read an acquaintance with dark facts about Angelo's past into this passage. The "kind of character" which Angelo's past conduct "unfolds" to the observer is immediately commented on by the Duke to the effect that such virtue must not be hoarded. The Duke would not advise Angelo that virtuous attributes must be made publicly manifest so that they may influence others, if he knew that Angelo is not at all virtuous. Also, the Duke has already made clear that he wishes to leave the reins of government in the hands of one who is not necessarily knowledgeable in the theory or practice of political rule but worthy to "bear" the Duke's "figure."

The argument that the Duke already at this point knows of Angelo's less than perfect character rests, of course, on the Duke's revelation in the third act to Isabella that Angelo had been engaged to Mariana but deserted her. The reasons for the dissolution of the formal promise to marry were a lost dowry and, according to Angelo, immodest behaviour on Mariana's part. We are also informed that the desertion of the bride happened five years ago. (V.i.216) Now, five years is a long time over which to remember a broken engagement of a man who otherwise, at least in public, conducts himself in an exemplary manner. The Duke, in considering Angelo as a possible deputy, would hardly be swayed in his decision by an event which, for one, happened many years ago and, for another, involved no legal irregularities. When Vincentio later hears about Angelo's perfidy in proposing to Isabella that she pay with her chastity for her brother's life, he remembers the old story of the broken engagement between Angelo and Mariana. Both the betrothal and its dissolution seem to have been public knowledge. (III.i.213) Even if the Duke thought of Angelo's broken engagement when he appoints him deputy, it seems hardly cause to deem a man unfit for office.<sup>7</sup>

The words on virtue are spoken to a man whom the Duke has judged by his past conduct ("thy history"). He gives Angelo to understand that to be ruler means to live virtuously and thereby to set a shining example for others to follow. Angelo and his moral attributes do not belong to himself only; virtue is wasted if cherished only by and for oneself:

Heaven doth with us as we with torches do,  
 Not light them for themselves; for if our virtues  
 Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike  
 As if we had them not. Spirits are not finely touch'd  
 But to fine issues; nor nature never lends  
 The smallest scruple of her excellence  
 But, like a thrifty goddess, she determines  
 Herself the glory of a creditor,  
 Both thanks and use. I.i.32-40

The Duke clearly indicates that Angelo is not only obligated to Heaven but also to nature to make use of his virtuous qualities by openly displaying them. The underlying idea is that Angelo's example will influence others in their behaviour and virtue will thereby increase.<sup>8</sup> Vincentio praises and instructs Angelo in this speech. He praises him for being of good character, and instructs him to let his moral attributes work openly. Implicit in these lines, however, is a subtle warning in the sense that unrealized potential or disappointed expectations are punished by heaven and nature alike.

## I

In the first scene of Measure for Measure the Duke of Vienna tells Escalus that he has to go on a journey. He appoints Angelo as his deputy. The Duke leaves Escalus and Angelo, denying the request to be escorted on the way because haste does not permit it and cheering crowds do not delight him. In the third scene we hear that the Duke has not left Vienna. He is in a monastery and there asks a friar to supply him with the habit of a monk. During Vincentio's exchange with the monk he not only reveals his true motives for abdicating temporarily but also tells the audience something about himself as ruler and man.

The Duke's first words raise nagging questions. Upon entering the Friar's cell, he says:

No. Holy father, throw away that thought;  
Believe not that the dribbling dart of love  
Can pierce a complete bosom. I.ii.1-3

Are we to think that the Duke has the habit of coming to a monastery to keep amorous assignations?<sup>9</sup> If the Duke has never entered the monastery for such an encounter before, the holy orders are implicated nevertheless if a nobleman is assumed to come for such a purpose. Moral laxity in Vienna has been allowed to penetrate the fabric

of society to such an extent that even a religious order seems matter-of-factly to provide cover for the incontinent. If the ruler of the city visits a friar and that holy man's first assumption is that the ruler has come in the business of love, then war, the plague, gallows, and poverty are not the only circumstances which make Mistress Overdone, the bawd, "custom-shrunk." (I.i.75)

The Duke tells Friar Thomas that his visit to the monastery "hath a purpose More grave and wrinkled than the aims and ends of burning youth." (I.iii.3-6) Next he informs him that he has handed to Angelo "A man of stricture and firm abstinence," his "absolute power and place here in Vienna." (I.iii.11-13) Angelo has been led to believe that the Duke has "travell'd to Poland." Before the Duke thinks it appropriate to reveal the purpose behind his temporary abdication, he describes first the situation existing in Vienna. In the thirteen lines which accomplish this Vincentio reveals himself as someone who cannot or will not face his own irresponsibility. In his exposé of misrule the colourful analogies and hyperboles detract effectively from the cause of the disorder:

We have strict statutes and most biting laws,  
The needful bits and curbs to headstrong jades,  
Which for this fourteen years we have let slip;

Even like an o'er-grown lion in a cave  
 That goes not out to prey. Now, as fond fathers,  
 Having bound up the threatening twigs of birch,  
 Only to stick it in their children's sight  
 For terror, not to use, in time the rod  
 Becomes more mock'd than fear'd: so our decrees,  
 Dead to infliction, to themselves are dead,  
 And Liberty plucks Justice by the nose,  
 The Baby beats the nurse, and quite athwart  
 Goes all decorum. I.iii.19-31

The Duke refers to himself as the cause of the prevailing moral untidiness. The laxity with which laws are regarded is due to having let them "slip." Through use of the royal pronoun "we" the reluctant ruler acknowledges that he is responsible.<sup>10</sup> The Duke obviously realizes that laws are necessary, that their enforcement is essential if they are to remain potent, and that topsy-turveydom results if rulers act like foolish parents. Yet, what L. C. Knights called a "crisp and lively description of the disorder resulting from official negligence"<sup>11</sup> crowds out attention to the Duke's part in the creation of this disorder.

Vincentio's account of past official negligence is couched in palliative language because at the moment he plays the indulgent father whose laxity has led to nothing more serious than decorum gone athwart. As L. C. Knights observed: "...the concluding lines suggest mischief or childish tantrums rather than deliberate

wickedness."<sup>12</sup> In a moment the Duke will suddenly elevate mischief to "evil deeds" and be, despite the shift in emphasis on the degree of misrule, not quite certain regarding his motives for Angelo's deputization.

The Duke puts his reasons for the deputization into these words:

... Therefore indeed, my father,  
 I have on Angelo impos'd the office;  
 Who may in th' ambush of my name strike home,  
 And yet my nature never in the fight  
 To do in slander. I.iii.39-43

The Duke is quite explicit. "Therefore" refers to the unruly conditions among his subjects as well as to his reluctance to become identified with harsh rule. Angelo has been deputized, so it seems to the listener, specifically to check the people's evil doings. Yet the Duke does not say that his substitute "shall" punish, implying that this is to be his commission; nor does he say that Angelo "will" strike home, suggesting that he knows that orders given will be carried out. He "may," in the official position of the Duke, enforce laws. If he chooses to do so, the Duke's character remains unassailable.

To observe Angelo's performance as governor unrecognized, the Duke asks Friar Thomas for a monk's



habit and instructions regarding the conduct of a "true friar." In due time he will give "more reasons" for this request but this much Vincentio is willing to tell the Friar:

Lord Angelo is precise;  
 Stands at a guard with Envy; scarce confesses  
 That his blood flows; or that his appetite  
 Is more to bread than stone. Hence shall we see  
 If power change purpose, what our seemers be.

I.iii.50-54

These lines are the heart of the play. Not only do they tell us what the play is about, they ultimately point to the meaning of Measure for Measure as well as to the purpose of the Duke's own "play" in the final act.

An examination of the Duke's character and thereby the interpretation of the play depends largely on how one reads the lines

Hence shall we see  
 If power change purpose, what our seemers be.

"Hence shall we see If power change purpose" can be paraphrased as meaning

- a) from here (or: from now on) we shall observe whether the personal possession of power can change a man's intentions (or: aims); and
- b) from here (or: from now on) we shall discover (observe) whether the exercise of authority (power) in society can change direction (aim).

In the one case the Duke delegates power to test character, in the other to test administrative policy. If one reads the lines to mean that the Duke tests character, then the implication is that "seemers" are affected by power to reveal their true selves. If one reads the lines to mean that the Duke is testing a certain kind of government--that is, he wishes to observe a person who governs the direction of power--then "seemers" merely indicates that Angelo is less than the true powerholder. Angelo's actions will show Vincentio that, indeed, the possession of power changes men's intentions. His own involvement with his subjects while disguised as friar will show him that the power vested in him must be put to purposes other than those evinced during his period of slack rule and other than those made manifest by the deputy.

It seems that the possibility of reading "If power change purpose" in terms of personal power and power as a force has been overlooked so far. The prevailing opinion is that the Duke tests Angelo's character by placing him in a position of absolute power. J. V. Curry is representative of those commentators who see the Duke's lines as expressing the wish "...to test and prove the character of his deputy, Angelo, and observe how the

possession of power will affect a precisionist...."<sup>13</sup>

Some critics see a more profound design evident in the Duke's words. Wilson Knight comments as follows: "The rest of the play slowly unfolds the rich content of the Duke's plan, and the secret, too, of his lax rule. ...The scheme is a plot, or trap: a scientific experiment to see if extreme ascetic righteousness can stand the test of power."<sup>14</sup> F. R. Leavis sees the test as a "demonstration ... of human nature."<sup>15</sup> Angelo is its representative and therefore "We know where we have to focus our critical attention and our moral sensibility; not, that is, upon the Duke, but upon the representatives of human nature that provide the subjects of the demonstration."<sup>16</sup>

However, objections to the "test" interpretation have been voiced. Clifford Leech thinks it questionable "whether, in view of these suspicions, the appointment of Angelo should have been made."<sup>17</sup> Robert Ornstein attacks the entire "test" interpretation saying that "no intelligent ruler tests his subordinates by giving them power over life and death when he knows beforehand their lack of simple humanity." He sees the Duke as a "moral man" who, to "achieve certain limited moral ends...takes certain calculated risks...."<sup>18</sup> An interesting interpretation of the Duke's voiced reasons for abdicating

is offered by R. G. Hunter. Two motives compel the Duke to relinquish his office temporarily, "one political...straight out of Machiavelli." Fearing "a reputation for tyranny" if he enforces the laws himself, "he turns the job over to a substitute who can serve as a scapegoat...." The other motive is "scientific" and consists in an "experiment" in which power is added "to puritanism."<sup>19</sup>

By far the most thorough discussion of the "power ...seemers" line is offered by Warren Smith. He calls attention to "the attitude displayed toward the deputy in the wording of the dialogue." Why would the Duke use "the epithets 'precise' and 'seemers?'" Smith believes that Vincentio's decision to enforce the laws "is the direct result of Lord Angelo's antagonism against the beneficent rule of the duke." Therefore, the Duke is "revealing his natural resentment" and appoints Angelo "as a vindication" of his own rule.<sup>20</sup> As tempting as such a reading is--because it effectively prevents the automatic identification of Angelo as reprehensible--, it rests, unfortunately, on the speculation that Angelo resents the Duke's laxity in law enforcement. When the Duke describes his deputy to Friar Thomas, he conveys apprehension regarding his true character, however, a deliberate "test" is nowhere stated or implied.<sup>21</sup>

Angelo is given authority because he appears to "be worthy To undergo...such honour." (I.i.22-23) That his character appeared to others in Vienna beyond reproach is shown by Escalus's approval of the Duke's choice. Angelo seems to be a good and morally upright man. When the Duke tells Friar Thomas "hence shall we see If power change purpose, what our seemers be,"<sup>22</sup> he implies that the outer man is not necessarily the inner man. What, he asks, are seemingly exemplary individuals at heart? At this point no suggestion is made that Angelo merely pretends to virtue. However, whether virtue, outwardly evident, can stand the test of power remains to be seen. Power gives control and command over others and this, like an intoxicant, may loosen restraints.

That power may change men's intentions or reveal character traits hitherto subdued, whether to good or ill effect, no one would question. In this case the aims or purposes of power will change depending on the kind of man who holds the power. Yet, power is not some tangible, animate force which sweeps unalterably those in command toward self-assertion or self-revelation. Rather, power itself can change purpose; the tide of events outside the control of the powerholder can force him to change the direction (or quality) of

power.

Angelo, because he is in a position of authority, decides to be rigorous in matters of morality. This brings about the meeting with Isabella who awakens passions in him he thought he had subdued. Because of his obsession with his good name, his blameless conduct, and his horror of discovery, he is forced to demand the execution of Claudio even though Isabella (as he is led to believe) has yielded to his lust. In this case the fact of holding power has changed Angelo's intention to "not make a scarecrow of the law." (II.i.1)

Vincentio, because authority is vested in him, decides to govern and to ameliorate situations created by Angelo. The Duke admits in his conversation with Friar Thomas that laws must be enforced--he knows that power must be used--but he learns from his deputy's over-zealousness that power must be put to the purpose of the integration, not the destruction, of society.

The play will always, I believe, remain unsatisfactory to reader or beholder because it touches on problems which can never be resolved in either a schematic or moral way. Power is personal in the sense that an individual possesses authority, and exercises it only by his own decisions and acts. This personal aspect

of power is the stuff for the poet, the novelist, or the psychologist. Yet, although we find great fascination in watching the individual powerholder and his decision-making, the political aspects and consequences of his actions overshadow not only the powerholder's own drama but also that caused among those governed by his decisions. In Measure for Measure our attention is focussed on Angelo, the man, and his personal decision making. At the same time we are aware that we are caught up in issues profoundly connected to "the fortunes of civilization."<sup>23</sup> The Duke's actions as temporal ruler or as spiritual advisor provide dramatic suspense and further the plot. We get involved in Claudio's and Isabella's plight, both victims of personal power. However, the political aspects of this power exercise dwarf the personal drama of those either wielding the power or those suffering from it. The dissatisfaction of critics with the final act of the play, one suspects, stems from the seemingly ill-joined major concerns of Measure for Measure, the concern with the man who has power and the interest in power as a force in society.

The basic difficulty in considering power--whether fully realized by audience and playwright or not--is this: power is both subjective and objective. Subjectively it is an aspect of human experience and therefore

intensely personal. Our interest is caught once the Duke relinquishes temporal power and Angelo is given full reign over Vienna. What engages our conscious attention from now on are their personal responses to situations. However, power is also objective; it is a fact in society. Power is a continuing phenomenon because man lives in society. This society, or state, must maintain a system of order. This order is maintained within a framework of government and law, because

This was the cause of men's uniting themselves at the first in politic Societies, which societies could not be without Government, nor Government without a distinct kind of Law; ... All men desire to lead in this world a happy life. That life is led most happily, wherein all virtue is exercised without impediment or let.<sup>24</sup>

Man cannot survive in chaos which would exist if his incorrigible waywardness were not controlled by group pressure. This leads to the formulation of laws to control behaviour harmful to the society. What happens in Measure for Measure, I think, is that our feelings are divided between sympathy for Claudio on the one hand who, as an individual, has to suffer, and loyalty to the group on the other which, as the community, must survive and therefore demand enforcement of the law. The disturbing element in the play is that Angelo, when propositioning Isabella, uses power for corrupt personal



ends and threatens to imperil the safety and dignity of the individual which may ultimately lead to the disintegration of society.

The Duke embarks upon his experiment to test the limits of subjective power--to see whether the exercise of authority changes a man's intentions--and of objective power--to learn whether the properties of power change under certain conditions, to what ends power can and may be used. Vincentio discovers that his one act of power, the deputization of Angelo, causes surprisingly unpredictable consequences.

## II

What has divided critical opinion regarding the characters as Shakespeare created them, the meaning as the audience finds it, and the integrity of the play as a dramatic presentation of possible events, turns on the assessment of the Duke of Vienna. He is, as so many discussions--whether favorable or unfavorable--show, the center of concern, although not all critics consider him the pivotal figure of the play.<sup>25</sup> He has elicited an enormous range of responses.<sup>26</sup> Through almost all of twentieth century commentary on Measure for Measure sounds a somewhat plaintive note concerning

the Duke's extraordinary activities. Unless critics are of the allegorical persuasion, commentators find fault either with the Duke's action or with Shakespeare's conception of him.

The difficulties encountered by critics in their evaluation of the Duke are best summed up by quoting M. Lascelles:

...for all those intimations of the Duke's importance whose presence in Shakespeare's play is made more conspicuous by their absence elsewhere [i.e., the possible sources examined by M. Lascelles], he surely does not declare himself in the way we have come to associate with Shakespeare's handling of his important characters. His utterance is nearer to that of chorus than of dramatis persona. His 'ancient skill' bears no discernible relationship to personal experience; we do not care how he came by it.<sup>27</sup>

Miss Lascelles is not alone in reading some of the Duke's comments as choric utterances.<sup>28</sup> Yet despite their semi-choric form and content they can be read and understood as soliloquies. The Duke as ruler lives removed from the people, from "personal experience," and his "choric" utterances are a manifestation of this. The speech in which he decides to apply "Craft against vice" (III.ii) is his last one spoken in this manner. It is significant that after this decision to involve himself in the affairs of his subjects he no longer

comments, chorus-like, on the action. The Duke is characterized not so much by what he says as by what he does and does not do. Vincentio's main concern--and thereby the main concern of the play--is with the exercise and the possibilities of power. As is usual in Shakespeare's plays this inquiry into an abstract concept is not conducted by having characters theorize about their concerns but by dramatizing them. The Duke begins his experiment with an inquiry into the nature of power, more specifically, into the hypothesis that power changes men's intentions and that power, as a fact and force in society, can and may change purpose.

When Vincentio tells Friar Thomas that he wishes to disguise himself to "see If power change purpose," (I.iii.54) he assumes also an actor's part. Instead of being the ruler who holds himself aloof from his subjects, he will move on the stage of human life, not controlling, but directing those around him. As Duke power is vested in him; he is the medium through which power is channelled. He moves through the play as a force but at the same time as a force which is called Vincentio and has the body, thoughts, and emotions of a man. He is like a player on the stage but only insofar as he exemplifies power whether temporal or ecclesiastical. At the same time he is a character

in the play as Angelo is a character in the play. Angelo's character breaks under the fact and force of power while the Duke's character, as I hope to show, does not change. However, the Duke learns that the power vested in him has to be directed meaningfully to the common weal of his people. The fact that he appears to play a role lies on the one hand in his play-acting a friar and on the other in his position and function of ruler of men. Critical opinion perceived long ago that something in the Duke's character or his function in the play has to do with "drama" or "staging." Commentators have seen the Duke variously as actor, playwright, stage-director, deus et machina, puppet, or as having a choric function. No other figure created by Shakespeare has been discussed so insistently and consistently in the vocabulary of the stage.

Raleigh already used the word "play" when he described the Duke as a ruler who "shirks his public duties, and plays the benevolent spy."<sup>29</sup> In the introduction to the New Cambridge edition of Measure for Measure, Quiller-Couch echoed Raleigh by saying that the Duke "...shirks his proper responsibility and steals back incognito to play busy-body and spy on his deputy."<sup>30</sup> Vincentio is seen by these two critics still as a character in the play, albeit as not a very "amiable" one.<sup>31</sup>

The first critic to see the Duke as a dramatic convenience rather than as a character in the play was W. W. Lawrence. He is also the first English-speaking scholar who thoroughly investigates Shakespeare's possible sources for Measure for Measure and refers repeatedly to medieval analogues in folk-tales. He sees the Duke as a convention employed by Shakespeare for plot purposes rather than as a ruler who attempts to come to terms with the problem of how power is to be exercised. Lawrence, therefore, is unable to reconcile the Duke's activities and his function in the play. He found that "his very activity ill accords with his retiring disposition, his desire to lay aside power, and delegate it to another."<sup>32</sup> It is not surprising that Lawrence charges Shakespeare with having "...not succeeded in making the Duke both serviceable to the purposes of drama, and psychologically consistent,"<sup>33</sup> since he sees him as "a stage Duke, not a real person."<sup>34</sup> The suggestion that Vincentio "seems a puppet, manufactured to meet the exigencies of dramatic construction"<sup>35</sup> becomes certainty in the chapter's closing sentence: "he is essentially a puppet, cleverly painted and adroitly manipulated...."<sup>36</sup>

Lawrence is right and wrong. The Duke is "a stage Duke" and "a puppet" but only insofar as any leader gives

the impression of not really acting from the heart but rather as the situation demands. James I recognized this when he said "...That a King is as one set on a stage...."<sup>37</sup> What pulls the strings of the public puppet is the body politic with all its explicit and implicit demands. The Duke is "serviceable to the purposes of drama" if one sees him as a human being behind a public role. Only then does he become "psychologically consistent" because with that viewpoint his utterances and actions are those of an individual unsure of the role he has to play but slowly adjusting to function in a position of power.

E. M. W. Tillyard in Shakespeare's Problem Plays praises Lawrence especially on his assessment of the Duke, whom Tillyard finds "a most unsympathetic character."<sup>38</sup> He thinks of him also as a stage figure who manipulates the action and does not come off well when compared to "the realistic characters."<sup>39</sup> Tillyard's famous statement that "after III.i.151 [Shakespeare] threw in his hand,"<sup>40</sup> draws support mainly from his evaluation of the Duke. This evaluation relies on Lawrence's study which Tillyard summarizes as follows: "The Duke's part derives both from the old folk-motive of the sovereign in disguise mixing with his people and from the conventional stage-character of the plot-

promoting priest."<sup>41</sup> This conventional figure is expected to leave his station temporarily and to reappear at the height of confusion, setting straight whatever unjust or intolerable conditions he found while unrecognized among the people. Shakespeare, I believe, took those conventions and created a ruler with whom--rather than in whom--the audience can experience the transition from ineffectual sovereign to just and wise head of a people. The old folk-motive serves admirably well for such a purpose since one of its assumptions is that the ruler goes among men and learns to what beneficial ends his power must be applied. It is the way with fairy tales to tell truths; the tale of the disguised ruler gives expression to the need to see princes as part of the human community.

The Duke's dramatic behaviour--dramatic in the sense that he abdicates temporarily, disguises himself, thinks of highly unusual solutions to arising problems, and engineers a great mass meeting with public confessions, penance, and forgiveness--issues from his character. While watching the Duke doing all these things we get to know his character. In this regard two very brief but potentially fruitful comments appear in Ernest Schanzer's discussion of the Duke. While refuting allegorical interpretations of the Duke's figure, he

says: "Only if we abandon these abstractions can we, for instance, reconcile such apparent inconsistencies as the Duke's report of his earlier misrule with his evident role throughout the play of representing the model prince. ...[Shakespeare] shows him to have a native relish for the scheming, the cat-and-mouse play, and all the mystery-mongering that are required in the interest of dramatic suspense."<sup>42</sup> An equally perceptive, if undeveloped, remark was made almost at the same time by Peter Ure who said of the Duke that "his action begins to look more consistent with that of a man who wishes to set off a story."<sup>43</sup> Schanzer and Ure are critics who link the Duke's dramatic behaviour to his character and do not blame it on plot necessities.<sup>44</sup> Shakespeare created, in these terms a thoroughly believable character and a play that is of a piece with all its developing, rising, and dissolving tensions. The two main characters, the Duke and Angelo, are flesh and blood. They have been given similar character traits to give meaning to the play's question: does power change purpose? At the end of the play we know that two individuals, alike in many respects, will not put authority to the same use.

Vincentio and Angelo have surprisingly many characteristics in common. The Duke tells Friar Thomas that he has "ever lov'd the life removed," (I.iii.8) and that he shuns "to haunt assemblies, Where youth, and cost,



witless bravery keeps." (I.iii.9-10) He generally has no taste for ostentatious behaviour even to the point where he does "not relish well" his subjects' "loud applause and Aves vehement." (I.i.69-70) Angelo concerns himself "With profits of the mind, [and] study...." (Lucio, I.iv.61) Escalus calls Angelo "one so learned and so wise." (V.i.468) The Duke wishes to be well thought of and fears almost morbidly any kind of slander. When Lucio casts aspersions upon his character, the friar-Duke replies: "Let him be but testimonied in his own bringings-forth, and he shall appear to the envious a scholar, a statesman, and a soldier." (III.ii.140-142) One of his reasons for appointing the "precise" Angelo is that he hopes his deputy will punish wrongdoing in Vienna "And yet my nature never in the fight To do in slander." (I.iii.42-43) While Angelo is not concerned with possible slander, he is ever conscious of his reputation. He is proud of his "unsoil'd name" and trusts that "th' austereness of [his] life" has not gone unnoticed. (II.iv.154) Angelo is convinced of his virtues and admonishes Escalus (who had been pleading for Claudio's life): "When I that censure him do so offend, Let mine own judgement pattern out my death, And nothing come in partial." (II.i.29-31) When his carefully "studied" behaviour has grown "sere

and tedious" (II.iv.7-9) because Isabella has roused his blood, he admits that

yea, my gravity,  
Wherein--let no man hear me--I take pride,  
Could I with boot change for an idle plume  
Which the air beats for vain.   II.iv.9-12

This taking pride in "gravity" is discernible in the Duke also when he lectures Friar Thomas and later Lucio. Both Vincentio and Angelo regard involvement with women as trifles. The Duke asserts that "the dribbling dart of love" (I.iii.2) is an ineffectual weapon against his "complete bosom," while Angelo admits that until he met Isabella, he "smil'd, and wonder'd how" men could be infatuated with women. (II.ii.186)

Another characteristic Vincentio and Angelo have in common is a tendency toward cruelty. Angelo is the less sensitive and his cruelty expresses itself directly and demands physical pain. When Escalus attempts to weigh the evidence of the bawds from the suburbs, Angelo leaves impatiently. His last words are that he hopes Escalus will "find good cause to whip them all." (II.i. 136) When Isabella refuses to yield to him, he threatens that Claudio

must not only die the death,  
But thy unkindness shall his death draw out  
To ling'ring sufferance.   (II.iv.164-166)

The Duke's cruelty is neither physical nor as readily apparent. Yet he is cruel nevertheless. After he has fulfilled his duty as friar and counselled Juliet on true repentance, he tells her abruptly:

Your partner, as I hear, must die tomorrow,  
 And I am going with instruction to him.  
 Grace go with you: Benedicite! II.iii.37-39

Juliet, as we know, is close to her hour of confinement and, since she genuinely repents her transgression, deserves a word of comfort. Equally difficult to understand is the needless suffering the Duke imposes upon Isabella when he keeps her in ignorance of her brother having been spared.<sup>45</sup> His "reason" for doing so transcends surely any legitimate "friarly" concern with her spiritual state:

...I will keep her ignorant of her good,  
 To make her heavenly comforts of despair  
 When it is least expected. IV.iii.108-110

We may infer, of course, that the deception is necessary since the Duke cannot trust the high-minded Isabella to act her part convincingly when she must publicly accuse the deputy of having enjoyed her body and yet executed her brother who was to be spared in exchange for her chastity.

Also, one must keep in mind that the Duke appointed Angelo because his character promised that he would

bring order into the moral affairs of Vienna. He knows that lechery "is too general a vice, and severity must cure it." (III.ii.96) What the Duke himself wanted to do but dared not for fear that his people would talk ill of him, he leaves to someone whom he describes as lacking compassion. It is needless harshness to put a city under the absolute power of one who

...is precise;  
 Stands at guard with Envy; scarce confesses  
 That his blood flows; or that his appetite  
 Is more to bread than stone. I.iii.50-53

The Duke had the option of appointing the humane as well as experienced Escalus but chose to deputize a man who might be severe and unrelenting. The man left in authority over Vienna's population deliberately ("scarce confesses") denies what is necessary for the continuation of life: the flowing of blood and the eating of bread.

Derek Traversi, while discussing Isabella, makes the following remark: "Virtue in Measure for Measure is habitually on its guard, defending itself by withdrawal against the temptations that so insistently beset it."<sup>46</sup> This observation applies equally to Vincentio and Angelo. Both are concerned with their reputation, and their virtue is "habitually on its guard." Angelo withdraws into his studied state of gravity while the Duke shuns

assemblies of idle youths. But here the similarity ends. Angelo represses his natural instincts. In the words of Lucio, he is

a man whose blood  
Is very snow-broth; one who never feels  
The wanton stings and motions of the sense;  
But doth rebate and blunt his natural edge  
With profits of the mind, study and fast.

I.iv.57-61

He takes pride in his apparent conquest of the passions. He withdraws from temptation by emulating the ascetic. The Duke, on the other hand, makes no such efforts. Yet he too "withdraws" when he refuses to rule. He does so largely, we are led to believe, because he "ever lov'd the life remov'd," (I.iii.8) and also because he cannot bear insults directed against his person should punishment issue from his office. His donning of a friar's robe is another form of withdrawal since he believes that only under its protection can he observe "If power change purpose."

The most penetrating and important similarity between Duke and deputy is one which affects the meaning and theme of the play as a whole. Both, the ruler who did not wish to govern and Angelo who is thrust into a position of power, are confronted with situations which force them to become the reverse of their former

selves. The Duke, so reluctant to act on behalf of those he is responsible for, when encountering individual subjects, acts quickly and decisively. He deputizes Angelo because he does not wish to govern and thereby incur reprobation. He disguises himself to observe his deputy's action and becomes deeply involved in situations which he could not predict. Because he has chosen the disguise of an ecclesiastic, he becomes father to souls in distress. But the duke beneath the friar's robe asserts himself and ministers also to the people's worldly ills. He resorts to stratagems highly unorthodox for a monk. This period of concern into which his own initial decision has forced him seems to make him aware of his duties and capable of carrying them out. He does not undergo a transformation of character, he does not come to any deep insights into his own being, but he has overcome his reluctance to make decisions over people's lives within the framework of his office. In the final act his just and equitable dealings with those who have offended seem to point to a future in Vienna when the ruler will rule.

Angelo, voluntarily uninvolved and therefore inexperienced in the world of reality, finds that his cultivated virtue can not protect him against temptation.

His studiously assumed upright behaviour falls from him and he tries to use his position of authority to gratify his base passions. In the final act he also has not so much changed as gained insight into what it means to be human. Both Vincentio and Angelo show a certain behaviour at the beginning of the play which changes fundamentally when they assume their respective positions of authority. In the final act, when they are Duke and citizen once more, they act consistently with what we first learned about them with one important difference: their behaviour is now more authentic. The Duke's leniency toward everyone resembles only superficially the laxity described in his speech to Friar Thomas. He shows leniency while dispensing justice at the same time. Angelo's last words in the play have nothing of studied gravity about them and his wish for death rather than mercy seems to come from a penitent heart and not from a desire to appear noble to the world. Since the emphasis in Measure for Measure is on the exercise of power, more specifically, on an answer to the question whether power changes purpose--what does power do to men who wield it and to what purpose is power to be wielded by men--the characters who demonstrate the answers have to be sufficiently alike to give the final conclusion validity. That the Duke, for over a decade,

shows himself in favour of laxity and the similar Angelo, once deputized, in favour of strictness, places the emphasis primarily on the aim of power: to govern firmly and realistically to ensure the continuance of a civil society.

### III

Angelo is told:

In our remove, be thou at full ourself.  
 Mortality and mercy in Vienna  
 Live in thy tongue, and heart.  
 Take thy commission. I.i.43-46

This, in the absence of specific instructions, means that he is to exercise the highest duty in Vienna according to the disposition of his character. Angelo is reluctant. He wishes that the stuff of which he is made, his "metal," be tested further before such awesome responsibility is imposed upon it. The Duke, however, overrides his objections, informing him that the choice was made with due deliberation. He emphasizes that his haste does not permit him to discuss "Matters of needful value," that he will write, that he expects to be kept informed as well, and that he leaves the commissions to the deputy and his secondary "To th' hopeful execution."



Angelo's request to accompany Vincentio part of the way is denied for reasons of urgency. Despite the Duke's increasing impatience to withdraw, he once more stresses the deputy's power to act according to his own discretion:

Nor need you, on mine honour, have to do  
 With any scruple. Your scope is as mine own,  
 So to enforce or qualify the laws  
 As to your soul seems good. I.i.64-66

Angelo has no reason to hesitate. His freedom to act in enforcing or mitigating laws is exactly that of the ruler himself. For the second time the Duke has, in effect, given his deputy absolute authority. Again he has emphasized that Angelo's power is to be equal to that wielded by himself. When Angelo, as soon as he assumes office, decides to apply the long sleeping laws, he is no way compelled to do so. Indeed, one might say that the Duke was lenient and that Angelo could have taken "be thou at full yourself" literally and served as an indulgent deputy.

Before the Duke leaves, he explains why he does not want to attract attention to himself by being escorted on his way:

I love the people,  
 But do not like to stage me to their eyes:  
 Though it do well, I do not relish well

Their loud applause and Aves vehement;  
 Nor do I think the man of safe discretion  
 That does affect it. I.i.67-72

When these lines are discussed at all by commentators, it is usually done with reference to an attitude shared by James I who expressed his dislike of cheering throngs in his Basilikon Doron. Interesting as this topical allusion is, what do the sentiments expressed tell us about Vincentio?

He does not think a man prudent who is fond of being applauded by crowds. Earlier he tells Angelo that heaven and nature demand public manifestation of a man's virtue. To Friar Thomas the Duke boasts of "a complete bosom." He reminds him that he has "ever lov'd the life removed" and shunned assemblies of idle youths. For fourteen years, by the Duke's own admission, do misdeeds go unpunished under his rule. When he appoints a deputy, he leaves no specific instructions. Vincentio, it appears, is a man who has governed only nominally. He has spent the last fourteen years away from public duties, being mostly occupied with quiet reflection. This remoteness from everyday life has been noted by critics as diverse in their assessment of Vincentio as Wilson Knight and Robert Ornstein. W. Knight explains the Duke's inaction thus:

His government has been inefficient, not through an inherent weakness or laxity in him, but rather because meditation and self-analysis, together with profound study of human nature, have shown him that all passions and sins of other men have reflected images in his own soul.<sup>47</sup>

R. Ornstein's opinion is also that Vincentio "would have preferred, it seems, a quiet private life among his subjects or in a study."<sup>48</sup>

The Duke who exhorts Angelo to let his virtues shine forth conceals his own qualities by refusing to govern. By acting as ruler he would have to give of himself to his people rather than hoard what he has learned in the study. Escalus tells us that the Duke is "One that, above all other strifes, contended especially to know himself." (III.ii.226-7) Vincentio, as the father of his subjects, has an obligation to communicate to others what he knows about himself, that is, his self-awareness should inform action on behalf of the people of Vienna. He has also studied others and believes that he can assess a man's character: "There is written in your brow, Provost, honesty and constancy; if I read it not truly, my ancient skill beguiles me." (IV.ii.152-4)

These qualities make a good ruler. However, the Duke's reluctance to govern may stem from his knowing

too much about himself and about the nature of man. So far this knowledge is abstract; it is a philosopher's way of looking at life. This is why the Duke praises Escalus' sagacity in matters of government above his own; it precludes being forced to give practical advice. This is why the Duke gives neither Angelo nor Escalus specific instructions; he has no experience in day-to-day government. This is why he fears slander; experience has not taught him that sometimes unorthodox means must be used to serve desirable ends. Behind the protection of a monk's cowl he enters reality to test his abstract knowledge of the study against the imperfect but undeniably real life of Vienna.

Notes to Chapter I: THE DEPUTIZATION

- 1 Although the word "commission" occurs three times in the text, it never refers to any specific information or instructions given by the Duke.

Duke to Escalus:                                      There is our commission,  
From which we would not have you warp.  
I.i.13-14

Duke to Angelo:                                      Old Escalus,  
Though first in question, is thy  
secondary.  
Take thy commission. I.i.45-47  
. . . . .  
So, fare you well.  
To th' hopeful execution do I  
leave you  
Of your commission. I.i.58-60

The O.E.D. gives the following definitions for "commission" as in use before and during Shakespeare's time:

1. Authoritative charge or direction to act in a prescribed manner; order, command, instruction. (Generally, of the commissioning authority.)
2. Authority committed or entrusted to any one; esp. delegated authority to act in some specific capacity, to carry out an investigation or negotiation, perform judicial functions, take charge of an office, etc. (Said to be that of the authorizing person, and also of the person authorized.)
3. A warrant or instrument conferring such authority.
- . . . . .
5. The condition of being authoritatively entrusted or given charge. [*italics mine*]

Ernst Leisi annotates: "commission: the word, in Shakespeare, can be both concrete ('the document')

and abstract." [William Shakespeare, 'Measure for Measure': An Old-Spelling and Old-Meaning Edition (Heidelberg, 1964)] Neither Angelo nor Escalus mention during the course of the play that they act in accordance with an "order, command, instruction" given by the Duke. In the absence of textual evidence, "commission" merely refers to the "condition of being authoritatively entrusted or given charge." (Def. 5) This reading of "commission" seems the correct one since, because of its vagueness, it is consistent with the Duke's lines addressed to Escalus and Angelo which, though rich in praise, are remarkable for their want of specific information or instruction.

M. Lascelles has no doubts regarding this matter. She writes: "In the absence of witnesses [the Duke] delivers a written commission to each of his deputies --in oddly contrasting terms. Escalus is praised for sagacity, and for knowledge of law, custom and human nature proper to an experienced magistrate, and then given, as it were, sealed orders--

From which, we would not have you warpe."  
(P. 48)

- 2 For explicit opinions, i.e. that the Duke tells Angelo to bring order to Vienna, see, for example, Wilson Knight, p. 77. Robert Ornstein, "The Human Comedy: 'Measure for Measure,'" University of Kansas Review, XIV (October 1957), p. 20. Derek Traversi, An Approach to Shakespeare, Vol. II: From 'Troilus and Cressida' to 'The Tempest' (Garden City, N. Y., 1956; rev. ed. 1969), p. 47. A. P. Rossiter, Angel with Horns (London, 1961), p. 158.
- 3 Warren D. Smith, "More Light on 'Measure for Measure,'" MLQ, XXIII (1962), pp. 317-318. Mr. Smith has appended a most exhaustive bibliography indicating books and articles in which the above specific charges are made against Angelo. pp. 317-318.
- 4 F. R. Leavis, "The Greatness of 'Measure for Measure'" (1942), in The Importance of Scrutiny, ed. Eric Bentley (New York, 1948), p. 159. E. M. W. Tillyard, p. 118. R. M. Smith, "Interpretations of 'Measure for Measure,'" SQ, I (1950), p. 211. H. Goddard, p. 52. R. Ornstein, p. 19. P. Ure, p. 21. M. Mincoff, p. 147.

- 5 N. Coghill, p. 19. In a footnote Coghill explains: "'History' and not 'character' is the subject of 'unfold.'" P. 26.
- 6 Clifford Leech, "The Meaning of 'Measure for Measure'" (1950), Shakespeare The Comedies: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Kenneth Muir, Twentieth Century Views Series (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1965), p. 111. M. Bradbrook, p. 393. W. M. T. Dodds had asserted four years earlier that "of course, ...Angelo is exactly as the Duke describes him: a man whose whole way of life bears on it the mark that enables an observer of men to reconstruct the secret history of self-discipline that has gone to its making." P. 89. For the same view see also Terrence Eagleton, pp. 69-70.
- 7 This entire matter of the betrothal and the Duke's propriety in proposing the substitution of Mariana for Isabella is discussed at length in Chapter III, pp. 98-100.
- 8 The spirit of these lines seems to refer to the parable of the talents. The servant who did not use his talent with usury was reprimanded and cast "into outer darkness." Matthew 25:14-30
- 9 The gloss in the Arden edition is kind but not very helpful: "The Duke is denying an off-stage suggestion that he has come to arrange a lover's rendezvous." This exculpates Friar Thomas but not the Duke.
- 10 In both line 19 and line 27, the pronoun is to be read as referring to the Duke. "We have strict statutes" establishes the fact that severe laws are on the books in Vienna. The ruler is identified with the law.
- 11 "The Ambiguity...", p. 147.
- 12 Ibid., p. 147.
- 13 J. V. Curry, Deception in Elizabethan Comedy (Chicago, 1955), p. 63. See also J. Bennett, p. 23; George L. Geckle, in the Introduction to his anthology of Twentieth Century Interpretations of 'Measure for Measure,' (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1970), p. 4. Peter Ure points out that the Duke already at this point does not regard Angelo very highly: "Like other people in the play, the Duke has an opinion

about Angelo, which he does not express to his face, for that would have been to spoil the conditions of the test. ...The impression [Angelo] makes is from the start one of coldness and inhumanity.... P. 22. Roger Sale sees in the lines that the Duke "implies that he is primarily testing Angelo and not seeking to reform Vienna." "The Comic Mode of 'Measure for Measure,'" SQ, XIX (1968), p. 56.

14 Wheel, pp. 78-79.

15 "The Greatness...", p. 155.

16 Ibid., p. 160.

17 "The Meaning...", p. 111. See also Toole, p. 182.

18 "Human Comedy...", p. 19.

19 Comedy of Forgiveness, p. 19. G. L. Geckle also sees Angelo as "a sort of scapegoat." P. 19

20 "More Light...", p. 318.

21 Harold Goddard had suggested a similar interpretation many years earlier. The Duke, he thinks, appoints Angelo in order to vindicate his slack rule. He says, in effect: "Granted that my dispensation has been too lenient; I'll show you [the people] what will happen under a paragon of strictness. See how you like it then!" P. 52. For an extreme view on the "power...seemers" line see Raymond Southall. The Duke expresses here the "distinction...between ...man's social conduct (guided by a business ethic), and man's inner state and conduct (guided by the religious ethic)." The "play is chiefly concerned with the separation of those two realms of conduct which Isabel unites." pp. 16-17.

22 I am not convinced that "seemers" should be interpreted according to the O. E. D. definition: "Seemer ...who seems, or makes pretence or show." The first occurrence of the word is Shakespeare's "seemers" in "what our seemers be" and no other use with this meaning is mentioned until 1647. The meaning of the verb "to seem" is explained as "To have a semblance or appearance." The Duke's opinion of Angelo's character is based on what Angelo resembles or appears to be. He appears as cold and therefore not likely to succumb to the appetite. Nevertheless, the Duke implies that appearance is not necessarily



fact.

- 23 The phrase is Anthony Caputi's who says: "Measure for Measure is, throughout, a play in which our concern about the characters' fortunes is distinctly subordinate to our concern about the fortunes of civilization." "Scenic Design...", p. 96.
- 24 Richard Hooker, Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, Vol. I (London, 1907), I.x.1-2; p. 188.
- 25 "The central figure, the pivot about which all else turns, is...the heroine." W. W. Lawrence, p. 81.
- 26 "The Duke, lord of this play in the exact sense that Prospero is lord of The Tempest, is the prophet of an enlightened ethic." W. Knight, p. 74. "The Duke is puzzling, and perhaps ultimately not quite successful. But it is certain that he is the center of the play, and the clue to its intention and its peculiar style." F. Fergusson, p. 78. "Dramatically Vincentio is an excrescence who ruins the play; thematically he is unnecessary, at least in the very extended form in which he is presented...." M. Mincoff, p. 149.
- 27 Shakespeare's 'Meas.' p. 143.
- 28 "...he not only acts as a deus ex machina, but almost as explanatory Chorus as in his speech at the close of the Third Act, and in moral and reflective passages elsewhere." W. W. Lawrence, p. 92. "The Duke offers only one formal, semi-choric comment on the responsibilities of office." R. Ornstein, p. 15. "(The Duke speaks soliloquies, but they consist of choral comments on the state of society.)" A. Caputi, p. 93. See also p. 153, n. B.
- 29 'Meas.,' p. 69.
- 30 Cambridge Ed., p. xxxiv.
- 31 Raleigh, p. 69.
- 32 Problem Comedies, p. 111.
- 33 Ibid., p. 112.
- 34 Ibid., p. 102.

- 35 Ibid., p. 109.
- 36 Ibid., p. 112.
- 37 "Basilikon Doron," in The Political Works of James I, ed. Charles H. McIlwain (New York, 1965), p. 43.
- 38 Problem Plays, p. 126.
- 39 Ibid., p. 118.
- 40 Ibid., p. 132.
- 41 Ibid., p. 126.
- 42 Problem Plays, pp. 113-114.
- 43 Problem Plays, p. 30.
- 44 I have purposely not mentioned J. Waters Bennett's discussion of the Duke in her chapter "The Duke as Actor and Playwright." (pp. 125-137) To me, her argument is too confusing to represent adequately. Having established on p. 126 that the Duke "play-acts" still in Act V of Measure for Measure, she then discusses the denouement as "an elaborate five-act-play within a play." (to p. 134) (I agree with Miss Bennett's overall conception of Act V as the Duke's "play" although not in detail.) Next, she affirms the dramatic purpose of Act V "as created to amuse the writer and the readers of the Basilikon Doron." (p. 134) This discussion ends a scant page later when she "imagine[s] that Shakespeare himself acted the part of the Duke," (p. 135) and this speculation is pursued to the end of the chapter. Royal Entertainment.
- 45 "...[The Duke's] supreme indifference to human feelings is as persistent a note as any in the play." Leech, p. 113. Tillyard expresses the same sentiment regarding the concealment of Claudio's rescue from death. P. 118. Leavis, defending Meas. against Knights' charges, says that "If he were felt as a mere character" the charges brought against the Duke would have some foundation. "How uncondonably cruel, for example, to keep Isabella on the rack with the lie about her brother's death!" P. 159. Toole also finds the Duke "somewhat cruel." P. 182.

46 An Approach, p. 53.

47 Wheel, p. 78.

48 R. Ornstein, p. 18. For the same view see also,  
for instance, R. Southall, p. 78; W. B. Toole, p. 182.

## Chapter II: THE DEATH SERMON

The Duke has created, directly or indirectly, the situations he encounters and is forced to deal with. Angelo has acted, we may assume, as the Duke expected him to act. He has taken the duties of governor seriously and decided to enforce the laws which are on the books in Vienna. He chooses to make an example of Claudio, a young nobleman, who has gotten his bride with child without the union having been sanctioned by the church. Claudio is thrown into prison and his execution is set for the next day. Juliet, his fiancée, is also in prison and, according to the Provost, "very near her hour." (II.ii.16) The Duke goes to the prison in his monk's habit to visit the "afflicted spirits." He asks the Provost:

Do me the common right  
To let me see them, and to make me know  
The nature of their crimes, that I may minister  
To them accordingly. II.iii.5-8

Juliet enters and the warden explains her offense:

She is with child,  
And he that got it, sentenc'd; a young man  
More fit to do another such offence,  
Than die for this. II.iii.11-14

The Duke does not share the Provost's consternation over the harsh penalty and only asks when Claudio is to die. Upon being told that the date for the execution is set for "tomorrow," he gives no hint of compassion or concern. Instead he turns to Juliet and asks her: "Repent you, fair one, of the sin you carry?" (II.iii.19)

A theologically accurate examination of Juliet's repentance follows. First the friar-Duke establishes whether the "most offenceful act was mutually committed." (II.iii.26-27) Juliet replies that, indeed, there was mutual consent. It is important to realize what is involved in this "mutual" agreement to commit the "offenceful act" because while here the Duke is insisting on the existence of the all-important consent by both parties, he will later propose the "bed-trick" to a consenting Mariana who, though unmarried in the eyes of both church and temporal law, will lie with Angelo who supposes her to be Isabella.<sup>1</sup>

Briefly, two kinds of spousals had been distinguished since the twelfth century. One involved that the parties agree to be married as of the present moment. This was seen as a binding contract, the so-called sponsalia per verba de praesenti. The other contract involved the

promise to marry each other at some future date and was therefore referred to as sponsalia per verba de futuro.<sup>2</sup> Both kinds of contract could be dissolved. The de praesenti agreement was the more seriously binding of the two. It constituted "in effect, though not in name, marriage itself."<sup>3</sup> The de praesenti contract could only be dissolved "by death or entrance into holy orders."<sup>4</sup> The spousal de futuro could be terminated at the will of either party, or if one party could show just cause for an annulment.<sup>5</sup> If, however, the couple had intercourse while engaged to be married under either form of spousal, they had committed a grievous sin, but the spousal became automatically a legal marriage. Children issuing from such a union, blessed or unblessed by the church, were considered legitimate.

The contract between Claudio and Julietta is clearly the de praesenti kind. Claudio tells Lucio:

Thus stands it with me: upon a true contract  
 I got possession of Julietta's bed.  
 You know the lady; she is fast my wife,  
 Save that we do the denunciation lack  
 Of outward order. I.ii.134-138

While Claudio was unquestionably serious in his intentions to marry Juliet, the same could not be said of

everyone entering upon the de praesenti contract which, in effect, involved no more than the consent of both parties to marry. The church insisted on solemnization of the spousal and strict abstinence from intercourse before the ceremony in order to prevent fornication under the semblance of being contracted. For the same reason--and since the church had the authority in these matters--did the state punish offenders. The fact was that

...a valid but clandestine marriage might be made merely by sexual intercourse preceded by promises to marry; but all such unions were stigmatized by public and ecclesiastical opinion.<sup>6</sup>

Both Claudio and Julietta have transgressed and have every reason to feel guilt.

The friar-Duke does not know, of course, whether a promise to marry existed between Juliet and Claudio. Having received assurance from the girl that she loves "the man that wrong'd" her, the friar knows that the "most offenceful act was mutually committed," that is, with consent of the parties. (II.iii.24-27) Whether the union was sanctioned by the church or not, public or private, made under a formal spousal or not, all

that really mattered was consent.

"In the celebration of this sacrament, as in the others, there are certain things which belong to the substance of the sacrament: such is the consensus de praesenti, which of itself suffices for the formation of the marriage; and there are also things which belong to the dignity and solemnity of the sacrament, as the giving of the bride by her parents, and the priestly blessing, etc., etc."<sup>7</sup>

Since Julietta admits consent, she has committed a deadly sin. She is told: "Then was your sin of heavier kind than his." After Juliet has assured the friar of her repentance, he counsels her on the correct reason for repentance:

'Tis meet so, daughter; but lest you do repent,  
As that the sin hath brought you to this shame,  
Which sorrow is always toward ourselves, not heaven,  
Showing we would not spare heaven as we love it,  
But as we stand in fear-- II.iii.30-34

"The motive of detestation of sin" should be, ideally, that the sin offends God.<sup>8</sup> When the friar-Duke admonishes Juliet to repent not because her sin has brought her "to this shame," not because she regrets the consequences for herself, not because she fears the punishment of heaven, but solely because she has caused "sorrow" to God, he is expressing the most recent theological insights and agreements arrived at by the Council of Trent. Yet despite the friar's knowledge of and concern with church



doctrine in the matter of penance, he leaves Juliet in imperfect contrition. She interrupts the friar with, "I do repent me as it is an evil, And take the shame with joy."<sup>9</sup> To this, attrition based on "heinousness of sin" and therefore imperfect,<sup>10</sup> the friar replies: "There rest."

The Duke, not being an ordained priest, cannot be expected to conduct himself properly in matters of the church. But the incidents exposing his incompetence as ecclesiastic become more and more serious. To leave Juliet with imperfect contrition is fairly innocuous. To not prepare a man about to die in the established manner of the church is more serious. Finally, the friar-Duke's proposal to send Mariana instead of Isabella to Angelo's bed is a grave offence. Yet, the more absurd his actions become as friar, the more meaningfully does he establish his competence as ruler.

## I

The Duke's great death sermon to Claudio provides the turning point in the play as well as the formulation of the protagonist's attitude toward life. The dramatic events which follow will prove that contempt of the world loses its theoretical validity when set against life's

"warm motion" (III.i.119) and the possibility of a "shamed life." (III.i.116) If the play is considered as a study in authority, the exercise of a ruler's power, that speech provides the focal point of the events, the ideas behind the events, and the link between the first and the second part of the play. Much critical dissatisfaction with the play's structure has been expressed in connection with its artistic and dramatic integrity. A fissure is usually seen as occurring after the confrontation between Isabella and Claudio when the Duke enters to suggest a solution to the dilemma in which brother and sister find themselves. Raleigh's comment expresses the opinion of many later commentators: "The rest of the play is mere plot, devised as a retreat, to save the name of Comedy."<sup>11</sup>

The Duke's reflections upon the meanness and worthlessness of life take up almost forty lines and may be regarded as the expression of values which have been formed in "a life remov'd." If the Duke is considered a fully created character and not as a convenient figure who serves to inhibit the free development of the nascent tragedy, then the thoughts expressed in the prison cell in the presence of Claudio--who finds himself awaiting death because of the Duke's past contemplative life--are the thoughts of the man Vincentio.<sup>12</sup>

The speech expresses Vincentio's Weltanschauung and is merely occasioned by Claudio's words:

The miserable have no other medicine  
 But only hope:  
 I have hope to live, and am prepar'd to die.  
 III.i.2-4

The young man's words do not really warrant the speech either in content or in length. He knows that he can only hope for a pardon from Angelo and is therefore "prepar'd to die." The friar-Duke begins by addressing Claudio but soon turns from him and seems to speak, as it were, to himself. Only the first few lines are directed at a man about to die:

Be absolute for death: either death or life  
 Shall thereby be the sweeter. Reason thus with life:  
 If I do lose thee, I do lose a thing  
 That none but fools would keep. III.i.5-8

This introduction encompasses the one dominant idea of the speech: life is worthless because man's existence, as Hobbes was to say later, is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." The Duke's reflections leave man no dignity, integrity, or individuality:

A breath thou art,  
 Servile to all the skyey influences  
 . . . Merely, thou art Death's fool;  
 . . . Thou art not noble;  
 . . . Thou'rt by no means valiant;  
 . . . Thy best of rest is sleep;

. . . Thou art not thyself;  
 . . . Happy thou art not;  
 . . . Thou art not certain;  
 . . . If thou art rich, thou'rt poor;  
 . . . Friends hast thou none;  
 . . . Thou hast nor youth, nor age,  
 But as it were an after-dinner's sleep  
 Dreaming on both; III.i.8-34

Youth and age are equally devoid of joy. Neither offers fulfillment. Should one accumulate wealth during one's lifetime, the aged have "neither heat, affection, limb, nor beauty To make [their] riches pleasant." Man has nothing, is nothing, and what he achieves proves to be a delusion. What man calls "life" is a succession of conditions of living death. Death is not to be feared since it reduces all possibilities for suffering, doubt, and struggle to nothingness:

What's yet in this  
 That bears the name of life? Yet in this life  
 Lie hid more thousand deaths; yet death we fear  
 That makes these odds all even. III.i.38-41

Having listened to this harrowing picture of life's miseries and futilities, Claudio thanks the friar and adds:

To sue to live, I find I seek to die,  
 And seeking death, find life. Let it come on.  
 III.i.43-44

Not a word in the friar's consolation has pointed to a finding of life after death.<sup>13</sup> Caputi points out that "...we have no evidence that Claudio, who has not

appeared since Act I, will not face death courageously."<sup>14</sup> Claudio tells the friar that he is "prepar'd to die." Therefore, to teach him the contempt of the world without a view of the life hereafter seems not to the point. In fact, Claudio and his "confessor" talk by each other and not to each other.

Claudio does not seem to be the sort of person who needs a lengthy exhortation to resignation in the face of adversity as is evident much earlier in the play when he is led to prison. It appears that part of the punishment for sexual offenders is a "showing to the world." (I.ii.108) When Claudio expresses his reluctance to be thus exposed and asks for speedy conveyance to the prison, the Provost gives Claudio to understand that he is pilloried on command from Angelo. The young nobleman's reply carries the same tone of resignation we hear later in prison:

Thus can the demi-god, Authority,  
 Make us pay down for our offence by weight.  
 The words of heaven; on whom it will, it will;  
 On whom it will not, so; yet still 'tis just.  
I.ii.112-115

Claudio, it must be emphasized, does not feel that it is unjust to punish according to the law; he only stresses the inequity of a law being enforced after "nineteen zodiacs" of laxity in moral matters have passed.

(I.ii.146-160) The manner in which Shakespeare carefully

delineates Claudio's character through his responses to his predicament would therefore indicate that the "Be absolute for death" speech is not--the disproportionate length of address and brevity of response argue against this also--to be interpreted as solely for the benefit of a rebellious or distraught condemned man.

The Duke's speech is, as one critic noted, most "un-Friarly."<sup>15</sup> A priest should aid the Catholic Christian to prepare himself actively for death since it is not enough to submit passively to the last rites. "So far as priestly assistance goes the first step in the process of preparation for death is the receiving of...confession and the conferring of sacramental absolution."<sup>16</sup> The priest is enjoined to do his utmost

to awaken in the communicant a special degree of fervour, a more than ordinary penetrating faith and ardent love on the occasion of what may be his final eating of the Bread of Life. ...The cardinal disposition of soul at the approach of death are: a frequent eliciting of the acts of faith, hope, love, and contrition; ...and the constant maintaining of a penitential spirit.<sup>17</sup>

That the Duke as friar is fully aware, theoretically, of his theological obligations toward prisoners and condemned men is made clear first in his meticulously correct counselling of Julietta regarding her penance and later in his concern for Barnardine's spiritual

welfare. When his attempts to prepare that rascally murderer for death fail, he exclaims:

Unfit to live or die!...  
 A creature unprepar'd, unmet for death;  
 And to transport him in the mind he is  
 Were damnable. IV.iii.63; 65-67

The news that a pirate, Ragozine, has died that same morning of natural causes is greeted as provided by "heaven." (IV.iii.76) The salvation of Barnardine's soul can now be attempted once more. The undoctrinal preparation of the condemned Claudio must therefore be dramatically significant for what it reveals of the Duke who chooses to express only contempt of life.

The pessimistic, "essentially materialistic and pagan,"<sup>18</sup> view of human life is expressed by the Duke before he has become involved closely with any of his subjects. So far his only action has been to deputize Angelo and to disguise himself as friar. His visit to the prison is, presumably, for purposes of finding out whether or not his substitute has begun to enforce Vienna's laws. The Duke's counsel of Juliet is perfunctory. He neither sympathizes nor promises to use his good offices to intercede on Claudio's behalf. The Duke is still very much detached from the individual. He will remain so until he has overheard the impassioned

arguments between Claudio and Isabella. These arguments are concerned with honour, morality, death, and life. Isabella argues for morality in this life in order to safeguard her soul's eternal life. Claudio argues for life even if it must be bought with his sister's loss of chastity. The Duke intervenes to spare one of his subjects shame and to save another from certain death.

## II

A digression from the scene at hand is necessary in order to show that the Duke was conceived in accordance with an ethical problem which has been much discussed. Should a man who is qualified to rule, be it by birth or learning, devote his life to the state or to his own interests?<sup>19</sup> Vincentio has been born to rule but neglects the affairs of Vienna for years. When he deputizes Angelo and puts on a monk's cowl, he rejects his official position symbolically. However, it is the duty of a ruler to govern; it is the founding principle of his position: "...the highest and most important of the ruler's specific duties is to see well to the administration of justice."<sup>20</sup> The prince was seen as the upholder of virtue in his realm, to which end he was expected to punish vice severely.<sup>21</sup> If the ruler did not enforce laws and thus took "away all kinds



of public government" this would mean, in Richard Hooker's words, "apparently to overturn the whole world."<sup>22</sup> But rulers are also men, and as such they might experience conflicts between their public duties and their private inclinations. These might tend toward a preoccupation with the government of the private self and with philosophical studies to find answers to questions about life and human nature. To the inquiring mind it becomes evident that there exists a seemingly unbridgeable gap between what man ideally can be and what he actually is. Experience, furthermore, shows him that systematic knowledge of truth is not synonymous with right action. An ideal morality cannot survive intact in an imperfect world. Therefore, one withdraws into a reflective life of tranquility.

To exercise political power wisely means to rely on a system of laws which reflects what man ideally strives for. The existence of laws presumes, at one and the same time, that man is corrupt and that he is amenable to perfection. Only this assumption will enable man to live with his fellow men:

Laws politic, ordained for external order and regiment amongst men, are never framed as they should be, unless presuming the will of man to be inwardly obstinate, rebellious, and averse from all obedience unto the sacred laws of his nature; in a word, unless presuming man to be in regard of his depraved mind little

better than a wild beast, they do accordingly provide notwithstanding so to frame his outward actions, that they be no hinderance unto the common good for which societies are instituted....<sup>23</sup>

The purpose of political power, then, is to deal with people and all their contrary impulses and shortcomings. Angelo, who exercises the law according to its abstract principles, does not consider the real and limited man Claudio but treats him according to the ideal for which the letter of the law provides. Angelo is the perfectionist who disdains man and his animal passions. He has the perfectionist's vision of man as virtuous and spiritual. This is an impossible vision as Angelo finds out. The irony is that Angelo has to recognize his own animal nature while applying the law which, ultimately, is the result of the vision of man as capable of overcoming his corrupting and corruptible self..

Angelo's fate illustrates why some men prefer to withdraw from an involvement in and with society. The Duke withdraws into contemplation, and Isabella into a nunnery. Although Thomas Lupset's thoughts on disengagement from the world do not apply to Vincentio, they express exactly what is at stake in his fourteen year retreat from responsibility:

...many men of gret wysedome and vertue flye from hyt, setting themselves in relygyouse housys, ther quyetly to serue God and kepe theyr myndys vpryght downe of them wych perceyue theyr owne imbecyllite and wekenes, prone and redy to be oppressyd and ouerthrowne, wyth thes comune and quyat plesurys of the world, by whome they see the most parte of mankynd drownyd and ouercomyn. How be hyt, me semyth, they dow lyke to fereful schypmen, wych, for drede of stormys and trowblus sees, kepe themselves in the hauen, and dare not comyt themselfys to the daungerouse tempestys of the same.<sup>24</sup>

Vincentio is born into the position of ruler and must exercise the functions which are inherent in this position.

The hart [of a commonwealth] ys the kyng, prynce, and rular of the state, whether so euer hyt be one or many, accordyng to the gouernance of the commynalty and polytyke state. ...He or they wych haue authoryte apou the hole state ryght wel may be resemblyd to the hart. For lyke as al wyt, reson, and sens, felyng, lyfe, and al other natural powar, spryngyth out of the hart, so from the pryncys and rularys of the state commyth al lawys, ordur and pollycy, al justyce, vertue, and honesty, to the rest of thys polytyke body.<sup>25</sup>

If the Duke, who is the heart of his society, ceases to function, he will kill the body politic. The general disorder which results from his fourteen year neglect is a sign of decay, mirrored in the play in the recurring references to venereal disease and corruption of morals.

When Vincentio withdraws himself, he takes away the heart of the society. Angelo in his place threatens, literally, to kill the societal body by enforcing a law which, in Pompey's words, would make it necessary "to geld and splay all the youth of the city." (II.i.227-8) The deputy's measures will indeed lead to a state in which all life is "extirped." When Lucio says that "it is impossible to extirp [lechery] quite,...till eating and drinking be put down," (III.ii.98-99) he formulates, though crudely, the very principle of life. The Duke, condemning life as worthless and mean, may be expressing a philosophical verity but not a principle to help him perform his duty. Vincentio has no Thomas Lupset to admonish him; instead life as he finds it in prison teaches him:

You see your cuntrey, as me semyth, requyre  
 your helpe, and, as hyt were, cry and cal  
 vnto you besyly for the same, and you, as  
 drownyd in the plesure of letturys and<sup>26</sup>  
 pryate studys, gyue no yere therto....

The Duke, we are told by Escalus, was "One that, above all other strifes, contended especially to know himself." (III.ii.226-7) Vincentio defends his reputation against the slander of Lucio by saying: "Let him be but testimonied in his own bringings-forth, and he shall appear to the envious a scholar, a statesman,

and a soldier." (IV.ii.140-142) The implications are clear. The Duke has kept himself "above all other strifes" in order to gain self-knowledge. In the meantime he has neglected his duties so that he appears to his subjects "A very superficial, ignorant, unweighing fellow." (III.ii.136) It is not enough to study to be virtuous and true (for that is what self-knowledge will lead to); one has an obligation to share good qualities with others. The Duke only expresses a commonplace in his "virtue" speech to Angelo:

...thys ys the marke that euery man, prudent and polytyke, ought to schote at; fyrst, to make hymselfe perfayte, wyth al vertues garnyschyng hys mynd; and then to commyn the same perfectlyon to other. For lytyl avaylyth vertue that ys not publyschyd abrode to the profyt of other; lytyl avaylyth tresore cloyd in coffurys, wych neuer ys commundyd to the succur of other; for al such gyftys of God and nature must euer be applyd to the commyn profyt and vtylyte. Wherby man, as much as he may, schal euer follow the nature of God, whose infynyte gudnes ys by thys chefely declaryd and openyd to the world, that to euery thyng and creature he gyuyth parte therof, accordyng to theyr nature and capacitye. So that vertue and lernyng, not commundyd to other, ys lyke vnto ryches hepyd in cornerys, neuer applyd to the vse of other.<sup>27</sup>

When Vincentio speaks of "his own bringings-forth" and that he "shall appear" as a perfect ruler, he reveals the goals behind his seeking for perfection through self-knowledge. Yet, as ruler he has no right to withdraw, even temporarily, the power and responsibility

vested in him:

The thryd [poynt requyryd to the wele of euery commynalty]--wych ys chefe and pryncypal of al--ys the gud ordur and pollycy by gud lawys stablyschyd and set, and by hedys and rularys put in effect; by the wyche the hole body, as by reson, ys gouernyd and rulyd, to the intent that thys multytude of pepul and hole commynalty, so helthy and so welthy, hauyng conuenient abundance of al thyngys necessary for the mayntenance therof....<sup>28</sup>

The plays' events show us that a pure morality, like absolute law enforcement, is life-destroying. Claudio--and by extension "all the youth of the city" --is part of the "polytyke body." He is, in the Provost's words, "More fit to do another such offence, Than die for this." (II.iii.13-14) The "gud ordur and pollycy by gud lawys" is to be established by the ruler so that the community may be maintained. While Vincentio lives in the middle of "strifes" rather than above them, he comes to recognize this. In the scene following his reflections on death he will acknowledge his duty by assuming responsibility for some of his subjects. In the process the contradictions between absolute standards and reality, between absolute morality and practical necessity, between the letter of the law and its spirit are resolved the only way possible if society is to survive: through the application of the law relative to the individual case. To serve the higher principle

of the maintenance of society, Vincentio has to sacrifice lesser principles. This is what the Duke accomplishes when he reappears as ruler and dispenses justice, tempered with equity, during the great judgment scene. First, however, he has to break the law to preserve the spirit of the law. He saves Claudio's life by offending against the law of Vienna.

NOTES to Chapter II

- 1 The details of the contract which existed between Mariana and Angelo are discussed in Ch. III. For the moment I am only concerned with the betrothal of Juliet and Claudio.
- 2 Chilton L. Powell, English Domestic Relations: 1487-1653 (New York, 1917), p. 3. Pollock & Maitland, The History of English Law, Vol. II (Cambridge, 2nd ed., 1968), p. 368. George Hayward Joyce, Christian Marriage: An Historical and Doctrinal Study (London, 2nd ed., rev. 1948), pp. 84-93.
- 3 Powell, p. 3.
- 4 Powell, p. 3.  
Pollock, p. 368.
- 5 Ibid. See also my Chapter III.
- 6 Powell, p. 6.
- 7 Peter Lombard, quoted in Joyce, Christian Marriage, p. 191. Cf. Powell, p. 18: "Indeed, the simple intention to marry, though accompanied by the wrong formula, was sufficient to effect the contract." See also Pollock & Maitland, p. 368.
- 8 "The motive of this detestation is that sin offends God: to regret evil deeds on account of the mental or physical suffering, the social loss, or the action of human justice which they entail, is natural; but such sorrow does not suffice for penance." "Penance." The Catholic Encyclopedia (New York, 1907-1914).



- 9 [italics mine.] As the lines 30-34 show, Shakespeare was thoroughly familiar with the catechetical preliminaries to confession. Therefore it is safe to assume that he could have given Juliet the appropriate response had he so wished.
- 10 "Catholic teaching distinguishes a twofold hatred of sin; one, perfect contrition, springs from the love of God Who has been grievously offended; the other, imperfect contrition, arises principally from some other motives, such as loss of heaven, fear of hell, the heinousness of sin, etc." "Contrition," Catholic Encyclopedia.
- 11 In Discussions, p. 70. W. W. Lawrence, Problem Comedies, pp. 111; 118, and "'Meas.' and Lucio," p. 444. E. M. W. Tillyard, pp. 123; 132. W. Sypher, p. 330. F. Fergusson, p. 79. P. Ure, p. 27. M. Mincoff, p. 145.
- 12 J. W. Lever considers the Duke here as "no more than an impersonal choric figure." P. ixx.
- 13 For opinions on the death sermon--most expressing disapproval for its lack of Christian content--see: W. Knight, p. 84. F. R. Leavis, p. 154. C. Leech, p. 112. R. M. Smith, p. 217. W. Sypher, p. 330. A. P. Rossiter, p. 165. P. Ure, p. 27. A. Caputi, p. 91. Roland Mushat Frye, Shakespeare and Christian Doctrine (Princeton, 1963), p. 136. R. W. S. Mendl, Revelation in Shakespeare (London, 1964), p. 143. J. W. Lever, p. ixxxvii.
- 14 "Scenic Design," p. 91.
- 15 A. P. Rossiter, p. 122.
- 16 see "Death," Cath. Enc.
- 17 Ibid.

- 18 J. W. Lever, Introduction, p. lxxxvii.
- 19 James I gave his opinion thus on the matter:  
 "And shortly, as the Fathers chiefe ioy ought to be in procuring his childrens welfare, reioycing at their weale, sorrowing and pitying at their evill, to hazard for their safetie, trauell for their rest, wake for their sleepe; and in a word, to thinke that his earthly felicitie and life standeth and liveth more in them, nor in himselfe; so ought a good Prince thinke of his people." [*italics mine*] "The Trew Law of Free Monarchies," (1598; 1603) The Political Works of James I, ed. Charles H. McIlwain (New York, 1965), p. 56. See also ibid., p. 70.  
 In his Basilikon Doron James I was even more explicit: "...studie not for knowledge nakedly, but that your principall ende be, to make you able thereby to vse your office; practising according to your knowledge in all the points of your calling: not like these vaine Astrologians, that studie night and day on the course of the starres, onely that they may, for satisfying their curiositie, know their course." Works, pp. 38-39.  
 James also counselled his son against being distracted from his calling by study. Ibid., p. 40. Montaigne devotes his essay "How One Ought to Gouverne His Will" to a defense of his opinion "that one should lend himselfe to others, and not give himselfe but to himselfe." [*italics mine*]  
 The concrete experience, on which the essay is based, is Montaigne's service to Bordeaux as Mayor. The Essays of Montaigne: John Florio's Translation (Modern Library, New York), The Third Booke, Chapter X, pp. 908-928.
- 20 Elizabeth M. Pope, "The Renaissance Background of 'Measure for Measure,'" Shakespeare Survey, II (1949), p. 74. Miss Pope documents her statement so well that I see no need to repeat her findings.
- 21 Sir William Forrest, in his Pleasaunt Poesye of Princelie Practise, penned these verses touching

the subject, in 1548:

[9]

Not (as too saye) of free liberalitee.  
 too chuse in the same whither yee will or not:  
 but bownden by Office of Principalitee:  
 nothinge shoulde els more a princis honour blot,  
 what knyttethe too the contrarye too loose the knot.  
 and what goethe loose in hynderinge the same  
 too see a restreynte: els are yee too blame.

10]

Off meanys too speake concernynge the saide case.  
 firste, is too bee had in consyderation:  
 (by Streyte punyschinge vice in euerye place:)  
 that Vertue maye bee hadde in digne estymation.  
 when synne so is hadde in detestation,  
 that whiche seemed (by custome) afore light  
 shalbee seene odyouse in eyerye mannys sight.

"Appendix" in England in the Reign of King Henry the Eighth: Part I. Starkey's Life and Letters, ed. Sidney Hertridge (Early English Text Society Series, 1878), p. lxxxvi.

- 22 Of The Laws, I., ix. 4. Everyman's, p. 191.
- 23 Ibid., I., x. 1. P. 188.
- 24 "A Dialogue between Cardinal Pole and Thomas Lupset" by Thomas Starkey. England in the Reign of King Henry the Eighth: Part I. Starkey's Life and Letters, ed. Sidney Hertridge (Early English Text Society Series, 1878), p. 43.
- 25 Ibid., p. 48.
- 26 Ibid., p. 3. "...chefely he [i.e. a man] must study to commyn hys vertues to the profyte of other. And thys ys the end of the cyuyle lyfe, or, as me semyth, rather the true admynstratyon of the commyn wele; the wych you see now, Mastur Pole, how thes phylosopharys by whose exampul you appere to excuse your selfe, most avoydyd and vniustely fled, ouer much delytyng in theyr owne pryuate studys." p. 6.

- 27 Starkey, pp. 5-6.  
Richard Hooker expressed the same idea in these words: "Goodness doth not move by being, but by being apparent; and therefore many things are neglected which are most precious, only because the value of them lieth hid." I., vii. 6. *Everyman's*, p. 172. See also James I, "Basilikon Doron," Works, p. 37.
- 28 Starkey, pp. 50-51.

### Chapter III: "CRAFT AGAINST VICE"

Angelo's rigid law-enforcement brings about, in an indirect way, the Duke's gradual assumption of responsibility. Angelo's actions demand spontaneous conteractions from the friar-Duke who, of a sudden, finds himself deeply involved in the fate of individual lives. After the Duke's exhortation to despise life, Claudio reaffirms his resigned acceptance of death. At this moment Isabella calls outside the prison cell. She has come to acquaint her brother with Angelo's shameful proposal to trade Claudio's life for her chastity. The Duke withdraws but asks the Provost to make it possible for him to overhear what passes between brother and sister.

Isabella had left Angelo quite convinced that her brother

. . . had he twenty heads to tender down  
On twenty bloody blocks, he'd yield them up  
Before his sister should her body stoop  
To such abhorr'd pollution. II.iv.179-181

Isabella, who should have entered the Convent of the Poor Clares a day before (I.ii.167), is innocent in every sense of the word. She relies on her brother's

"mind of honour" (II.iv.178) to save her from a fate which she considers worse than death. She does not vacillate regarding the course she must take, not now and not later in the face of her brother's abject fear of death. She goes to him assured that her only duty toward Claudio is to prepare him for death:

Then, Isabel live chaste, and brother, die:  
 More than our brother is our chastity.  
 I'll tell him yet of Angelo's request,  
 And fit his mind to death, for his soul's rest.  
 II.iv.183-186

Peter Ure has called the struggle between Isabella and Claudio the "most terribly painful scene in all of Shakespeare"<sup>1</sup> and painful it must appear to the Duke also. Before him he sees a man who values life above his sister's honour and a woman who places her spiritual and physical integrity above her own and her brother's life. His own considered detachment from "That [which] bears the name of life" (III.i.40) is set to naught when he hears two of his subjects who, because of his philosophically grounded laxity regarding a ruler's responsibility, must battle over one of the most harrowing ethical dilemmas imaginable. Isabella has convinced herself that Claudio will place her honour above his life. She answers her brother's anxious question: "Now, sister, what's the comfort?" (III.i.52)

by making light of Claudio's predicament:

Lord Angelo, having affairs to heaven,  
Intends you for his swift ambassador,  
Where you shall be an everlasting leiger.  
Therefore your best appointment make with speed;  
Tomorrow you set on. III.i.56-60

Claudio only asks: "Is there no remedy?" Isabella perceives that her brother is not quite resigned to die and, fearful lest he agree to Angelo's disgraceful proposal, does not tell him immediately how his life may be ransomed. She only hints that he may live if the judge can exercise his "devilish mercy." (64) Before actually revealing the nature of this "mercy," she warns him of the consequences should he "implore" that mercy. His life will be given to him but he will be in "perpetual durance." (67) Also, his honour would be stripped "from that trunk you bear, And leave you naked." (71-72) Claudio begs her to let him "know the point." (72) But Isabella does not really trust her brother's sense of honour:

. . . I quake  
Lest thou a feverous life shouldst entertain,  
And six or seven winters more respect  
Than a perpetual honour. Dar'st thou die?  
The sense of death is most in apprehension....  
III.i.73-77

Values appropriate to a life in the study or behind cloister walls are constantly juxtaposed to those of

life experienced in the world. The Duke discovers passions, fears, intransigence once he enters the world of his subjects; Angelo, empowered with the highest office in the land, discovers that virtuous behaviour can disintegrate in a moment; and Isabella finds that the abstractions "honour" and "chastity" can ill compete with the overwhelming urge of man's will to life. Isabella's disclosure of freedom's price elicits a firm: "Thou shalt not do't." from Claudio. Convincingly she assures Claudio that she would throw her life "down for your deliverance As frankly as a pin." At the moment death seems to her a trifle compared to the long drawn out shame she would have to endure were she to submit to Angelo. Claudio affirms his readiness to die the next day. But he has been offered a tangible basis for hope. Tentatively he suggests that fornication is the least of the seven deadly sins. Immediately Isabella understands what her brother asks her to do. To his timid "Death is a fearful thing," she replies sternly: "And shamed life a hateful," (115-116) describing as much his life bought with her shame as her estimation of her own future if she assents. But Claudio counters with a horrifying description of the uncertainties which follow the moment of death.



What Isabella and the Duke hear are feelings and thoughts which come from one who passionately enjoys life and its sensations and can therefore describe even an unknown, feared state in vivid, sensuous, concrete images:

Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;  
 To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot;  
 This sensible warm motion to become  
 A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit  
 To bath in fiery floods, or to reside  
 In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice;  
 To be imprison'd in the viewless winds  
 And blown with restless violence round about  
 The pendent world. . . . 'tis too horrible.  
 The weariest and most loathed worldly life  
 That age, ache, penury and imprisonment  
 Can lay on nature, is a paradise  
 To what we fear of death.     III.i.117-131

Without referring to the Duke's "Be absolute for death" discourse Claudio repudiates all it conveyed. Life, even if mean and beset by adversity, is "sensible warm motion" and infinitely to be preferred to death. Man and his animal spirits assert themselves against philosophical considerations which, theoretically, make death a state to be welcomed. Claudio's hunger for life is as elemental as the drive to procreation. Neither desire can be suppressed. To let life and its appetites have its course, yet to channel these appetites and to protect the community from willful lawlessness, is the Duke's obligation.

If Claudio is abjectly afraid of death's unknown terrors, Isabella is equally afraid of being forced to do what she "abhors." (II.iv.182; III.i.101) Claudio now begs outright for his life: "Sweet sister, let me live." He tries to allay her scruples by suggesting that to save a brother's life through sinning will be excused by "nature" and become "a virtue." (133-135) No doubt, Isabella sees at least partial truth in Claudio's argument. She is now as emotionally attached to her position as Claudio is to his, and her fear of bodily violation drives her into a frenzy of abuse:

O, you beast!

O faithless coward! O dishonest wretch!  
 Wilt thou be made a man out of my vice?  
 Is't not a kind of incest, to take life  
 From thine own sister's shame? (135-139)

Her disappointment that her own brother lacks the nobility she imputed to him leads her even to accuse her mother of adultery. With finality she consigns her brother to death: "I'll pray a thousand prayers for thy death; No word to save thee." (145-146) Her brother has refused to live up to her expectations, has destroyed her moral worldpicture, and she turns her fury against his character as only an individual can who is desperately groping for the pieces of a shattered certainty. Although earlier her judgment had been that Claudio

had "fall'n by prompture of the blood," (II.iv.177) she now condemns his sin as "not accidental, but a trade." (146) With the final admonition "'Tis best that thou diest quickly." (149) she turns to leave when the Duke steps forward to intervene.

First, the friar-Duke must assure himself that Angelo is really as corrupt as Isabella has charged. He cannot, therefore, promise Claudio delivery from the appointed execution. Nor can he admit, for the same reason, that he believes what he has heard. He buttresses his excuse that Angelo merely "hath made an assay of [Isabella's] virtue, to practise his judgment with the disposition of natures" (161-162) by saying that he is confessor to Angelo and therefore knows this to be true. Claudio must resign all hope and prepare himself for tomorrow's death. This time the poor wretch is truly ready to die. He believes that he has grievously misjudged Angelo as well as his sister: "Let me ask my sister pardon; I am so out of love with life that I will sue to be rid of it." (III.i.170-171)

The Duke is often said to be controlling or guiding events.<sup>2</sup> This would imply that, for instance, Vincentio knew what would happen between brother and sister and that he concealed himself merely to be on hand to bend

events from a disastrous course. Those commentators who take this view, usually find the play flawed and unsatisfactory. The main objection is that the terrible dilemma confronted by Claudio and Isabella is never resolved and that the Duke's guiding hand from now on serves to bring the play to a happy end.<sup>3</sup> It is my contention that the play is of a piece and that its second half makes only thematic and dramatic sense if the Duke is seen as an integral character of the play and not outside it as a convention or plot convenience. Once he has appointed Angelo and disguised himself, he is as much caught up in the events created by him as everyone else. When he finally engineers the dénouement of all difficulties, he does so as ruler fully conscious of his duties.

The Duke's actions as friar seem directed toward a probing of all possibilities in matters of authority. In this connection two interesting "problems" deserve a few words. The one is the Duke's seeming harshness in supporting Angelo's decisions, the other his imperfect--to put it mildly--behaviour as monk and spiritual advisor.

In no less than three instances is the friar-Duke given an opportunity to question the decisions made by

his deputy. The first opportunity arises in his meeting with Juliet. He does not voice any approval of the Provost's indirect condemnation of Angelo sending Claudio to die (II.iii.13-16), nor does he comfort Juliet by suggesting that her partner has been sentenced unjustly and a reprieve is in order. When he learns of Angelo's perfidy, he defends his deputy's action by pretending that he knows of his good intentions from the confessional. (III.i.159-166) In the third instance, Vincentio answers the Provost's estimation of Angelo as "a bitter deputy" glowing praise to the effect that his life and acts of justice correspond closely. (IV.ii.76-83)

That the Duke, privately, does not approve of his deputy's actions is borne out in the course of events. He cannot, however, publicly call in doubt the instituted authority. The authority figure must be respected; this the duke beneath the monk's disguise knows. Also, he is in favour of the strict application of the statutes on the books in Vienna and to weaken the enforcing agency would mean to subvert that end. By attacking the deputy, he would attack his own office. Finally, since Vincentio chose the deputy, he may not wish to admit that Angelo went beyond what the Duke expected him to do.

The second "problem," why the friar-Duke--although theoretically aware of Church practice and worldly law --chooses to act in an unorthodox fashion, is more difficult to understand. Yet the possibility exists that he acts the imperfect ecclesiastical authority to test the acceptance of authority on the part of his subjects. By doing so he finds that "authority"--in this case spiritual authority--is never questioned. Juliet accept his imperfect counselling regarding her penance; Claudio accepts the friar's imperfect "consolation" speech as preparation for death; and Isabella accepts the monk's assurance that the substitution intrigue is no sin. Since authority is authority in whatever realm, the Duke probably comes to the conclusion that his worldly authority will be accepted with equal calmness as long as its exercise seems reasonable.

The Duke's initial laxity in exercising power leads, of that events give ample proof, to suffering and injustices. The low-life characters, who stand for Vienna's society as a whole, show us the corruption infesting the life of the city. Even after the proclamation that "all houses in the suburbs of Vienna must be plucked down," (I.ii.89) a "wise burgher" can intercede so that the brothels in the city itself are left standing. That lax conditions are difficult to overcome and may also

contribute to further evil is expressed not only by Angelo, from whom we would expect such sentiments, but also by the kindly Escalus. After he has tried to unravel the illegal doings of Pompey and his companions, the Justice and Escalus come to speak of Claudio. Escalus regrets that Claudio must die but knows "there's no remedy." (II.i.278) When the Justice comments on the severity of Lord Angelo, Escalus reproves him gently:

It is but needful.  
 Mercy is not itself, that oft looks so;  
 Pardon is still the nurse of second woe.  
 II.i.279-281

Angelo, in his argument with Isabella, provides a similar reason for rigid standards. Ultimately they are necessary if justice is to treat all offenders equally. Isabella argues that many have committed Claudio's crime yet "Who is it that hath died for this offence?" (II.ii.89) The deputy is perfectly correct when he points out to her that, had the first offender against the law been punished, not many had "dar'd to do that evil." (92) Isabella, only compassion but not the law on her side, begs: "Yet show some pity." (100) To this, Angelo, the defender of rigid application of the statutes, replies:

I show it most of all when I show justice;  
 For then I pity those I do not know,

Which a dismiss'd offence would after gall,  
 And do him right that, answering one foul wrong,  
 Lives not to act another. II.ii.101-105

Laws which are not enforced at all or capriciously administered open the door to exploiters of human frailty. We see this when Pompey is sent to prison and there recognizes all sorts of rascals who were able to exploit their fellow citizens under the Duke's weak government. (IV.iii.1-20) Not mercy--which is leniency--and not severity in the administration of a city will lead to tolerable conditions in society. Neither can nor should be applied absolutely.<sup>4</sup> By breaking the law himself in the interest of a relative justice Vincentio implicitly comes to this recognition.

## I

From a doctrinal point of view the Duke's actions as friar are open to censure. In the case of Juliet's penance, he chooses not to pursue the matter of perfect contrition. When he attempts to comfort Claudio, he gives ample reasons to condemn the world but does not point to the future life of the soul in heaven. He repeatedly disrespects the Seal of Confession whose absolute inviolability had been restated and reconfirmed by the Council of Trent.<sup>5</sup> Finally, his proposal of the



bed-trick "flies in the face of the teaching of the Church,"<sup>6</sup> and Mariana's lying with Angelo before a public ceremony has pronounced them man and wife is against the law of Vienna as well. Furthermore, "mutual" consent, stressed in the Duke's conversation with Juliet, is not mentioned at all. The friar knows that Angelo had disavowed any connection with Mariana five years ago. (V.i.216)

The friar-Duke's proposal that Mariana lie with Angelo in Isabella's stead deserves the closest examination. Not only the Duke but also Shakespeare has been bitterly attacked for this strategem. W. W. Lawrence put it very well when he described reactions to the "bed-trick":

The Duke has been blamed for suggesting it, Isabella for consenting to it, and Mariana for carrying it out. Most readers feel it to be in no wise consonant with<sup>7</sup> the refinement of the sweet swan of Avon.

Angelo has condemned Claudio to death because, under a de praesenti contract, he has consummated marriage. The Duke appears to agree with Angelo's severe sentence since he neither joins the Provost in his sentiments (II.iii.13-15) nor gives Claudio to understand that he is to die for a caprice of the deputy. Yet, when Isabella's chastity is threatened and Angelo revealed

as corrupt, the Duke suggests that Mariana and Angelo commit a more serious offence than the one for which Claudio is to lose his head. Claudio will be punished "for getting Madam Julietta with child" (I.ii.66) even though their "true contract," a sponsalia per verba de praesenti, was legally binding. However, in the eyes of the church the couple had committed a deadly sin. Isabella's judgment of the act as "a vice that most I do abhor" (II.ii.29) is to be understood as made by a young girl totally committed--at that point in her life--to the teachings of the church. As far as she is concerned, physical union is a "vice" unless achieved within the bounds of holy matrimony.

So many far-reaching implications for an interpretation of Measure for Measure are connected with this question of the marriage contracts--the propriety and legality of the Duke's substitution scheme, as Lawrence points out, involves the Duke, Isabella, Mariana, and Shakespeare--that an examination of past assessments of the "bed-trick" seems in order. By far in the minority are those critics who find the whole business distasteful. Quiller-Couch disapproves without further discussion when he looks at Isabella. He says

only:

To put it nakedly, she is all for saving her own soul, and she saves it by turning, of a sudden, into a bare procuress.<sup>8</sup>

Consequently, by implication, the Duke is seen as a procurer. The entire play does not come off well under Quiller-Couch's scrutiny and his strong words are not surprising. Wilson Knight, however, who explicated the play enthusiastically in the light of pertinent Bible passages, thought the assignation between Mariana and Angelo also "illicit." He generally disapproves of Isabella and writes that "she readily involves Mariana in illicit love" because her own chastity is, to her, of "universal importance."<sup>9</sup> Yet Isabella agrees to the scheme at the behest of the Duke whom Knight sees as "the prophet of an enlightened ethic."<sup>10</sup> This contradiction in a highly influential essay points up the difficulties which have dogged commentators regarding the Mariana episode.

Those critics who see Measure for Measure as a parable of atonement, find nothing objectionable in the substitution. On the contrary

Mariana's laying down of her body is as the sowing of a tithe. It makes for an atonement in several senses: it fulfils the 'promise of

satisfaction' (the phrase is Shakespeare's at the end of Act III.sc.i.) exacted by the Adversary; it accomplishes her own physical at-one-ment with her estranged husband; and it makes possible the eventual reconciliation between the Prince and his (spiritually) estranged people.<sup>11</sup>

R. W. Battenhouse wrote his article in 1946. Twenty years later the substitution was still being interpreted as echoing "the pivotal event in the mystery cycle."<sup>12</sup> But how did those critics react who saw the bed-trick neither as "the greatest scandal about Measure for Measure"<sup>13</sup> nor as an reenactment of Christ's sacrifice for man?

Forty years ago W. W. Lawrence declared firmly that "...Mariana and her adviser are in no wise culpable, nor is Isabella herself."<sup>14</sup> He pointed out that Mariana and Angelo had been affianced and that "Such a betrothal as Mariana's was held in Elizabethan days to have much the binding force of the complete marriage ceremony, and to confer marital rights."<sup>15</sup> He referred to Claudio's contract with Juliet as being of the same kind.<sup>16</sup> In 1950 D. P. Harding published a long and informative article about "Elizabethan Betrothals and 'Measure for Measure.'"<sup>17</sup> In it he supported, extensively documented, Lawrence's contention that Mariana and Angelo were united by the same bond which existed between Juliet and Claudio as far as the "purely legal implications" are concerned.<sup>18</sup>

Harding, however, shows evidence that from the church's point of view both acts of cohabitation constituted a "serious wrong-doing" of which neither the Duke, Isabella, or "their pawn Mariana" seem to be aware.<sup>19</sup> He substantiates his claim that the union of Mariana and Angelo was to be considered as sinful as that of Juliet and Claudio carefully. Isabella's inconsistency in agreeing to the one and to find the other abhorrent "exactly mirrors a national inconsistency"<sup>20</sup> which had arisen from a confusion between the legal and moral implications of the sponsalia per verba de praesenti. Such a contract, says Harding, existed between the partners of each couple.

Harding's assessment of the bed-trick as merely legalizing a de praesenti contract persisted until Ernest Schanzer introduced yet another element into the substitution debate.<sup>21</sup> This concerned the nature of the contract between Mariana and Angelo. Schanzer explains that the couple was affianced according to a sponsalia per verba de futuro in which the parties promise each other to marry at a future date. A de praesenti contract could not be broken, a de futuro one could be dissolved. Should, however, cohabitation take place while couples were promised to each other under either form of spousal, they were legally man and wife.<sup>22</sup>

When the friar-Duke acquaints Isabella with his proposal to send Mariana to Angelo, he describes their former relationship as follows:

She should this Angelo have married: was  
 affianced to her oath, and the nuptial  
 appointed. Between which time of the  
 contract and limit of the solemnity, her  
 brother Frederick was wracked at sea,  
 having in that perished vessel the dowry  
 of his sister. There she lost...with both,  
 her combinate husband, this well-seeming  
 Angelo. ...[He] swallowed his vows whole,  
 pretending in her discoveries of dis-  
 honour:... III.i.213-227

Angelo corroborates the account when he is brought to justice:

My lord, I must confess I know this woman;  
 And five years since, there was some speech of  
 marriage  
 Betwixt myself and her; which was broke off,  
 Partly for that her promised proportions  
 Came short of composition; but in chief  
 For that her reputation was disvalu'd  
 In levity:... V.i.215-221

The Duke therefore knew the exact circumstances of the dissolution of the contract. Yet he assures Isabella, even before he has made his plan known to her, that she "may most uprighteously do a poor wronged lady a merited benefit."<sup>23</sup> (III.i.199-200) He also reassures Mariana who had not voiced the slightest objection to the proposal. When she returns with Isabella, having been informed of the plan's details,

she is advised:

Little have you to say  
When you depart from him, but, soft and low,  
'Remember now my brother.' IV.i.68-70

Mariana replies firmly: "Fear me not." The friar-Duke seizes upon the word "fear" and--probably to the consternation of Mariana--sanctions the plot thus:

Nor, gentle daughter, fear you not at all.  
He is your husband on a pre-contract:  
To bring you thus together 'tis no sin,  
Sith that the justice of your title to him  
Doth flourish the deceit. IV.i.71-75

He does not say that her "title" to him justifies the deceit; the "pre-contract" embellishes the deception.<sup>24</sup> That, indeed, some veneer is appropriate is indicated when we hear the Duke later in prison. He is waiting for a pardon for Claudio from Angelo. A messenger has just delivered a note which the Provost is reading to himself. The Duke now describes the bringing together of Angelo and Mariana as "sin":

This is [Claudio's] pardon, purchased by such sin  
For which the pardoner himself is in. IV.ii.106-7

Even though the Duke and Angelo agree in their accounts of the reasons for the dissolution of the agreement to marry, they differ regarding its seriousness. The Duke says that Mariana "was affianced to her

oath." (III.i.213-214)<sup>25</sup> Angelo claims that "there was some speech of marriage Betwixt myself and her." (V.i.216-217) Schanzer believes that the Duke has heard about the betrothal from Mariana "in his role of Friar confessor."<sup>26</sup> This assumption, however, seems to invalidate much of Schanzer's argument regarding the binding legality of the agreement which rests on the repeated assertions by Mariana and the Duke that vows had been exchanged and the contract "never been dissolved."<sup>27</sup> Mariana, crying for five years after Angelo, is not a reliable source of information. Furthermore, had a sworn spousal existed of the kind Schanzer supposes, she had recourse to the law. Angelo was entitled to break the contract when it became apparent that the dowry had been lost. He specifically states "that her promised proportions Came short of disposition." (V.i.218-9)<sup>28</sup> Whether Angelo had any right to claim that Mariana's "reputation was disvalu'd In levity," (V.i.220-21) or to pretend, as the Duke puts it, "discoveries of dishonour," (III.i.227) we cannot assess. The fact is, however, that "lack of public decency" was a serious enough shortcoming to constitute a legal impediment to marriage.<sup>29</sup>

It seems evident that the spousal between Mariana and Angelo had been dissolved. Either was free to marry someone else. It is not true to say, as R. W.



Chambers does, "that, according to Elizabethan ideas Angelo and Mariana are...man and wife."<sup>30</sup> If the sponsalia per verba de futuro had indeed been that binding, no legal provisions for a dissolution would have existed. Had Shakespeare wanted us to believe that it was desertion of a wife, he could have made Mariana a legally wed woman as he made Helena one in All's Well. In that play Helena and Bertram are married publicly; they are man and wife unconditionally. Helena's going to Bertram's bed instead of the expected Diana is justified because she is his wife. Mariana has no status other than that of spinster.<sup>31</sup>

Shakespeare's audience must have been, for the most part, familiar with the implications of the relationships between the couples in Measure for Measure. Not only the Puritans but the Brownists were trying to bring reforms to the laws governing the relations between the sexes. Chiefly, of course, this concerned the matter of civil marriages as against those solemnized by the church and also the liberalization of divorce provisions. In 1584 Brown had returned to England and began to espouse those principles laid down in his book The life and manner of true Christians. The right to dissolve a spousal de futuro upon "some laweful vnmeetnes and disliking

eche of the other" was expressly affirmed.<sup>32</sup> Twentieth century reservations to accept the Duke's proposal, Isabella's complicity, and Mariana's ready assent are therefore not misplaced. R. W. Chambers has censured critics for objecting to the bed-trick by asking: "But is that the sixteenth-century attitude?"<sup>33</sup> It seems that the notion that each party in an engagement has the right to break the promise existed then as now.

Before returning to the legality of the Duke's substitution scheme, one more approach to this contentious matter deserves mention. Some commentators have viewed the bed-trick as necessary to the plot. This line of argument, however, presents new problems for an interpretation of the play as a whole unless the substitution is dealt with correspondingly with regard to the characters. Thus W. W. Lawrence says that the "reasons for its [the bed-trick] insertion are clear. The virtue of Isabella is thus preserved, and the necessity of her forced marriage to the villain avoided."<sup>34</sup> Kenneth Muir in his source study writes:

Shakespeare, then, had to find a suitable substitute for Isabella. It had to be someone who loved Angelo and had some right to his bed. What better choice than someone to whom Angelo had been betrothed, and whom he had rejected for some reason appropriate to his character and to the theme of the play?<sup>35</sup>

E. Schanzer sees the necessity for the inclusion of the scheme thus:

...[Shakespeare's] desire to make us question Isabella's choice and to turn Measure for Measure into a problem play, demanded that she should persist in her refusal, and therefore a substitute had to be found if Angelo was fully to act out his villainy and yet a happy ending was to be contrived.<sup>36</sup>

The question arises whether the bed-trick was introduced by Shakespeare for the above reasons.<sup>37</sup> Schanzer says quite rightly: "I do not believe that, had it suited his dramatic conception, Shakespeare would have hesitated to let Isabel follow Cassandra's course."<sup>38</sup> (In Whetstone's play Cassandra keeps the assignation herself, marries her violator, and begs, together with her brother whose life has been saved, for her husband's reprieve from the block.)

Two questions, it seems to me, must be asked. Did Shakespeare deviate from his source because he wished to leave Isabella untainted or because it was necessary for the theme of the play (which turns on the character of the ruler) to taint the Duke? Should an audience, then, not explain away but recognize that the Duke "pimps for Mariana?"<sup>39</sup> The distinction to be drawn, I think, is between Shakespeare who altered the source by introducing the substitute maid and Shakespeare who

created a Duke who justifies a scheme which is patently illicit. It is not "Shakespeare" who "emphasizes the legality of the pre-contract,"<sup>40</sup> it is the Duke.

Between Mariana and Angelo exists no contract. Yet Mariana receives assurance from the Duke regarding the moral as well as legal justification of the substitution. (IV.i.72-75) The point is not that any de futuro contract became immediately as binding as a public marriage vow should cohabitation take place, but that Angelo had disavowed a long time ago any intention of marrying Mariana in the future. The Duke's proposal is also unlawful because the all-important consent cannot be assumed for both parties. Even after cohabitation has taken place, technically Mariana would still not be regarded as Angelo's wife:

In strictness of law all that was essential was this physical union accompanied by the intent to be thenceforth husband and wife.<sup>41</sup>

The primary requirement, it was pointed out, is the internal consent of the will. The union is effected by the act of consent. Roman law had formulated the truth with precision in the saying: Nuptias non concubitus sed consensus facit. But consent is an act of the will. A pretended consent can only effect a pretended marriage.<sup>42</sup>

Mariana wants a husband, Isabella wishes to preserve her honour and save her brother, but why does the Duke

involve himself in an illegal scheme?

I believe that we can see the dramatic and thematic necessity for the substitution of Mariana for Isabella when we acknowledge its unorthodoxy. Instead of trying to defend the Duke's bed-trick proposal, it should be seen for what it is: an illegal measure knowingly employed by the Duke. Only thus can the inquiry into the nature of power be understood. Angelo uses worldly power to force Isabella to give in to his designs. The Duke uses ecclesiastical "power" to reassure the women of the legality of an illegal act which, if carried out, will unmask Angelo. Power has changed purpose. Angelo uses his power to corrupt ends; the Duke uses his to good. It is no longer a matter of power per se--"Mortality and mercy in Vienna Live in thy tongue and heart"--but to what purposes power is used. The ruler beneath the friar's robes uses his power to avoid suffering for Isabella, save a human life, and to punish Angelo's coldhearted treatment of Mariana. Angelo has the law on his side; the law, in this case, is power. He condemns Claudio, and we know that he is right; laws must be enforced. Yet Isabella has a right to keep her chastity, Claudio has a right to stay alive, and Mariana has a right to happiness.

## II

The Duke, so averse to action for almost two decades, takes initiative to right a number of wrongs. His final dispensation of justice and clemency in his legitimate role of ruler in the fifth act does not come as a surprise. Isabella also begins to emerge from her withdrawal from reality and to see that absolute standards will not serve in certain circumstances. Her ready acceptance of the Duke's scheme to send Mariana to Angelo's bed stems partly from her desire, of course, to remain chaste and to save her brother, but also from her genuine compassion for the deserted and unhappy Mariana. She begins to gain insight when she says: "I have spirit to do anything that appears not foul in the truth of my spirit." (III.i.205-7) She realizes that not all situations in life can be approached or solved with a set of absolute ideals. In the last act she accepts human frailty and pleads for the life of Mariana's husband by asking that the circumstances be taken into account:

Look, if it please you, on this man condemn'd  
 As if my brother liv'd. I partly think  
 A due sincerity govern'd his deeds  
 Till he did look on me. V.i.442-445

The Duke has within a short space of time bethought himself a broken engagement between Mariana and Angelo five years ago, recognized and accepted the corruption of his deputy, and devised a plan by which the dilemma he just witnessed may be resolved. He has become concerned and is not afraid to act. True, he is in a monk's disguise and does not have to fear slander since he is neither Duke nor friar. But as far as a character on the stage can change, he changes in the sense that as an individual he decides to commit himself to action. This step is necessary if his public action later as true ruler is to be credible to his subjects. In the great confrontation between brother and sister neither evidence nor legal cause is brought forth which would convince a court that Claudio is condemned without justification. The Duke overhears nothing that would suggest extenuating circumstances. Passions rise over an issue quite removed from Claudio's legal case: can a sister be expected to buy her brother's life with her body and, as she believes, damnation of her soul? Yet the Duke decides in his hiding place that Claudio shall live. Despite his own impressive admonition to face death without regrets for this life, despite his conspicuous silence so far on matters of equity or mercy, he decides that Claudio shall be saved.

The Duke takes the burden for the deliverance of Claudio from Isabella's conscience. He has to commit a sin in the eyes of the church to do so. He, in contrast to Isabella, has no doubts regarding the state of his soul even though a ruler also is accountable to God. Angelo had tried to persuade Isabella to buy her brother's life with the argument that "our compell'd sins stand more for number than for accompt." (II.iv.57-8) Claudio also tried to convince his sister that sins committed under compulsion and to a good end are forgiven:

What sin you do to save a brother's life,  
Nature dispenses with the deed so far  
That it becomes a virtue. III.i.132-4

The Duke, who is now in the same predicament, does not hesitate. He is, as it were, in Isabella's position. He has to prostitute his honour in the sense that he is bawd to Mariana. Isabella would have been forgiven because

What we do against our wills, or constrainedly,  
we are not properly said to do it, because the  
motive cause of doing it is not in ourselves,  
but carrieth us, as if the wind should drive a  
feather in the air, we no whit furthering that  
whereby we are driven. In such cases there-  
fore the evil which is done moveth compassion;  
men are pitied for it, as being rather miserable  
in such respect than culpable.<sup>43</sup>



The Duke is not constrained to act against his will; he knows what he proposes. It is the act of a father who wants to keep his children from harm. And he is, in fact, the father of his people:

To fathers within their private families Nature hath given a supreme power; for which cause we see throughout the world even from the foundation thereof, all men have ever been taken as lords and lawful kings in their own houses. ...It is no improbable opinion therefore which the arch-philosopher was of, that as the chiefest person in every household was always as it were a king, so when numbers of households joined themselves in civil society together, kings were the first kind of governors amongst them. Which is also (as it seemeth) the reason why the name of Father continued still in them, who of fathers were made rulers....<sup>44</sup>

By deciding to act, Vincentio has decided to keep order in his dukedom. His wrongdoing will not fall heavily into the scale since

...that which we do being evil, is notwithstanding by so much more pardonable, by how much the exigence of so doing or the difficulty of doing otherwise is greater; unless this necessity or difficulty have originally risen from ourselves.<sup>45</sup>

Only Angelo commits a wrong for which there can be no excuse.

The Duke seems inclined to be pessimistic about man. He is therefore not surprised when Angelo does

not fulfill the expectations warranted by what he seemed in the eyes of the world. Acquainted through Isabella with his substitute's proposed misuse of power, he comments on this discovery: "but that frailty hath examples for his failing, I should wonder at Angelo."  
(III.i.185-186)

The Duke's power must now be put to the purpose of governing, to the purpose of bringing justice to Vienna, which will involve the unmasking of his deputy. Authority changed Angelo's purpose because it gave him power to impose his will upon Isabella for his own ends. Angelo has proven frail. Ironically, Vincentio can only right the situation by manipulating human frailty and "falling" in the process himself. He will use "craft" instead of statecraft "against vice."

NOTES to Chapter III

- 1 Problem Plays, p. 29.
- 2 How convincingly the Duke acts as if he were in control of situations emerges from the following comments: "The more-than-Prospero of the play, it is the Duke who initiates and controls the experimental demonstration--the controlled experiment--that forms the action." F. R. Leavis, p. 159. "[Shakespeare] made the Duke...a sort of stage director, who because of his power and wisdom can start and control the action as though from the wings. . . . it is clear that the Duke is a figure of Shakespeare himself." F. Fergusson, pp. 78, 85. "[The Duke] emerges in Act III.i. to dominate the action. Thereafter, he is...deliberately ordering events." A. Caputi, p. 94. "...an outsider [is placed] in the play itself: the detached, rather aloof Duke of Vienna, who observes, controls, and comments on the actions of other characters." D. L. Stevenson, p. 13. "The Duke's plotting...is strategic, not tactical. He has conceived a whole, organic design, a single action, to develop which he becomes involved in the tactics of the moment." T. Eagleton, p. 91, p. 89. See also J. V. Curry, p. 64 and William B. Bache, 'Measure for Measure as Dialectical Art (Lafayette, Ind., 1969), p. 61.
- 3 See my earlier note, p. 68 n. 11.
- 4 "...what difference is betwixt extreame tyrannie, delighting to destroy all mankinde; and extreame slacknesse of punishment, permitting euery man to tyrannize ouer his companion?" James I, "Basilikon Doron," Works, p. 38.
- 5 "Regarding the sins revealed to him in sacramental confession, the priest is bound to inviolable secrecy. From this obligation he cannot be excused whether to save his own life or good name, to save

the life of another, to further the ends of human justice, or to avert any public calamity." "Penance --Seal of Confession," Catholic Encyclopedia.

- 6 W. W. Lawrence, "'Meas.' and Lucio," p. 450.
- 7 W. W. Lawrence, Problem Comedies, p. 94.
- 8 "Introduction," p. xxx.
- 9 Wheel, p. 93.
- 10 Ibid., p. 74.
- 11 R. W. Battenhouse, p. 1038.  
The critic R. M. Frye, trained in theology like Battenhouse, write à propos this statement that Mariana is made "perhaps the most droll of all the Christ-analogues." Shakespeare and Christian Doctrine, p. 36.
- 12 "If the substitution of Mariana for Isabella, an action which saves Angelo from sin and makes him eligible for redemption, may be regarded as a shadow of that great selfless and loving action which split the iron seams of time and flowered into eternity, that action which transcends the logic of time and hovers over all earthly actions, then one of the central events in Measure for Measure parallels the central event in the mystery cycle." W. B. Toole, p. 191.
- 13 A. P. Rossiter, p. 124.
- 14 W. W. Lawrence, Problem Comedies, p. 95.
- 15 Ibid., p. 95.

- 16 Ibid., p. 97. For the same opinion see Donald J. McGinn, "The Precise Angelo," Joseph Quincy Adams Memorial Studies (1948), p. 139.
- 17 JEGP, XLIX (1950), pp. 139-158.
- 18 Ibid., p. 141.
- 19 Ibid., p. 153.
- 20 Ibid., p. 156.
- 21 Here are some of the views current before Ernest Schanzer's article was published: Miss Lascelles's book, so thorough in every other aspect, has only this comment: "It seems clear that, in Measure for Measure, we are meant to approve not only of the Duke's strategem, but of Mariana's, and even of Isabel's, part in it; clear, also, that former censure of such behaviour--and of the dramatist's part in it--has been intemperate." P. 121. W. W. Lawrence, in his article, approves of this statement, p. 452. W. J. Roscelli incorporates D. P. Harding's conclusion into the following view of the bed-trick: "Mariana has been betrothed to Angelo by a de praesenti contract. All Isabella asks is that Mariana perform an act which, according to the mores of the secular world, it is her conjugal right to perform. The request is neither callous nor immoral. It involves a recognition that the ethical conduct of most men and women is regulated not by God and His church but by the standards of society and individual conscience." "Isabella, Sin and Civil Law," University of Kansas Review, XXVIII (1962), p. 227.
- 22 Ernest Schanzer, "The Marriage-Contracts in 'Measure for Measure,'" Shakespeare Survey, vol. 13 (1960), p. 86. Mr. Schanzer's interpretation of Mariana's engagement to Angelo seems now, at least concerning the "sworn spousal" part, generally accepted. The following critics have incorporated Schanzer's

interpretation into their writings: George L. Geckle, p. 5 (and his n. 10, p. 5); D. L. Stevenson, p. 55; J. W. Lever, pp. liii, liv; P. Alexander, p. 483.

23 Italics mine.

24 "embellish" or "adorn." (J. W. Lever's and E. Leisi's annotations.) The word definitely connotes "prettifying."

25 "She should this Angelo have married: was affianced to her oath,..." This is the Folio reading maintained by J. W. Lever. Lever points out that "most editors emend to 'to her by oath,' making Angelo the subjective of the sentence, 'She' a disjunctive, and 'should this Angelo' an inversion." I prefer the Folio version since it suggests that only Mariana considered herself bound by an oath.

26 Schanzer, "Marriage-Contracts," n. 19, p. 89.

27 "Had Angelo's contract been of this kind, conditional upon the receipt of Mariana's dowry, it would have lapsed automatically when her dowry was lost at sea. But we find that the contract has in fact never been dissolved, as the present tense used by the Duke and Mariana, 'he is your husband on a pre-contract', 'I am affianced this man's wife', makes clear. And we can understand why this should be so, in spite of Angelo's claim that it was

broke off,  
Partly for that her promised proportions  
Came short of composition, but in chief  
For that her reputation was disvalued  
In levity, (V.i.218-22)

when we realize that their bond was not that of a simple or conditional de futuro contract, which could be broken off against the wishes of one of the parties to it. Theirs were sponsalia iurata, sworn spousals, as we are told repeatedly: 'was affianced to her by oath' (III,i,222); 'This is the hand which, with a vow'd contract,/ Was fast

belock'd in thine' (V,i,209-10); 'I am affianced this man's wife as strongly / As words could make up vows' (V,i,227-8)." Unfortunately, Schanzer neglects to mention which edition of the play he is consulting. Ibid., p. 85.

- 28 "Certain specified grounds were held sufficient to justify a dissolution of the engagement. ...It was disputed whether a man might repudiate his bond, if when he formed the engagement his fiancée was wealthy, and subsequently became poor. The majority of doctors only allowed him to do so, if the dowry was expressly stipulated for in the contract of betrothal." [*Italics mine.*] G. H. Joyce, Christian Marriages, p. 93.  
J. W. Lever glosses: "218-21. Partly...levity/ Both reasons would provide valid grounds in law for dissolving a de futuro contract."  
"Spousals de futuro were merely promises made by or for two persons to marry some time in the future, deo volente, and might be broken for any just and reasonable cause by either party." Powell, p. 3.
- 29 Powell, p. 10. Also, it may be relevant to note that Mariana sends the singing boy away a) in the middle of the song, and b) telling him to "haste thee quick away" when the supposed friar approaches. (IV.i.7)
- 30 "'Meas.," p. 89.
- 31 That our intuitions are sometimes a better guide to appreciate such matters, is evident in Tillyard's comments on the substitution. He wrote in 1950: "It is, incidentally, because the folk-material is so differently spaced and blended in the two plays that the theme of the substitute bride is quite seemly in All's Well and is somehow rather shocking in Measure for Measure. In All's Well we have been habituated to the improbable...." P. 134.  
J. W. Lever finds the bed-trick as condonable in Measure for Measure as in All's Well: "By secular standards Mariana's plight fully condoned her deceiving of Angelo, just as the plight of Helena condoned the deception of Bertram." P. iv.

- 32 quoted in Powell, p. 45.
- 33 "'Meas.,'" p. 89.
- 34 Problem Comedies, p. 91.
- 35 Sources, p. 106.
- 36 Problem Plays, p. 109.
- 37 See also R. M. Smith, p. 214.
- 38 Problem Plays, p. 109.
- 39 Nevill Coghill comments: "...we complain...that [the Duke] pimps for Mariana, and so on. What is important to notice in the 'bed-trick' (as it has been called) is not what happens to Mariana, but what happens to Angelo." P. 22.
- 40 McGinn, p. 135.
- 41 Pollock and Maitland, p. 368.
- 42 Joyce, pp. 67-68.
- 43 Richard Hooker, I., ix. 1. Everman's, p. 186.
- 44 Ibid., I., x. 4. P. 191.
- 45 Ibid., I., ix. 1. P. 186.  
Virgil Whitaker, in Shakespeare's Use of Learning, postulates "that Richard Hooker was to a considerable extent responsible not only for the thought but also for the very structure of some of Shakespeare's greatest plays. ...Shakespeare demonstrably knew



Hooker." (San Marino, Calif., 1953), p. 206. I am convinced that Shakespeare meant the Duke to break the law. Since Hooker often merely formulates and elucidates the commonplace, it is quite possible that the Duke's acting under duress would have been recognized as an extenuating circumstance by the audience. Angelo is the only villain in the play.

#### Chapter IV: "HE WHO THE SWORD OF HEAVEN WILL BEAR"

As the play progresses, it becomes more and more evident that the Duke is beginning to act as ruler, that he begins to deal with conditions as he finds them. While still in prison as a spiritual advisor, Vincentio is witness to the moral corruption pervasive in Vienna. He comes in immediate contact with a pimp, a slandering reprobate, and a brothelkeeper "of eleven years' continuance." (III.ii.190) The bawd Pompey is brought to prison by Elbow. Even this minor police official comments on the degradation possible when laws are not enacted. He puts the case against lechery from a moral as well as legal point of view:

Nay, if there be no remedy for it, but that  
you will needs buy and sell men and women  
like beasts, we shall have the world drink  
brown and white bastard. III.ii.1-4

The disguised Duke exclaims: "O heavens, what stuff is here!" The bawd attempts to defend himself by telling the friar that things are out of order since lechery is being put down but usury goes unpunished. This is the same kind of reasoning, albeit on a less exalted plane, with which both Isabella and Escalus attempt to convince Angelo that Claudio should be pardoned. Because sinners

are in the world but not all sinners can be caught and punished, Claudio should not be singled out. Pompey's argument proceeds along the same lines: because usurers are allowed to prosper, the same immunity from the law ought to be granted to pimps. The friar-Duke, however, is not convinced by the speciousness of the defense and reproves Pompey severely:

Fie, sirrah, a bawd, a wicked bawd;  
 The evil that thou causest to be done,  
 That is thy means to live. ...Say to thyself,  
 From their abominable and beastly touches  
 I drink, I eat, array myself, and live.  
 Canst thou believe thy living is a life,  
 So stinkingly depending? III.ii.18-26

The bawd provides the opportunity for the "abominable and beastly touches" and thus, through exploitation of human weakness, enriches himself. Pompey's own life is debased by his reliance on the baseness of others. The Duke, probably aware that physical punishment avails little if the heart is still disposed to sin, counsels Pompey: "Go mend, go mend." Pompey's attempt to vindicate his "profession," is countered with:

Correction and instruction must both work  
 Ere this rude beast will profit. III.ii.31-32

If Pompey is the representative from the common people to show the effects of slack rule, Lucio, a gentleman, demonstrates that neither noble birth nor quick intelligence are safeguards against licentious

behaviour. He personifies defiance of the law and scorn for ordered behaviour. He follows his impulses of the moment, mindful only of his own enjoyment and interests. In the preceding scene the Duke came face to face with moral dilemmas which made him realize that life is intensely valuable and yet worth nothing if it is bought with one's honour. Now he meets those who, free from ethical considerations, live for the moment like "rude beasts." When Lucio enters, he is immediately greeted by Pompey as a possible source of bail money. Lucio, his bright and entertaining prattle notwithstanding, seems quite without redeeming qualities. He blithely discusses Pompey's whore-mistress, admits that he informed on Pompey, and despite the use he made of Pompey in the past, refuses to stand bail for him. Lucio dismisses Pompey like a beast; he tells him to "Go to kennel." (III.ii.82) Once Pompey is gone, Lucio turns his attentions to the friar and asks: "What news, friar, of the Duke?"

The Friar, having assured Lucio that he knows nothing of the Duke's whereabouts, then listens with almost morbid fascination to a long list of vices imputed to the absent ruler. The temporary abdication of the head of government is called "a mad, fantastical

trick." (III.ii.89) The Duke's "steal[ing] from the state" (89-90) is deplored because it allows the deputy "for the rebellion of a codpiece to take away the life of a man." (110-111) The Duke, Lucio says, would have overlooked and even approved such goings-on since "he knew the service" and "Had some feeling for the sport." (115-116) Within the next few minutes the Duke listens to an "appraisal" of himself as one who visits prostitutes, drinks excessively, is without substance or wisdom, "would have dark deeds darkly answered," (171) and disobeys the Church by eating "mutton on Friday." (175)

Lucio's vilification of the man in authority and not of authority itself is, of course, logical in its own way. If laws in Vienna are suddenly rigorously enforced after a long period of lenient application or none at all, and if this sudden pressure coincides with the appointment of a new man as ruler, the only conclusion to be drawn is Lucio's: a city is not governed by application of impartial laws but by the whims of partial men. Having imputed former leniency to the Duke's lax morals, Lucio now attributes Angelo's severity in calling sexual offenders to account also to a personal shortcoming. Angelo is "Something too crabbed that way." (95) The deputy, according to Lucio, was either spawned by a sea-maid or "begot between two stock

fishes." (104-105) The implication is that Angelo is not human. He is so much the opposite of a warm-blooded man that "his urine is congealed ice." (106-107) Having designated leniency as well as strictness as mere foibles of individual men, Lucio proceeds to make small of what the law condemns. He "limits sex to its harmless mechanics"<sup>1</sup> and thereby attempts, presumably, to make light of the underlying assumption of all laws, namely that "...the will of man [is] inwardly obstinate, rebellious and averse from all obedience unto the sacred laws of his nature."<sup>2</sup> Claudio's act of love is described as "rebellion of a codpiece," (111) "filling a bottle with a tun-dish," (166) and "untrussing." (173) Lucio's frame of reference seems confined to, and defined by, Mistress Overdone's world. That world, however, which encourages "beastly touches," is not civil society.

It has been much debated whether Lucio knows that this friar is the Duke in disguise or not.<sup>3</sup> I do not think that this is a crucial issue for the play as a whole. Lucio is important for two reasons, both closely related to an inquiry into the nature of administrative power. On the one hand his behaviour signifies Vienna's sexual rottenness which has been allowed to flourish under the Duke's lenient rule. On the other, Lucio's slander of the authority figures, be they lenient or

harsh, not only exposes the dangers inherent in rule by personal whim rather than impersonal laws but also provides an additional lesson for the Duke. Vincentio learns from Lucio--a man who exposes himself continuously to venereal disease, is the familiar of pimps and prostitutes, and leaves his child in the care of a brothel-keeper--that

No might nor greatness in mortality  
 Can censure 'scape. Back-wounding calumny  
 The whitest virtue strikes. What king so strong  
 Can tie the gall up in the slanderous tongue?  
 III.ii.179-182

The Duke's confrontations with Lucio raise, in as concrete a manner as possible, the matter of slander. It is ironic that the Duke, who expressly wished to avoid being subject to slander, is now reviled to his face. Lucio's chatter, designed to deprive the law and those who enforce it of credibility, is understandable enough. He belongs, and freely admits this, to the incontinent and has to fear stricter measures. But Lucio also, at the same time, gives substance to the Duke's fear of slander. Vincentio's reason for his temporary absence, that his substitute "may in th' ambush of my name strike home, And yet my nature never in the fight To do in slander," (I.iii.41-43) seems now justified. Had he, instead of Angelo, chosen to impose

harsh penalties after fourteen years of permissiveness, tongues like Lucio's would have easily spread resentment against the ruler and against the state. James I recognized that "the people, who seeth but the outward part, will euer iudge..." a public figure:

It is a trew old saying, That a King is as one set on a stage, whose smallest actions and gestures, all the people gazingly doe behold: and therefore although a King be neuer so precise in the discharging of his Office, the people, who seeth but the outward part, will euer iudge of the substance, by the circumstances; and according to the outward appearance, if his behaiour bee light or dissolute, will conceiue ~~pre~~-occupied conceits of the Kings inward intention: which although with time, (the trier of all trewth,) it will euanish, by the euidence of the contrary effects, yet interim patitur iustus; and ~~pre~~judged conceits will, in the meane time, breed contempt, the mother of rebellion and disorder."<sup>4</sup>

Vincentio will have to reconcile himself to the fact that delinquents will always attach authority for their own purposes and that they will do so by attacking the individual in power who exercises authority. The ruler is identified with the law, and, the law is identified with the ruler. Lucio's reasoning is by no means perverse. The laws, "Dead to infliction, to themselves are dead," (I.iii.28) and only an agent of the law can revive them. The man in office is the symbol of repression to those who wish to live unfettered by the demands of society, and he is the symbol of order to



those who recognize "man to be inwardly obstinate [and] rebellious." The Duke must learn that he is not opposed as Vincentio, the man, but as the ruler, an institution.

That Vincentio perceives that to be ruler is to play a necessary role is shown in his respective reactions to Lucio's accusations. The two encounters between the disguised ruler and the "fantastic" differ in that during the first one (III.ii.83-178) the Duke is visibly disturbed by what he hears and tries in vain to curb Lucio's exaggerated tales of the absent sovereign. Anxiously he asks Escalus for a description of the absent Duke's "disposition" as well as "What pleasure [he] was given to." (III.ii.225; 228) The second skirmish (IV.iii.150-177) finds a much calmer Vincentio. He counters coolly by referring Lucio to the day when the Duke will return and by suggesting that then will be the time and place to reveal what he knows. By this time the Duke has, of course, already determined to bring open justice to everyone, and in his new-found self-confidence he can make short shrift of the "burr [that] shall stick." (IV.iii.177)

It is not only Lucio who "sticks" like a burr in person to the friar-Duke; his remarks also "stick" in

an audience's mind. For this reason he presents a critical problem which can never be wholly resolved. Like any detractor's abuse directed against authority, Lucio's insults are "matter and impertinency mix'd." While Lucio is, of course, a slanderer, a "fantastic," "one who has fanciful ideas or indulges in wild notions,"<sup>5</sup> the audience is asked to lend credence to at least some of his accusations.<sup>6</sup> For instance, in his appeal to Isabella to intercede with the deputy on her brother's behalf (I.iv.49-71), Lucio, with uncharacteristic seriousness, reports the current situation in Vienna. While telling the novice that the Duke has left town, he mentions that he is close to "those that know the very nerves of state." (53) To assume, therefore, that Lucio is privy to at least some of the Duke's comings and goings seems justified. Similarly, when Lucio speaks of Angelo as

...a man whose blood  
Is very snow-broth; one who never feels  
The wanton stings and motions of the sense;  
I.iv.57-59

and as one who has been spawned by a sea-maid (III.ii.104), he must be believed. Were his description of Angelo discounted, the Duke's own assessment of the deputy as a man who "is precise; ...scarce confesses That his blood flows;" (I.iii.50-52) would have to be disregarded also.

Moreover, an audience recognizes that Lucio is simply stating a fact when he says that eating and drinking will have to be outlawed in order to make everyone chaste. (III.ii.98-99)

At the same time Lucio's "Back-wounding calumny" (III.ii.180) cannot be given much credit since his tendency to play havoc with people's reputations is well documented long before he slanders the Duke. Early in the play Lucio is seen bantering with some acquaintances. The conversation revolves rather tediously around the subject of the pox. At one point one of the gentlemen turns irritably on Lucio: "Thou art always figuring diseases in me; but thou art full of error; I am sound." (I.ii.49-50) Shortly thereafter Lucio admits that his malicious gossip is a form of "fooling." (I.ii.64) When he goes to Isabella to persuade her to plead for her brother's life, he tells her that it is his habit "to jest Tongue far from heart." (I.iv.32-33) Indeed, Lucio seems to expect some kind of sanction for his role as scandal-monger. When the Duke, in his proper function, calls him to account for "slandering a prince," Lucio offers as excuse that he "spoke it but according to the trick." (V.i.502)

R. Lawson, who carefully documents the prototype for Lucio in Elizabethan life, finds him to have "no

influence upon the course of the action" in the last three acts.<sup>7</sup> But Lucio has no counterpart in Shakespeare's possible sources and it is therefore difficult to believe that he was given so much space only to provide "through his asininites, a farcial strain to an otherwise sombre comedy," and to furnish, "perhaps, a piquant, timely reference to King James' fear and hatred of detractors."<sup>8</sup> Lucio's function in the last three acts is to expose the consequences of slack rule by showing an individual grown accustomed to living without a social conscience and therefore contemptuous of any authority figure, and, also, to contribute to the making of a Duke. Lucio's slander provides one more link in the chain of events which changes the Duke's attitude toward his responsibility.<sup>9</sup> The Duke, like almost everyone else in the play, learns about himself, his responsibilities, and man.

The Duke's discovery that despite his precautions gossip flourishes and all sort of innuendo flows freely and rapidly from one of his subject's tongue is not quickly forgotten. While the friar-Duke waits for Isabella to acquaint Mariana with her part contrived to "scale" the corrupt deputy, he reflects on the perils of his position. He has been drawn into the affairs of his subjects, is trying to bring good out of ill, and generally involves himself despite his retiring dispo-

sition. Should it become common knowledge that the Duke arranged so delicate a matter as the substitution of Mariana for Isabella in his deputy's bed, there would be no end to slander. Despite the objections of editors and critics,<sup>10</sup> the Duke's lines seem perfectly in place at this point of the play:

O place and greatness! Millions of false eyes  
 Are stuck upon thee: volumes of report  
 Run with these false, and most contrarious quest  
 Upon thy doings: thousand escapes of wit  
 Make thee the father of their idle dream  
 And rack thee in their fancies. IV.i.60-65

Responsibility of power involves not being perturbed by slander. The ruler must realize that an attack on his person is made in all likelihood on the individual as the symbol of power. Vincentio shows in his soliloquy that he accepts slander as a consequence of being in "place and greatness."

When Lucio imputes to the Duke the sins of lechery and drunkenness, he raises the same issue Escalus and Isabella put before Angelo in trying to have Claudio treated leniently, namely that what any man, a ruler included, regards censoriously as vice or sin may be inherent in the nature of man. One lesson of the play is that however well intentioned law-enforcers are, they cannot escape from the world of law which they and the system which gives them authority have invoked.

At the same time, a society made up of Lucios, without respect for the integrity or reputation of other individuals and dedicated solely to the pursuit of their own pleasures, would result in anarchy and ultimately lead to what Richard Hooker so well described:

...the corruption of our nature being pre-supposed, we may not deny but that the Law of Nature doth now require of necessity some kind of regiment; so that to bring things unto the first course they were in, and utterly to take away all kind of public government in the world, were apparently to overturn the whole world.<sup>11</sup>

This the Duke comes to recognize in his encounter with Lucio.

The Duke's public reassumption of power in the final act is well prepared for. He decides to employ practical means to restore the society for which he is responsible and, significantly, makes that decision at the end of the third act. Act III begins with the Duke's "Be absolute for death" speech, disavowing either interest or value in individual life, and ends with his soliloquy on the duties of a ruler. Vincentio set out to see "If power change purpose" and now recognizes that the purpose of power is to apply "Craft against vice" (III.ii.270) if conditions make it necessary. Power has been misused by Angelo. This misuse with all its attending complications has awakened the Duke to his responsibilities.

His soliloquy is neither an "obscure piece of doggerel"<sup>12</sup> nor "choric."<sup>13</sup> Instead Vincentio formulates clearly not only the duties of a ruler but also his plan to exercise his authority. The Duke shares none of Angelo's certainty in being able to separate neatly the man and the office:

He who the sword of heaven will bear  
Should be as holy as severe:  
Pattern in himself to know,  
Grace to stand, and virtue, go:  
III.ii.254-257

Angelo is efficient as agent of justice because he sees the law as an abstraction which is applied impersonally by men. The moral quality of the men sitting in judgment does not, in his opinion, affect the passing of sentence:

I do not deny  
The jury passing on the prisoner's life  
May in the sworn twelve have a thief, or two,  
Guiltier than him they try. . . .  
What knows the laws  
That thieves do pass on thieves?  
II.i.17-23

The Duke, in contrast, sees the law as a binding force for everyone. Only those who are faultless in what they are asked to condemn are allowed to sit in judgment:

More nor less to others paying  
Than by self-offences weighing.  
Shame to him whose cruel striking  
Kills for faults of his own liking!  
III.ii.258-261

Since everyone is culpable no one has the right to find another guilty, however,

Liberty plucks Justice by the nose, . . .  
 When evil deeds have their permissive pass,  
 And not the punishment. I.iii.29; 38-39

James I counsels his son in the Basilikon Doron against the display of clemency since, in the long run, it benefits neither the king nor the subjects. While Vincentio must be faulted for lax rule rather than the extension of clemency in past years, the consequences seem to be the same in either case:

For if otherwise ye kyth [display, declare] your clemencie at the first, the offences would soone come to such heapes, and the contempt of you grow so great, that when ye would fall to punish, the number of them to be punished, would exceed the innocent; and yee would be troubled to resolute whom-at to begin: and against your nature would be compelled then to wracke many, whom the chastisement of few in the beginning might haue preserued.<sup>14</sup>

Without administering justice according to the letter of the law, the spirit of it--to put "needful bits and curbs to headstrong jades"--must prevail. Vincentio has learned that those who seem free from faults are only seemingly so. He knows now what "our seemers be." The Duke's final lines leave no doubt that he has decided to employ unusual means to achieve



desired ends, the re-establishment of an orderly Vienna:

Craft against vie I must apply.  
 With Angelo tonight shall lie  
 His old betrothed, but despised:  
 So disguise shall by th' disguised  
 Pay with falsehood false exacting,  
 And perform an old contracting.  
 III.ii.270-275

It is ironic that the Duke's disguise as friar will not only "perform an old contracting" between Angelo and Mariana but, more importantly, secure also "an old contracting" between the Duke and his subjects.

The events before the Duke's reassumption of authority are structured in such a way to expose Vincentio to social, legal, and moral irresponsibility. First there is the asocial Lucio who slanders the Duke. Then Vincentio learns that Angelo uses the law to do away with Claudio because he fears recrimination. Finally, the ruler comes face to face with Barnardine whose amorality makes him "Unfit to live or die!" (IV.iii.63) With each encounter another facet of the play's concerns is illuminated and the Duke drawn further into the affairs of men. It becomes somewhat tiresome to state again that the Duke cannot be seen as stage convention, deus ex machina, or puppet when one looks at these events, for instance. The Duke listens to Lucio, circumvents Angelo's order to execute Claudio, and feels qualms

about sending a man unprepared for death to the gallows. Shakespeare's sources show no precedent for any of these encounters. In Promos and Cassandra it is the governor's decision to have the brother of the violated girl executed, and the gaoler circumvents the order. In Epitia the execution is carried out. Cinthio's novella has no one resembling Barnardine and in Whetstone's play the "gayler" conveniently provides "A dead mans head, that suffered th' other day" at the right moment. The emphasis in Epitia is on the solomonic judgment of the king who is brought into the play at the end through the young girl's accusations against Iuriste. Whetstone seems to have been more concerned with injustice suffered by the poor, corruption among minor government officials, and Andrugio's acceptance of death to ensure his sister's happiness. Lucio has no counterpart in either of the possible sources. In neither play is the ruler seen as moving among his subjects or as constantly confronted with social, legal, or moral problems as in Measure for Measure.<sup>15</sup>

When the Duke visits the prison again, he answers the Provost's question after Claudio's fate with confidence: "There's some [comfort] in hope." (IV.ii.75) The Provost has doubts because Angelo is "a bitter deputy." Vincentio, however, defends the deputy's

decision-making because "his life is parallel'd Even with the stroke and line of his great justice." (77-78) He disagrees with the Provost's assessment of Angelo as being a severe man because the deputy practices what he desires to see in others:

...were he meal'd with that  
Which he corrects, then were he tyrannous;  
But this being so, he's just. IV.ii.81-83

So confident is the Duke that Angelo will adhere to the bargain, he greets a messenger's entry with: "And here comes Claudio's pardon." (99) The Duke hears instead that Angelo misuses his legal powers again, this time to circumvent discovery of the "deflower'd maid;...by an eminent body, that enforced The law against it!" (IV.iv.19-21)

Angelo, fearing that Claudio

Might in the times to come have ta'en revenge  
By so receiving a dishonour'd life  
With ransom of such shame, IV.iv.28-30

has issued the death warrant. Far from being in control of events, the Duke is forced to resort to more manipulation in order to save Claudio. In this scene the audience is shown how ineffectual Vincentio was as ruler. The Provost reads aloud the precise instructions for Claudio's death (which include that the dead man's head

be sent to the deputy) and those for the execution of another prisoner, Barnardine. When he is informed that Barnardine has spent nine years in prison, the friar Duke asks:

How came it that the absent Duke had not either delivered him to his liberty, or executed him?  
I have heard it was ever his manner to do so.

IV.ii.131-132

The Provost's answer gives a shattering picture of conditions under the "absent Duke" and testifies at the same time to the efficiency of Angelo's governorship:

His friends still wrought reprieves for him; and indeed, his fact till now in the government of Lord Angelo came not to an undoubtful proof.

IV.ii.133-135

What is more, Barnardine is guilty of murder and this, according to the Provost, is "not denied by himself." (137) The "friar" does not comment on the Duke's slovenly administration of justice. Instead he demands to know the spiritual state of this criminal.

Barnardine's attitude toward authority, be that authority secular or ecclesiastical, is one of total indifference. His conduct is an implicit comment on the fact that authority can only be exercised if man is willing to submit to those in his midst who have been given power to govern. Barnardine knows no fear

because he has dulled his senses. The Provost describes him as

A man that apprehends death no more dreadfully  
but as a drunken sleep; careless, reckless,  
and fearless of what's past, present, or to  
come: insensible of mortality, and desperately  
mortal. IV.ii.140-143

He is impervious to spiritual counsel; "He will hear none." (145) Worldly attempts to reform him are futile since Barnardine refuses to share the commonly accepted view--on which the deterrent value of punishment by restraint is based--that a prison is a place of ignominy. "He hath evermore had the liberty of the prison: give him leave to escape hence, he would not." (IV.ii.146-147)

The Duke is all too easily ready to send Barnardine to his execution. So far no one the friar-Duke counselled has questioned his authority or competence. When he encounters Barnardine, the limits of all authority are defined: authority not recognized and accepted is impotent. When Barnardine emphatically declares that he "will not consent to die this day. . . for any man's persuasion," (54;59) he serves notice that he considers himself his own man. However, he cannot be seen as a free and rebellious spirit who questions, implicitly or explicitly, the concept of authority. He is, after all, "Drunk many times a day, if not many days entirely

drunk." (IV.ii.145-148) When Barnardine refuses to have anyone determine his mode of life or the time of his death, he does so because he is in a drunken stupor and not because he objects consciously to the concept of control. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to assume that the Duke learns something from the encounter.

This is the nadir of the Duke's experiences among his subjects. Lucio has slandered him most viciously, the very thing the Duke tried to avoid. Angelo has decided to have Claudio executed, a move the friar-Duke sook to forestall by sending Mariana to the deputy's bed. Barnardine, a murderer, has been in prison for almost a decade without being brought to justice. Lucio shows the Duke the kind of person which flourishes when laws are not enforced. Angelo exemplifies that seeming virtue is no guaranty against corruption of character and that the law can serve basest ends. Barnardine's amorality is beyond any worldly or spiritual authority. At this point the ruler in Vincentio re-asserts himself. The Duke does not reveal himself yet. But the Provost's loyalty to the constituted authority and its orders makes it necessary that the friar-Duke produce his own "hand and seal." (IV.ii.191) He convinces the reluctant warden that Barnardine's head

instead of Claudio's must be sent to Angelo and that Claudio must be spared. He assures the Provost that "all difficulties are but easy when they are known." (204-5) Symbolically Vincentio has given notice that he will use his "hand and seal" from now on. The assertion of his worldly power to resolve the present difficulty is the beginning of the Duke's return to the life and functions of a ruler.

In connection with Vincentio's declaration of himself as authority in Vienna it has been said that thereby the play avoids the very issues it raises.<sup>16</sup> This is not true because the Duke resolves the issues in the final act, and thereby Shakespeare solves them in the play. It is not suggested that issues of this kind can be resolved in this manner outside the play. Art provides a clarification and deepening of experience; it does not attempt to provide a blueprint for the resolution of moral conflicts. To the kind of dilemma confronting Isabella and Claudio there can be no answer. Whether Isabella should yield her honour to pay for her brother's life, or whether Claudio should joyfully embrace death rather than have his sister submit to Angelo are moral questions which cannot be answered by Shakespeare or anyone else. Shakespeare took the problems

as far as he could. Isabella unequivocally decides to preserve her chastity and her brother decides equally firmly that, to avoid the unknown terrors of death, his sister should agree to Angelo's heinous offer.

The other issue which remains unresolved is the one on which centers, initially, the confrontation between the deputy and Isabella: the conflict between the need for law enforcement on the one hand, and the granting of mercy on the other. Again, each position is examined to the fullest. Isabella pleads:

Alas, alas!  
Why, all the souls that were, were forfeit once,  
And He that might the vantage best have took  
Found out the remedy. II.ii.72-75

E. M. W. Tillyard remarked à propos this passage that "it reveals and takes for granted the total Pauline theology of Christ abrogating the enslavement to the old law incurred through the defection of Adam."<sup>17</sup> But the issues of the play are fought out in this world. The mercy Isabella pleads for will in its end-effect lead to the same conditions the Duke had let prevail during his years of leniency. Isabella's entreaties, as Christian and as noble as they are, cannot be seen in isolation from the disgusting state of affairs in Vienna where prostitution, usury, deceit, perjury, murder, and other vices are rife.



Isabella's argument proceeds in the realm of the soul, in a realm where temporal law is irrelevant. Once the soul is redeemed through Christ's mercy, the soul lives again in an eternal state of innocence. Angelo's argument which rests entirely on the intimidating force of the law is made in terms of this world:

The law hath not been dead, though it hath slept:  
 Those many had not dar'd to do that evil  
 If the first that did th' edict infringe  
 Had answer'd for his deed. Now 'tis awake,  
 Takes note of what is done, and like a prophet  
 Looks in a glass that shows what future evils,  
 Either new, or by remissness new conceiv'd,  
 And so in progress to be hatch'd and born,  
 Are now to have no successive degrees,  
 But ere they live, to end. II.ii.91-100

Isabella does not plead for a fair treatment of her brother or ask to consider the circumstances--it is his first offence, he is very young, he intends to marry Juliet--nor does she point out that the particular crime Claudio is guilty of is not a premeditated act against society. Her plea is based on Christ's teachings in the Sermon of the Mount which, for all its high idealism, is not applicable in the administration of the affairs of a city.<sup>18</sup> Angelo knows that mercy extended in one case will set a precedent and make the law totally ineffectual. Therefore he prefers to set a precedent by punishing Claudio harshly. The law's potency will be re-confirmed and prevent crimes in the future. Both

positions, ultimately, are highly idealistic and do not take into account human passions which have a habit of sweeping aside both conciliatory and punitive injunctions.

Again, as in the case of the moral dilemma facing Claudio and Isabella, the conflict between the divine command to "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged"<sup>19</sup> and the need to impose restraint on man for the good of the community cannot be solved. Shakespeare gives each position the clearest and fullest expression, however.

The play establishes a definite point of view toward the issue entering the argument of severity against mercy, namely that concerning man's overweening pride regarding his own infallibility and his resulting arrogant severity in a position of authority. The self-righteous Angelo condemns himself by his action. Severity in a position of power is condemned implicitly by the Duke's equitable judgments in the trial scene and explicitly by Isabella's plea for Angelo's life. She no longer asks for mercy but offers legal grounds in Angelo's defense. The entire theme of the changing purpose of power is woven through the play, and the events which constitute the plot after II.ii. turn on the resolution of the proposition that power must be put to purposes consonant with the maintenance of an ordered society.

The Duke saves Claudio, has Mariana go to Angelo in Isabella's stead, determines thoroughly Angelo's guilt, and prepares for a public trial which will bring the Duke in his proper function together with the people of Vienna. The saving of life, the upholding of honour, the easing of suffering, and the judging of deeds has finally become important to the Duke.

NOTES to Chapter IV

- 1 D. L. Stevenson's phrase, p. 53.
- 2 R. Hooker, Of the Laws, I., x. 1. Everyman's, p. 188.
- 3 Christopher Spencer, while denying that Lucio recognizes the Duke, gives a fair account of the controversy and adds bibliographical information regarding the prevalence of the view that Lucio does know that he slanders the Duke. "Lucio and the Friar's Hood," English Language Notes, III (1965), 17-21. The most persuasively argued position contrary to C. Spencer's is N. Coghill's in "Comic Form in 'Measure for Measure,'" Shakespeare Survey, VIII (1955), 14-27.
- 4 "Basilikon Doron," in Works, p. 43.
- 5 "fantastic, n.," O. E. D.
- 6 A. W. Schlegel wrote that "at least" regarding the Duke's "singularities and whims [Lucio's slander] was not wholly without foundation." "'Measure for Measure,'" in Discussions of Shakespeare's Problem Comedies, ed. Robert Ornstein (Boston, 1961), p. 65.
- 7 R. Lawson, "Lucio, in 'Measure for Measure,'" English Studies, XIX (1937), p. 263.
- 8 Ibid., p. 264.
- 9 W. B. Bache, in a very recent study, (1969) says that by means of Lucio's vicious slander, "the Duke is given, a shocking view of himself and of his lordship...." 'Meas.' as Dialectical Art, p. 24.

- 10 J. W. Lever has devoted two pages of his Introduction to this problem. (xx-xxii) Kenneth Muir takes issue with Lever's arrangement of the soliloquy in the Arden Edition. He proposes instead to exchange the soliloquy IV.i.60-65 for the one at the end of Act III ("He who the sword..."). "The Duke's Soliloquies in 'Measure for Measure,'" Notes & Queries, n. s., XIII (1966), 135-136. That the monologue is too short to fill the time which is needed for Isabella to acquaint Mariana with the part she is to play need not disturb. The Duke may fall into contemplative silence.
- 11 Of the Laws, I., x. 4. Everyman's, p. 191.
- 12 William Empson, "Sense in 'Measure for Measure,'" (1951) in Discussions of Shakespeare's Problem Comedies, ed. Robert Ornstein (Boston, 1961), p. 108.
- 13 W. Empson, p. 108; C. Leech, p. 117.
- 14 Works, p. 20.
- 15 Geoffrey Bullough, Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, II (London, 1958). For a fuller discussion see J. W. Lever, pp. xxxvi-xliv.
- 16 A. P. Rossiter, p. 281; R. Ornstein, p. 21; M. Lascelles, p. 163.
- 17 The Elizabethan World Picture (London, 1963), p. 30.
- 18 Luke 6
- 19 Luke 6:37

## Chapter V: THE INTEGRATION

The resolution of Measure for Measure has elicited as many contradictory reactions as the other "problems" in the play. F. R. Leavis's comment, written thirty years ago, explains the profusion of opinions: "...what one makes of the ending of the play depends on what one makes of the Duke."<sup>1</sup> Leavis's own favorable view, based on his assessment of the Duke as a kind of Providence, is held by only a few critics.<sup>2</sup> By far the majority of commentators see the last Act either as a hasty gathering of dramatic threads on Shakespeare's part,<sup>3</sup> or as unsatisfactory when viewed in terms of the issues raised or the characters developed in the play.<sup>4</sup> However, the resolution is not only true to the conception of the figure of the Duke but also meaningful in terms of the theme of the play: an inquiry into the nature of power.

The purpose of power is to create or preserve an integrated society. The beginnings of this integration are illustrated through Vincentio in the last Act. At the beginning of the play the Duke had said that he does not like "to stage" himself to the people's eyes. His unwillingness to represent power to his subjects receives its most obvious expression when he withdraws under the

guise of a monk. When he breaks the law in arranging for Mariana to sleep with Angelo, he does so as ruler to prevent unwarranted suffering. Angelo, in contrast, breaks the law to satisfy his lust and to escape censure. Angelo violates legal and ethical norms for his own sake whereas the Duke does so for reasons quite outside his own personal interest. The Duke as well as Angelo are the flesh and blood in which power is vested. How man, with all his shortcomings, exercises power, what that power does to his corrupt and corruptible self in terms of society, and to what end he uses that power, these are the central issues of Measure for Measure.

"Character," in the strictest sense, is not, therefore, Shakespeare's primary concern. It concerned him, however, insofar as the character of a man influences the choices he makes as a ruler. Society itself and its health are made the central "character," its heart being the ruler. Mark van Doren recognizes this, although not in these terms, when he writes that "The atmosphere of Vienna is the thing."<sup>5</sup> More recently, this idea was expressed by A. Caputi:

Measure for Measure is, throughout, a play in which our concern about the characters' fortunes is distinctly subordinate to our concern about the fortunes of civilization. It is civilization as it is at issue in the careers of Isabella, Claudio, Angelo, the Duke, Pompey, Barnardine, and others chiefly enlists our attention and engages our feelings.<sup>6</sup>

"The fortunes of civilization" seem to depend, to use the metaphor of the Elizabethans, on a functioning and healthy heart. Vincentio does not function for fourteen years, and Angelo is a corrupt, unhealthy heart. This is why we must look at the character of each man as far as the play permits us to do so. My concern has been the Duke's character, Angelo's having received sufficient critical attention.<sup>7</sup> The Duke, then, is society but his action and his function in the play cannot be understood unless he is also seen as a human being.

By emphasizing the character of the Duke, Shakespeare extends the personal habits of Angelo and Isabella to include a whole society, and thereby he moves ...towards comedy.

...without the Duke and the large social concerns he embodies, comedy is not possible, for then there is no situation larger than the will of the characters to prevent them from fulfilling their heroic or tragic destiny.<sup>8</sup>

Societal forces, embodied in the Duke, forestall disaster.

The methods the Duke uses to preserve his society are underhanded, the substitution scheme begins his application of "Craft against vice," and the lies and deceits of the final act are merely an extension of his new form of government. Isabella is the first one who has to prevaricate in the interest of the public good.



She had earlier already consented to the deception of Angelo, and her honour (in the widest sense), for which she was willing to sacrifice her brother, is besmirched publicly:

[Angelo] would not, but by gift of my chaste body  
 To his concupiscible intemperate lust,  
 Release my brother; and after much debatement,  
 My sisterly remorse confutes my honour,  
 And I did yield to him. V.i.100-104

Her strict morality (to III.i.151) is tied to the belief that her body's violation would be "abhorr'd pollution," but not to any conception that the integrity of the soul can also be violated. After the hysterical defense of her honour and denunciation of Claudio, her rigid moral concepts begin to bend a little: "I have spirit to do anything that appears not foul in the truth of my spirit." (III.i.205-207) R. W. Chambers says of Isabella that she "is a sensible Elizabethan girl, with no nonsense about her, and she knows that it is no sin to bring husband and wife together."<sup>9</sup> She has become "sensible," as the Duke has become "sensible," and she knows, as the Duke knows, that it is a sin to bring Angelo and Mariana together. She has also recognized that for the purpose of saving a brother's life some principles will have to be sacrificed.

Indeed, once Isabella has agreed to the friar-Duke's proposal, there is "no nonsense about her." She helps the Duke in carrying out the substitution scheme and readily consents to the plan, which involves an outright lie, to unmask Angelo: "I am directed by you." (IV.iii.136) This is her education in the exigencies of the world, and having committed herself to the ways of the world she cannot return to the cloister. Her request for Angelo's pardon is made precisely in accordance with her recent this-worldly practicality. When Mariana pleads with Isabella to intercede for her new husband, the Duke lectures her sternly against the expectation of mercy:

Against all sense you do importune her.  
Should she kneel down in mercy of this fact,  
Her brother's ghost his paved bed would break,  
And take her hence in horror.      V.i.431-434

But Isabella "astounds," as M. C. Bradbrook pointed out long ago, the Duke.<sup>10</sup> She does not plead for mercy but asks for Angelo's reprieve solely in terms of this world. After she has suggested that he was governed by "A due sincerity" until she aroused his appetites--a further sign of her grasp of reality--she pleads legal grounds:

My brother had but justice,  
In that he did the thing for which he died:  
For Angelo,  
His act did not o'ertake his bad intent,

And must be buried as an intent  
 That perish'd by the way. Thoughts are no subjects;  
 Intents, but merely thoughts. V.i.446-452

Isabella, in a way, rewards Angelo for having taught her that "It is the law" and not the man, who "condemns." (II.ii.80) She asks for equity which is all we can ever ask for in an imperfect world.

To see Isabella's pleading and the Duke's pardon of Angelo as a final vindication of mercy, as some commentators have done,<sup>11</sup> is surely to miss the entire drift of the play. Isabella's idealism begins to disintegrate at that point when two absolute values cannot be reconciled: the preservation of her chastity and the preservation of Claudio's life. Both, ideally, are principles society is committed to, yet one has to suffer. Shakespeare emphasizes the impossibility, even in theory, of a reconciliation sufficiently by having Isabella only concerned about her "honour" once Angelo has propositioned her. From then on the salvation of Claudio moves into the recesses of her mind. In order to reconcile the two absolute values Isabella, with the help of the Duke-friar, has to sacrifice lesser principles. This, in effect, constitutes her entry into the world. From then on we hear not a word from her that suggests the moral perfectionist she once was. Her pleading

"with all the finesse of a seasoned attorney...on purely legalistic grounds" may, in the words of E. Schanzer, make "One's spirit recoil....,"<sup>12</sup> but a plea with reference to this world and not to Pauline theology is absolutely necessary if we are to see the wheels of society as Shakespeare wanted us to see them, and as they undoubtedly are.

When the Duke proposes the bed-trick, he violates the worldly standard of morality to serve the principle of life and, paradoxically, that of honour. His violation of absolute standards of justice in the final judgment scene is, as it is for Isabella, merely a recognition of his limitation as man. He as man is guilty as all men are guilty, but he has been born into the position of ruler and so is responsible for making order out of disorder by drawing the guilty subjects into society rather than casting them out. This is the basis for his leniency. His equitable and lenient judgments cannot be compared, as some readers do,<sup>13</sup> to the laxity prevailing at the beginning of the play. Two references to his arbitrary and slovenly execution of his office surely tell us clearly that Vincentio, in the great trial scene, has come to realize what it means to be the heart of a society. In connection with

Barnardine's nine years in prison we learn that he was neither set at liberty nor executed (the Duke's own testimony to the contrary [IV.ii.130-132]) because "His friends still wrought reprieves for him." (IV.ii.133) Under Angelo's stern pursuit of justice Barnardine confessed to his murder. In Lucio's case the Duke's former judicial conduct also left much to be desired. He "was once before him for getting a wench with child," (IV.iii.167) but perjured himself because otherwise "they would have married [him] to the rotten medlar." (IV.iii.171) Evidently the Duke did not find it necessary at the time to call any witnesses. That they existed we know from Mistress Overdone. She has been taking care of Lucio's child by Kate Keep-down for over a year. (III.ii.193-195)

Both Barnardine and Lucio receive their just deserts. The sentence Barnardine receives is somewhat unorthodox but no doubt effective, and unorthodoxy we have come to expect from Vincentio. At any rate, Barnardine has served nine years in prison and thereby suffered punishment. With his predilection for drink and sleep, a fettering of the dissolute fellow to a spiritual father seems punishment still. Lucio receives the very exact sentence he escaped some time ago by perjuring himself;

he has to marry Kate Keep-down, the mother of his abandoned child. The whipping and hanging sentence is suspended. Lucio, however, feels that "Marrying a punk, ...is pressing to death, Whipping, and hanging."

(V.i.520-1) To this the Duke replies: "Slandering a prince deserves it." But he had already forgiven Lucio for the slander (1.518), so that the sentence is passed, in effect, for his begetting a bastard. If Lucio thinks the punishment too harsh, he may consider it fit for "slandering a prince" as well.

"Slander to th' state" deserves pressing to death, (V.i.320; 344), a fate with which the friar-Duke is threatened after his denunciation of conditions in Vienna. Symbolically, it signifies that he does not escape censure either; in fact, he censures himself. A short moment before his revelation (Lucio or no Lucio, Vincentio had to reveal himself soon), he condemns himself by condemning the dissolute life in Vienna:

My business in this state  
 Made me a looker-on here in Vienna,  
 Where I have seen corruption boil and bubble  
 Till it o'errun the stew: laws for all faults,  
 But faults so countenanc'd that the strong statutes  
 Stand like the forfeit in a barber's shop  
 As much in mock as mark. V.i.314-320

This description of an ill administered state is offered in the presence of "The generous and gravest citizens,"

(IV.vi.13) whom the Duke had summoned the day before to appear at the assembly. But his admission of neglect serves notice that he is aware of the "faults so countenanc'd" and determined not to let the statutes stand any longer "As much in mock as mark." Ironically, it is this truth which is gainsaid by the kind-hearted Escalus who commands the Provost to send the slandering friar to prison. In the ensuing scuffle Lucio "makes" the Duke by ripping off the monk's cowl.

Despite the Duke's words, Lucio is not "the first knave that e'er mad[e] a duke." (354) The Lucios of this world make rulers and laws necessary. And this particular Lucio has helped to "make" Vincentio into a ruler who recognizes, and decides to accept, his responsibilities to the state. He is indeed "a kind of burr" which "sticks" in every fellowship of men as a reminder to what depravity man can sink if he disregards laws and common decency. The encounter with Lucio was one more event which showed Vincentio what purpose power must serve. A society riddled with Lucio's kind will become anarchic, and it is a ruler's constituted function to promote and uphold harmony.

Angelo, the very opposite to Lucio, would also further a disintegration of society so that, in terms

of the play, neither rigid application of the law nor its merry disregard will serve the community. Because Vincentio apprehends this deeply, he punishes neither Angelo nor Lucio with death, which is what the law demands. He knows that in the strictest sense Angelo must pay with his life:

'An Angelo for Claudio; death for death.  
Haste still pays haste, and leisure answers leisure;  
Like doth quit like, and Measure still for Measure.  
V.i.408-410

Angelo, true to his taut self to the end, begs: "No longer session hold upon my shame," (369) and would sooner die than live with his soiled reputation. Even after the women have pleaded for him, he says:

I am sorry that such sorrow I procure,  
And so deep sticks in my penitent heart  
That I crave death more willingly than mercy;  
'Tis my deserving, and I do entreat it.  
V.i.472-475

But Vincentio had and has no intention to accommodate his unworthy deputy. Isabella in no wise changes the Duke's mind. Mariana seconds her argument: "Thoughts are no subjects; Intents, but merely thoughts" with "Merely, my lord." (V.i.451-452) The Duke tells both women: "Your suit's unprofitable. Stand up, I say." and immediately proceeds with his design. This involves a confrontation of Angelo with the living Claudio, and



this fact, that Claudio is alive, will be the legal basis for Angelo's reprieve.

The Duke does not address Isabella (or Mariana) until thirty-six lines later when he pardons Angelo for Claudio's sake:

...for his sake  
 Is he pardon'd; and for your lovely sake  
 Give me your hand and say you will be mine.  
 He is my brother too: but fitter time for that.  
 By this Lord Angelo perceives he's safe;  
 Methinks I see a quickening in his eye.

V.i.488-493

Claudio, the convicted criminal, will be the brother of the ruler, Isabella, the accomplice in the Duke's deceit will be the ruler's wife. Angelo, the misuser of power, will be a free subject under the ruler. His punishment is that he has to live with his shame. We have learned enough about Angelo's regard for a blameless reputation to know what that must mean to him. Roger Sale has seen this clearly and expressed it concisely:

There is a certain dignity in confessing and being punished, far more than in being made to go on living. But that is just what the Duke makes Angelo do, for Claudio is not dead and Angelo must live with the woman he wronged twice over. It would perhaps be merciful to execute Angelo and allow him to maintain his conception of himself and of a law wherein the strictest justice is the only mercy, but it is just that he be made to live and to come to terms with both his virtue and his vice.<sup>14</sup>

Marriage, publicly solemnized marriage, is to control rampant sexuality. Angelo and Mariana, Claudio and Juliet, Lucio and his punk, Vincentio and Isabella, all marry at the behest of the Duke. It is not true that this "...implies that lust may, after all, be bridled as well by marriage as by death."<sup>15</sup> The entire action of the Duke, the issues in the play, the accommodation to this world, argue against such a view. To bridle sexual passions through the handing down of death sentences would mean the destruction of society; this was Angelo's solution. The Duke consigns sexual behaviour to the conventional bounds of marriage, thereby not only preserving society and life but creating life in the children to be born.

The marriage of Vincentio and Isabella is neither the "scandalous proceeding" Bradley thought it,<sup>16</sup> nor to be seen as the "marriage of Truth and Justice"<sup>17</sup> or Christ marrying His Bride.<sup>18</sup> This marriage, like all the other marriages, shows the Duke's faith in, and affirmation of, the society over which he has decided to rule in public view from now on. Marriage, whether forced or not, depends on trust, trust of each partner in the other. Selfishness, hopefully, will grow into devotion. And the fellow-feeling on the intimate, familial level might extend to fellow-man in society.

But the bonds have to be solemnized publicly, the pledges made according to society's conventions. Vienna's corruption grew because the ruler had withdrawn from the public eye, he had become private and self-centered. Vincentio's meditation on death only in terms of the worthlessness of the individual life with its brevity, pain, and meanness is the ultimate expression of self-centeredness. Only the individual preoccupied with himself cannot see anything beyond the self, beyond the life of the body, and perceive that body as constantly beset by affliction. Vincentio's assumption of responsibility and his wish to marry Isabella express not necessarily a change from that opinion. He is, however, revealing a belief that the meaning of life resides in aims beyond his own self-concern.

Shakespeare made the Duke into a monk and Isabella into an aspiring nun because only in this way could he emphasize their desire to remain aloof from worldly involvements. Starkey's description of cloistered virtue being like the mariner who never leaves the haven for fear of storms is to the point.<sup>19</sup> Vincentio and Isabella want to belong to themselves. This is expressed through the Duke's hoarding of himself for himself during his long period of non-rule and Isabella's

obsessive concern with her chastity. Neither wants to dirty his hands in the world. Circumstances force them to become involved in a reprehensible scheme. Yet their crime is committed in the interest of others, and so both are drawn outside themselves, into the world, and life.

To see the Duke in his monk's robe as Providence and Isabella as the Bride of Christ is surely to neglect their unwholesome and, above all, uncatholic behaviour. The Duke repeatedly perverts, or goes against, the teachings of the Church, and Isabella seems not totally dedicated to the principles of a holy life either. Shakespeare's audiences would probably not have taken exception to the pair's unorthodox actions since the country had not been Roman Catholic for decades. However, that there is something highly objectionable about this friar and the novice may be indicated by the fact that the censor for the Inquisition, an English Jesuit, left Shakespeare's plays in the 1632 folio intact and confined himself to the blackening of offensive passages. Only one play, Measure for Measure, he expurgated in toto, "the pages having been neatly cut out with a sharp instrument."<sup>20</sup>

There is nothing "wrong with this play"--pace Quiller-Couch.<sup>21</sup> The play does not "end as happily as Shakespeare could contrive it."<sup>22</sup> Measure for Measure, from Vincentio's temporary absence from office to his emergence as effective ruler of his state, is a logical, fascinating, and honest inquiry into the purposes of power.<sup>23</sup> This Shakespeare accomplishes by altering his sources radically and making the ruler the central character rather than a deus ex machina as in Cinthio's Epitia or Whetstone's Promos and Cassandra. Every other character in the play and his action is created to serve the dramatic argument. Measure for Measure is a dramatized debate and its topic "administrative power." Since administrative power is synonymous with Law, the argument centers in the application of laws. Laws, as Richard Hooker points out, are formulated because man recognizes his imperfect nature but aims at perfection. Angelo and Isabella exemplify this aspect of man and his law. Angelo attempts to apply the law with the approach of the perfectionist. His vision of ideal justice breaks when he discovers his own frailty. Isabella attempts to live up to another perfectionist vision, that of absolute purity. She also must discover that absolute values cannot survive in a world which is, for the most part, inhabited by Claudios. The debate whether justice or

mercy serves man best remains, as it must, unresolved since the situation in Vienna (which, of course, is the human situation) does not allow either ideal. Absolute justice would lead to society's destruction and unconditional mercy to its total corruption. The legitimate ruler, whose neglect and absconding from office has created the moral decay, must--together with the perfectionist Isabella--break the law to bring order into Vienna.

The "breaking" of strict justice, also, in the final act does not show a cynical view of life. Rather it is an honest and realistic view of limited man who can only devise limited means to deal with and within his society. Viennese life and society is not shown as unregenerate either. On the contrary, the legitimate ruler, the heart of the society, has returned. The process is a little like surgery. The body politic will never be completely healthy, but it will mend sufficiently to function to the well-being of everyone. The Duke's measures are best described in Escalus's words:

Let us be keen, and rather cut a little,  
Than fall, and bruise to death. II.i.5-6

The dramatized debate takes place against the background of sexual licentiousness, and even the

dilemmas of the main characters turn on sex. The corruption of man is expressed in the elemental impulse of sex. Those who do not wish to face man and his animal nature are, at the beginning, disdainful of sex: the Duke, Angelo, Isabella. Yet Shakespeare keeps the balance. He shows us those who unheedingly give in to their elemental impulses, and we are not asked to feel sympathy for Lucio, Overdone, or Pompey. The subjection to each and every elemental impulse is shown in Barnardine who is neither fit to live nor to die. Yet the play is not gloomy. The substitutions, decreed by the Duke, of one person for another, of a lesser principle to serve a higher one, of craft for statecraft, of disguise for openness, suggest that mankind

Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven  
As makes the angels weep; who, with our spleens,  
Would all themselves laugh mortal. II.ii.121-124

NOTES to Chapter V

- 1 F. R. Leavis, p. 159.  
Wilson Knight says that the "varied close-inwoven themes of Measure for Measure are finally knit in the exquisite final act,...[it] is the key to the play's meaning, and all difficulties are here resolved." Wheel, p. 89. Leavis agrees with Wilson Knight in his assessment of the Duke as a kind of Providence and consequently finds the final act "consummately right and satisfying...marvellously adroit."
- 2 Cf. F. Fergusson who, like the Christian interpreters, "...read[s] this act as an allegory of the descent of Mercy upon the scene of human judgment." P. 82.
- 3 L. C. Knights: The last two acts show "obvious signs of haste, are little more than a drawing out and resolution of the plot." P. 149.  
C. Leech: "...there is evidence that Shakespeare's mind was not working at full pressure in this part of the play...". P. 115.  
J. V. Curry: "In the light of the foregoing discussion of the entertainment value of deception it would seem that Shakespeare in the last scenes of Measure for Measure was simply catering to the taste of his audience for exhibitions of trickery and artifice in the sort of character who manipulated the strings." P. 153.  
A. P. Rossiter: "...the observer Duke turns Deus ex machina, and the puppet-master makes all dance to a happy ending, with a lot of creaking." P. 122.
- 4 W. W. Lawrence: "We may as well admit that Shakespeare's art oscillates between extreme psychological subtlety, and an equally extreme disregard of psychological truth, in the acceptance of stock narrative conventions. To attempt to explain away the Shakespearean happy ending seems to me a hopeless task." Problem Comedies, p. 118.



E. M. W. Tillyard: "...Measure for Measure culminates in the last long scene. And this scene does not succeed whether witnessed or read...Its main effect is that of labour." P. 122.

D. A. Traversi: "The control of evil is not in [the Duke's] hands; its machinations often find him unprepared, leave him groping hastily in the darkness for an improvised remedy. That is why the resolution of this play, directed toward a clarification which has no place in the outlook of the characters themselves, cannot completely satisfy. The external and the inner situation simply do not correspond." P. 66.

E. E. Stoll: "But as usual in Shakespeare, there is, at the end, no moral, and, throughout, nothin approaching a thesis; for the Duke and the Sister, marrying, seem, quite properly, though absentmindedly, to have abandoned, he the business of reform and she the ascetic ideal." P. 259.

M. Mincoff: "The tremendous conflicts of the opening have dwindled down to a dreary little problem of procedure,...there comes the wearisome business of the unmasking,..." P. 146.

5 Shakespeare, p. 190.

6 "Scenic Design," p. 96.

7 See particularly W. M. T. Dodd's essay "The Character of Angelo in 'Measure for Measure,'" MLR, XLI (July 1946), 246-255, reprinted in Discussions of Shakespeare's Problem Comedies, ed. Robert Ornstein (Boston, 1961), pp. 88-96.

For a neutral assessment of Angelo in the light of some critical assumptions see A. Sewell, "The Character of Angelo," in Discussions, pp. 97-100. E. Schanzer gives the unfavorable view in his The Problem Plays, pp. 83-96.

8 Roger Sale, "The Comic Mode....," pp. 59; 61.

9 "'Meas.,'" p. 99.

- 10 "Authority....," p. 393 & p. 396. Miss Bradbrook is, as far as I am aware, the only critic to have noticed this. This is the more remarkable since Miss Bradbrook sees the play as an allegory with Isabella "standing" for Mercy.
- 11 The issue of mercy as against justice is a minor one. It enters the play only insofar as it points up a) the relationship between mercy and laxity, both leading ultimately to the same intolerable conditions (see my Chapter IV, p. 138 n. 14), and b) to have the two ideal positions--Christ's teachings and perfect justice--juxtaposed. As I have shown earlier, neither position is tenable in a world inhabited by corrupt and corruptible man. For interpretations of Measure for Measure in the light of Mercy vs. Justice see the Christian interpreters and, for instance, R. W. Chambers, pp. 107-108; M. C. Bradbrook, p. 386 (both "allegorists"); M. Pope, p. 79; D. J. McGinn, pp. 138-9; K. Muir, p. 108; Terence Hawkes, Shakespeare and the Reason: A Study of the Tragedies and the Problem Plays (London, 1964), pp. 97-98; G. Geckle, p. 10.
- 12 Problem Plays, p. 101. Quiller-Couch, faulting the entire conception of Isabella, says that she "ends on a string of palpable sophistry." "Introduction," p. xxxii. M. C. Bradbrook lauds the "legal quibble worthy of Portia" because only thus can mercy be obtained. P. 396. R. Ornstein notes that her plea shows "clarity of legal perception" and that this nearly completes her education in the world. "The Human Comedy....," P. 20. See also J. W. Lever, p. lxxi.
- 13 Wilson Knight, of course, does not condemn the Duke: "All, including Barnardine, are forgiven, and left, in the usual sense, unpunished. This is inevitable. The Duke's original leniency has been shown by his successful plot to have been right, not wrong." Wheel, p. 95. G. Hunter, who pretty well explicates the play in Knight's path, says: "[Vincentio's] confronting of the problem of man's sinful

- nature confirms the validity of his original solution: mercy." Comedy of Forgiveness, p. 225. Warren Smith blames the "wholesale remissions at the end of the play" on the fact that "the duke is incapable of enforcing statute law without regard to humanitarian principle." "More Light...", p. 318. For variations on Miss Bennett's view that "We are right back where we started as far as the Duke's government is concerned ..." (p. 64) see C. Leech, p. 115; Sypher, p. 329; W. W. Lawrence, "'Meas.' and Lucio," pp. 446-447..
- 14 "The Comic Mode....," p. 57.
- 15 A. Sewell, p. 99.
- 16 A. C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy (New York, 1967), p. 78.
- 17 M. C. Bradbrook, p. 368.
- 18 Roy Battenhouse, pp. 1051-1053. W. B. Toole sees the "atonement theme" in the marriage between Vincentio and Isabella. P. 188. This marriage has elicited some of the most acerbic comments in Measure for Measure criticism. Said Quiller-Couch: "...at the end we are left to suppose that for [Isabella] mating is mainly a question of marriage-lines; and that, for a Duke, she will throw her novitiate head-dress over the mill." "Introduction," p. xxxi. R. M. Smith disapproved: "...this Duke-Priest turns around at the end and rewards himself by offering his hand to Isabella, a Roman Catholic novice...." P. 211. A. P. Rossiter calls the affair "declin[ing] coyly into the ex-Friar's bosom." P. 162. J. W. Lever is one of the few critics who avoids extremes and discusses the whole business dispassionately. Pp. xcii & xcv.
- 19 See my Chapter II, p.77 n. 24.

- 20 The whole matter of "Roman Catholic Censorship of Shakespeare: 1641-1651" is fascinating reading in R. M. Frye's thoroughly documented Shakespeare and Christian Doctrine (Princeton, 1963), pp. 275-293.
- 21 Quiller-Couch launches his (unfavourable) discussion of the play as play with the question: "What is wrong with this play?" "Introduction," p. xiii.
- 22 [*italics mine.*] E. Schanzer, Problem Plays, p. 120.
- 23 Although I do not share R. J. Kaufmann's and W. B. Bache's approaches to Measure for Measure, I do agree with their assessment of the Duke. Kaufmann comments: "The Duke's movement is from reluctant and hence marred sovereignty to effectual working, from symbolic possibility to substantial reality." "Bond Slaves & Counterfeits: Shakespeare's 'Measure for Measure,'" Shakespeare Studies, III (1967), p. 94. Bache, after a rather forced argument arising out of Isabella's "Unhappy Claudio! Wretched Isabel! / Injurious world! Most damned Angelo!" arrives at the conclusion that the Duke "must forcibly perceive that he must rule this vicious world." P. 47.

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