

NOBLES AND BAWDS:  
SHAKESPEARE'S MEASURE FOR MEASURE

by

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MEASURE FOR MEASURE

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ABSTRACT

Critical debate regarding Measure for Measure is characterized by contention. Each view of the play seems to cancel other views, while proposed solutions to perceived problems seem to create further problems. This contentious range of response indicates a very peculiar play, yet one which is regarded as worth the trouble. But commentators most commonly conclude that the play's problems are irresolvable and that the play is, finally, a failed masterpiece.

The "shiftingness" of the criticism may mirror a similar equivocality in the play itself. Measure for Measure is concerned with the related issues of self-knowledge and good rule. But the play's characters seem neither conclusively educated and changed, nor capable of being effectively ruled, so that in spite of an ostensible resolution in Act V, the issues themselves seem unsolved. The play seems marked by "problems," if by that we mean it includes situations that cause uncertainty or the tendency to divided response. This study discusses the interrelationship and interaction of the principal and comic characters, together with the problems they disclose, in order to examine the resolution of the play's issues.

The comic structure of Measure for Measure raises expectations that the play's conflicts and contentions will be settled. But those expectations seem denied, resulting in a pervasive irony. This thesis proposes that the problems of Measure for Measure may be regarded as aspects of an ironic whole. The play's failure to resolve its issues may in fact be

seen as a refusal to do so, in recognition of the complexity of things. Measure for Measure seems to present a sceptic yet comic view which includes imperfection, and which encourages ambivalence as an appropriate response to the irresolvable questions it raises.

Every true man's apparel fits your thief.  
If it be too little for your thief, your  
true man thinks it big enough. If it be  
too big for your thief, your thief thinks  
it little enough. So every true man's  
apparel fits your thief.

Measure for Measure, IV, ii, 41-45

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*self knowledge  
mar → Angelo*

## INTRODUCTION

The striking thing about critical response to Measure for Measure is its highly contentious nature. The range of response to the play is unusually wide and contradictory, agreement constantly diverging over perceived problems which are central to interpretation and evaluation. Indeed, what I notice about the criticism mirrors what A. P. Rossiter says about the play: that it is characterized by a certain "shiftingness," so that each explanation seems to cancel the others, in the same way that a solution to one problem in the play seems to generate other problems. Rosalind Miles senses the same quality: "The very wide range of the discussion it has stimulated offers us an advance warning that this is a play of undeniable but somehow evasive peculiarities."<sup>1</sup>

Evaluation of Measure for Measure has been controversial throughout its critical history. Coleridge found it "a hateful work," and Andrew Lang later called the very mirth "miserable." E. K. Chambers sensed in it "a nascent pessimism," characterizing it as "broken music," and J. W. Lever called it an "evasion" of the issues it raises. On the other hand, F. R. Leavis claimed that "Actually, no play in the whole canon is remoter from 'morbid pessimism' than Measure for Measure" and found the play to demonstrate real "greatness." Mary Lascelles finds proof of the play's integrity in the very complexity that has given critics so much trouble. William Empson is somewhere between these extremes: "In a way, indeed, I think this is a complete



and successful work of the master, but the way is a very odd one, because it amounts to pretending to write a romantic comedy and in fact keeping the audience's teeth slightly but increasingly on edge."<sup>2</sup>

Interpretation has been equally divergent. Allegorists such as G. Wilson Knight, Roy Battenhouse and Nevill Coghill seem content with the play, seeing in it "a parable," a "cosmic drama of the Atonement," and "the comedy of Adam."<sup>3</sup> Many problems are minimized or dismissed in this approach, as emphasis is placed more on the symbolic and conventional than on a presentation of a complex humanity with its inconsistencies and contradictions. On the other hand, D. L. Stevenson approaches the play as "a comedy wholly in an ironic mode" which illustrates "the inevitability of moral paradox,"<sup>4</sup> and finds it completely successful from this perspective. But many others are as uneasy as A. P. Rossiter who sees the play exposing another side to all serious, dignified, and noble human affairs. For him the resultant scepticism of man's worth gives to the play "a grating quality which excludes geniality and ensures disturbing after-thoughts."<sup>5</sup>

Some commentators express sheer puzzlement, almost defeat: "What is wrong with this play?" asks Quiller-Couch. "Evidently something is wrong, since the critics so tangle themselves in apologies and interpretations."<sup>6</sup> Rosalind Miles concludes her survey of critical opinions of Measure for Measure with the observation that "there must be something strange about a play which can elicit such distinctly contradictory interpretations."<sup>7</sup> Her survey demonstrates that the common critical consensus is

that the play's problems result in various degrees of artistic and aesthetic failure, regardless of the interpretation. But she also argues that this persistent notion has become an idee fixe, a self-perpetuating critical stance. The play's problem, Miles suggests, may lie more in the criticism than in the play itself: as she puts it, "Give a dog a bad name..." If by common consent the play is seen as a failure, however brilliant, the criticism is obsessed with accounting for that assumed failure. Interpretation and evaluation become locked within the confines of a fait accompli, limiting the play's potential.

In a study of approaches to "meaning" in Shakespeare, Norman Rabkin presents some insights which suggest a way out of the dilemma. Reductive interpretation of the plays is for Rabkin inadequate; he proposes that "...complexity that undercuts thematic paradigms is a constant in Shakespeare's art."<sup>8</sup> The plays may be seen to present highly complex situations and issues that are resistant to reduction to unequivocal, monolithic "meaning." Rabkin's approach to The Merchant of Venice, for instance, places that play's problems in a larger context than that which demands clear-cut solutions to tangled questions:

The Merchant of Venice undercuts or at least suggests the impracticability of the very paradigm it leads its audiences to desire, positing as necessary a charity which seems uncharitable in its operation and hinting at a similar paradox in the operation of the universe.<sup>9</sup>

He concludes that virtually all of the plays have been termed "problem plays," but that this may be due less to artistic weakness than to a recalcitrance to reduction, arising from "Shakespeare's habitual recognition of the irreducible complexity

of things...."<sup>10</sup> A. P. Rossiter proposes a similar notion, that in the problem plays "All the firm points of view or points d'appui fail one, or are felt to be fallible."<sup>11</sup> He places that "shiftness" in a complete, suitably complicated view of human nature itself, a view that Shakespeare consistently demonstrates:

Because the Tudor myth system of Order, Degree, etc. was too rigid, too black-and white, too doctrinaire and narrowly moral for Shakespeare's mind: it falsified his fuller experience of man.<sup>12</sup>

It seems unlikely that this approach to what have been termed problems in the plays will either explain them completely or explain them away, but it may at least direct criticism toward more positive and effective approaches to them. The problem of Falstaff's expulsion in Henry IV, or Hamlet's hesitation to kill Claudius, the cruelty of Edgar's disguise in Lear, the troubled marriage of All's Well, or Feste's note of disillusion at the end of Twelfth Night--the examples of problems in the canon could go on and on--remain troubling, but might be seen as appropriate to the complexity of the issues they engage or embody, and be interpreted accordingly. Although certain problems in Shakespeare seem to defy explanation, these same problems may be the index to a view of the plays which requires of us acceptance of that uncertainty, contradiction, or paradox which occurs when what we have been led to expect is simultaneously questioned or suddenly denied. If such an occasion is seen as a problem, it might also be seen as an essentially appropriate one, for it seems characteristic of Shakespeare to refuse facile solutions to difficult questions. It may be that the intention in certain problematic circumstances is an irony that keeps difficulties

properly complicated. Or, as Raymond Powell theorizes, problems may be caused by a tension which exists between form and content. According to Powell, the structures of the plays "reflect the twin impulses towards increasing simplicity and increasing complexity--the drive towards neatness, pointedness, the possibility of explicit summary constantly subverted by that larger awareness of multiplicity, alternative points of view, deeper implication, carried even to the point of inconsistency and internal contradiction."<sup>13</sup> However we attempt to answer them, it is the questions themselves that seem important; the so-called problems complicate (wonderfully) the plays and might direct us more to complexity of response than to an urgency to reduce them. This study seeks to regard the problems of Measure for Measure in that larger context.

NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

<sup>1</sup> Rosalind Miles, The Problem of Measure for Measure (London: Vision, 1976), p.13.

<sup>2</sup> Miles, p. 39; D. L. Stevenson, The Achievement of Shakespeare's Measure for Measure (Ithica, N. Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1966), p.65; J. W. Lever, Introduction to the Arden Edition of Measure for Measure (London: Methuen, 1965), p. xcvi; Miles, p.155; Mary Lascelles, Shakespeare's Measure for Measure (London: Athlone, 1953), p.164; William Empson, The Structure of Complex Words (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1951), p. 284.

<sup>3</sup> G. Wilson Knight, The Wheel of Fire (London: Methuen, 1956), p. 96; Stevenson, p. 106; Nevill Coghill, "Comic Form in Measure for Measure." Shakespeare Survey, 8 (1955), p.26.

<sup>4</sup> Stevenson, p. 128.

<sup>5</sup> A. P. Rossiter, Angel With Horns (New York: Longmans, 1961), pp. 116-17.

<sup>6</sup> Arthur Quiller-Couch, Introduction to the New Cambridge Edition of Measure for Measure (1922), p. xii.

<sup>7</sup> Miles, p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> Norman Rabkin, Shakespeare and the Problem of Meaning (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981), p.33.

<sup>9</sup> Rabkin, p. 140.

<sup>10</sup> Rabkin, p. 61.

<sup>11</sup> Rossiter, p. 128.

<sup>12</sup> Rossiter, p.59.

<sup>13</sup> Raymond Powell, Shakespeare and the Critic's Debate (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 140.

Chapter I: "a mingled yarn"

The nexus of the various problems in Measure for Measure occurs in the comic resolution of act V, i.<sup>1</sup> Prior ambiguities, questions or doubts are tolerable within the comic frame if they are resolved at the play's close, for it is an essential characteristic of the genre, in all its forms, that some type of impediment to happiness or the rightful fittingness of things will precipitate actions towards its removal.<sup>2</sup> Nevill Coghill puts the matter succinctly: "it starts in trouble and ends in joy."<sup>3</sup> But joyfulness, or at the very least some degree of assurance that circumstances have changed and that the comedic world will be happier or at least better, depends on more than mere structure. The affirmation or joy that the structural removal of impediments seems to promise should inform the mood of the resolution as well: characters and their circumstances should not only appear altered but should be felt to be so.

The resolution of trouble will only seem complete, for instance, if there are no doubts, no lingering shadows of the earlier situation. In the last scene of Measure for Measure I perceive, however, a dislocation between structure and mood, so that a problematic uncertainty of response occurs, throwing everything, especially any anticipated joyful renewal, into question. What was expected seems frustrated, thwarted,

resulting in either a sense of the play's failure, or the demand that interpretation be radically shifted.

Structurally, everything is brought together for a conventional happy ending: corruption is exposed, the wronged hero vindicated, the hero who was thought to be dead is presented, the libelous rascal punished, and, most importantly, everyone is included in a festive, generous forgiveness which culminates in marriages and the promise of a just and merciful social order. And yet there is uncertainty. The super-heated and seemingly tragical conflicts of the first three acts appear to stretch the comic fabric to the breaking point, so that the final bringing together of all the disparate and brawling disturbance of what J. W. Lever has called "psychic disintegration" appears patched and questionable. Commentators have commonly perceived not release, reconciliation, and joy, but a "deep and corroding discontent"<sup>5</sup> regarding everything essential to the resolution: the punishment, the forgiveness, the marriages, and the new social order.<sup>6</sup> There is the feeling that what should be in structure and spirit an "anagnorisis" is a hasty, merely mechanical resolution of the plot.<sup>7</sup> What the play has developed does not seem, to most critics, to be properly or completely resolved, and it has made interpretation and evaluation contentious and uncertain.

It seems to me that questions arise from what is felt about the main characters in the final scene. They have come through a great deal and are all in need of a resolution of the conflicts which have divided and tormented them; and indeed resolution appears to happen. Yet there is something about each of the main

characters which leaves a residue of doubt, the nagging sense that all is not well, and that the fittingness of things which comedy promises is correspondingly unsure. But that is not all. Compounding these problems is a further uneasiness regarding the characters of the comic sub-plot. They are very much a part of the troubled social order and as such cause us to anticipate their reformation, change, or at least some degree of compliance with reformed rule.

At the play's end, it is true, one of these troublesome characters is to be rehabilitated through "prison-work," one is to be religiously instructed, and another to be married, so that it would appear the promise of reclamation and reform is to be fulfilled. And yet there is a stronger suggestion that a continued recalcitrance to reformation more accurately marks them all, an incorrigibility which questions the realization of expected social change. But problems regarding the characters of both plots leave us with an uncertain response not only to the characters, but to the issues they reveal.

I see, then, two related problems in Measure for Measure, which in turn create problems regarding the play's contentions and themes: the questionable settlement of the conflicts of the principal characters and the doubtful reformation of the comic characters seem to undermine the resolution of the play's issues. This thesis addresses these problems in the interest of an approach to Measure for Measure which is not exclusively "dark," or resigned to artistic failure, or determined to explain the problems away,<sup>8</sup> but one that includes an acceptance of the



irresolvable as an appropriate, comedic response to complex questions.

1. "By cold gradation and well-balanc'd form:" The Principal Plot

The principal plot of Measure for Measure concerns a disguised duke who observes the effects of his seemingly virtuous deputy's interpretation of law, and the consequences of the deputy's attempt to make a corrupt bargain with a young novice of a convent. In the balance is a young man's love and life. As the conflict develops, the deputy and novice are drawn deep into a mire of lust, pride, and fear, while other characters are affected by a strict law condemning the very lechery of which the deputy is himself guilty. The duke attempts to control the events which issue from the conflict and guides the characters towards a comedic resolution of potentially tragic matters. ((The Duke's stated reasons for his removal and disguise are: to reactivate, through a substitute, a dormant law regarding lechery; to observe, incognito, the effects of power and the imposition of law; and to scrutinize the antithesis of "seeming" and being (I, iii, 35-54). ))

The first reason is justified by the Duke's description of a general state of moral and social chaos in Vienna, which he feels must be rectified. Rosalind Miles notes the significance of sexual disorder in Elizabethan and Jacobean times:

Theirs was not merely a restrictive code designed to protect individuals. There was a firm connection made in contemporary thought between sexual stability and the natural order, the world of sexual relations seen as the microcosm for the whole realm of human affairs. Lear

argues for sexual anarchy when his world has collapsed; Timon wishes lust and licentiousness on those who have wronged him, as the worst punishment he can conceive...<sup>9</sup>

Sexual disorder is the condition of Vienna as I, ii illustrates, and whether or not we wish to consider this as a microcosm, it contains dangerous elements and some form of action is necessary. To protect himself and his office from the corrosive effects of slander, the Duke commissions Angelo to reactivate the law regarding lechery, for the Duke's laxity regarding it had actually encouraged the permissiveness he now wishes curtailed.

The Duke is not only concerned with the reactivation of law, but with its effect on the people. He tells Friar Thomas that he will observe Angelo's "sway" by visiting "both prince and people" in disguise. The play provides us with ((several applications of the law, and with the effects of each.)) Angelo's interpretation of law is that it must inspire "terror," and that it should not be influenced by the circumstances of each case:

What's open made to justice,  
That justice seizes. What knows the laws  
That thieves do pass on thieves? (II, i, 21-3)

Angelo imposes the law in this harsh fashion upon Claudio, who has impregnated his affianced lover. Regardless of the circumstances of Claudio's life, he is to be executed for his crime. On the other hand, Escalus the Duke's elder statesman, interprets the law as a corrective measure, and not merely as an instrument for punishment:

Ay, but yet  
 Let us be keen, and rather cut a little,  
 Than fall, and bruise to death. (II, i, 4-6)

He would qualify the law to suit the circumstances of each situation. For instance, Escalus would save Claudio because he perceives him as a gentleman who had a noble father, and because he is condemned "for a fault alone" (II, i, 40). Immediately following this argument between Angelo and Escalus, the bawd Pompey is tried for procuring. Angelo hopes that Escalus will find cause to punish Pompey and friends; but Escalus pardons Pompey in the hope that he will reform.

Beyond these approaches to the law, the play presents the effects of the Duke's protracted leniency regarding his subjects. His lax approach to law has caused problems, which the comic scenes disclose, and which the Duke himself recognizes and admits:

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, 23-31)

None of these applications of law--Angelo's, Escalus', or the Duke's--are effective. Angelo's strict law is tyrannical with Claudio, Escalus' liberal approach is ineffectual with Pompey, and the Duke's laxity has resulted in near social chaos. The Duke tells Friar Thomas that he will observe Angelo's effect as he imposes the law, that he will visit the people, and that he will "see/ If power change purpose..." (I, iii, 54). The law

will not only be applied, then, but seems to be part of a clandestine experiment regarding the interpretation of rule and its effects.

Measure for Measure reveals the effects of the Duke's experiment with law; but the play turns upon the conflicts between the principal characters, which arise from their "seeming." The OED defines the noun "seemer," first used, it notes, in Measure for Measure, as "One who seems, or makes a pretense or show." The Duke's use of the word is ambiguous. He tells Friar Thomas that he will see "what our seemers be" (I, iii, 54), and the plural is striking. Certainly, the Duke will observe Angelo's semblance of ducal power. But the Duke himself assumes the semblance of a friar. In both cases, the Duke will see what those roles turn out to be, that is, he will learn the nature of political and ecclesiastical power. If he is seen to test Angelo in this primary fashion--ie. in an experiment with the forms and effects of political authority--he may also be said to test his own adopted role--the nature and influence of the religious authority as a force in Vienna. After III, i, the Duke appears to test Isabella in this sense as well. She too is a "seemer:" she had adopted the semblance of a novice. But Angelo and Isabella are complex, and what the Duke learns of their outward selves is extended to a disclosure of the beings beneath their masks, for they are both dissociated from what they seem to be. Finally, the Duke is himself complex, and, through his experience as a seeming friar, his education in the effects of his disguise becomes a self-education concerning the being

beneath the cowl.

A contemporary use of the word "seeming" amplifies the sense of the word "seemer:" "External appearance considered as deceptive, or as distinguished from reality; an illusion, a semblance" (OED). Isabella attacks Angelo for hypocritical "seeming" (II, iv, 149). The Duke's later use of the word is more complex:

That we were all, as some would seem to be,  
From our faults, as faults from seeming, free.  
(III, ii, 37-8)

The whoremaster whom Elbow refers to in the lines previous to this clearly has faults, prompting the Duke to a wishfulness that "we were all" free from fault. The Duke says "some would seem to be," obliquely referring to Angelo, whom Elbow has just said cannot abide whoremasters. The use of "seem" and "seeming" in the lines echoes one of the Duke's purposes for placing Angelo in power: "hence shall we see/...what our seemers be." The word "seemers" carries no necessarily pejorative connotation other than an implication that semblance and being may not be equivalents. But it acquires a negative value, it seems to me, when semblance and being are in fact, either consciously or unconsciously, dissociated. In the beginning, Angelo is merely "one who seems," that is, one who assumes the ruling guise of the Duke. But by III, i the Duke knows that Angelo has become a hypocrite, which appears to cast aspersion on the sentence's (III, ii, 37-8) "some," extending the sense of "seeming." The wishfulness and aspersion suggest that the Duke's "all" means just that, whether whoremaster, deputy, or perhaps even duke, and

that the wish that it were otherwise is unattainable. By the end of II, ii Angelo's "seeming" begins to mean conscious deception. If to others he seems free from fault, it is because his actual faults are disguised: his apparent virtue masks his lust and corruption. But I would add that one's faults might as easily exist unconsciously, cloaked in the "seeming" of the illusion that they are other than what they actually are. Envy, for example, might be mistaken in oneself for a sense of injustice that another possesses what one does not have. "Seeming," that is, might as easily be self-deceptive as dissembling. There is little evidence, for example, to suggest that Angelo is the hypocrite in Act I which he becomes in Act II. His genuine surprise at his awakened lust in II, ii suggests, rather, that he simply had not known himself, and had deceived himself about his susceptibilities.

Measure for Measure suggests that the world is universally culpable: we are "all" no more free from fault than our faults are free from the semblances or illusions we cloak them in. Angelo appears to deceive himself regarding his own potential fallibility early in the play. Similarly, Isabella and the Duke appear to be free from fault, but as the play proceeds we not only observe the effects of Angelo's illusions and subsequent dissembling, but we may come to question the others in certain ways as well.

Measure for Measure appears to be concerned, then, with good rule and the unmasking of "seeming." The Vienna of the play certainly needs rule:

The baby beats the nurse, and quite athwart  
Goes all decorum. (I, iii, 30-31)

Without rule society is topsy-turvy. But its individuals--its Claudios, Pompeys, and Barnardines--are, the play tells us repeatedly by no less a character, for instance, than the seemingly virtuous Isabella,<sup>11</sup> simply examples of a generally erring humanity., Because the erring are human--and the humanity of the play all share the propensity to err--the strict application of law is as inappropriate as too much leniency. Judgement must be tempered with mercy for culpable man, and that middle way between "mortality and mercy," the play makes plain with its exposure of "seemers," will be based on self-knowledge. The principal plot may be seen as a process towards such knowledge, and towards a consequent resolution of the issues of justice.

## 2. The World Inverted: The Comic Sub-plot.

In contrast to the rigidity of Angelo, and to the seriousness of the principal plot and characters, the world of the comic sub-plot is vital, loose, and full of humour. The comic scenes are juxtaposed to the serious, so that their radical difference in point of view and spirit is striking. From the taut urgency and ambiguous suggestiveness of Act I, i, the following scene throws us into streets loose with open sexual license and amorality. Here the careless mercenary talk of the paid work of war is valued more than an unpaid peace:

1 Gent. Heaven grant us its peace, but not the King of Hungary's....There's not a soldier of us all that, in the thanksgiving before meat, do relish the petition well that prays for peace.  
(I, ii, 4-5; 14-16)

Religion is mocked and devalued in the soldiers' banter:

Lucio. I believe thee; for I think thou never wast where grace was said.

2 Gent. No? A dozen times at least.

1 Gent. What, in metre?

Lucio. In any proportion, or in any language.

1 Gent. I think, or in any religion.

Lucio. Ay, why not? Grace is grace, despite of all controversy; as for example, thou thyself art a wicked villain, despite of all grace.

1 Gent. Well, there went but a pair of shears between us.  
(I, ii, 18-27)

The joking about Grace turns into an elaborate jest about venereal disease:

1 Gent. ...I had as lief be a list of an English kersey as be piled, as thou art pilled, for a French velvet. Do I speak feelingly now?

Lucio. I think thou dost: and indeed, with most painful feeling of thy speech. I will, out of thine own confession, learn to begin thy health; but whilst I live, forget to drink after thee. (I, ii, 31-7)

Lucio continues with the jest, saying he has "purchased... diseases" under Mistress Overdone's roof, and quipping on the word "sound:" "but so sound as things that are hollow; thy bones are hollow; impiety has made a feast of thee" (II, i, 51-3).

The world of the comic subplot is amoral, disturbing perhaps, and yet it is presented in such high-spirited fashion,



full of wit and banter and vital characterization, that it is at the same time delightful. The concerns of a *Madame*, for instance, become the simple domestic affairs of a warm-hearted humanity:

Thus, what with the war, what with the sweat,  
what with the gallows, and what with poverty, I am  
custom-shrunk. (I, ii, 75-7)

The bawd Pompey Bum has his charm and genuine sense of propriety: "You that have worn your eyes almost out in the service, you will be considered" (I, ii, 101-03). And there is the quick-witted badinage of Lucio and friends, which makes fun of unnerving subjects from war to lechery to syphilis. Mistress Overdone, proprietress of a bawdy-house, seems one of the most sympathetic characters in the play, showing genuine concern for Claudio's plight, and rearing the abandoned illegitimate child of a whore. In later scenes, Pompey proves to be adept at slipping through the gaps of a confused justice system, thriving in light-hearted disregard of attempts to quash him. Responding to the demand that he reform, he says, almost admirably, "The valiant heart's not whipt out of his trade" (II, i, 252). The murderer Barnardine simply refuses to be executed, out-smarting the authorities who hesitate to be responsible for sending an uncontrite soul to certain hell:

Abhor. Truly, sir, I would desire you to clap into  
your prayers; for look you, the warrant's come.

Barnardine. You rogue, I have been drinking all night; I  
am not fitted for't. (IV, iii, 42-3)

He continues, instead, to live on his bed of straw, eating, sleeping and drinking in defiance of his death-warrant. The

ludicrous constable, Elbow, attempting to charge Pompey with procuring, humorously mangles his words to ridiculous effect, making a laughing-stock of the law he represents:

I do lean upon justice, sir, and do bring in here before your good honour two notorious benefactors...void of all profanation in the world, that good Christians ought to have. (II, i, 48-50; 55-6)

Pompey proceeds to explain himself in long-winded, equivocal nonsense about stewed prunes, their dish, and cracking their stones--a circuitous alibi which empties his speech, and the charges, of all serious meaning. It is absurd to the point of extracting Angelo's single quip of the play: "This will last out a night in Russia/ When nights are longest there" (II, i, 133-34). All of the comic characters are portrayed with such affection that judgement of their otherwise unsavoury activities and lives must, it seems, be suspended. To imprison Pompey, bankrupt Mistress Overdone, or decapitate Barnardine, regardless of their social threat, is undesirable in the context of their presentation.

Lucio freely travels between the comic world and that of the principal characters, a foppish 'fantastic' without regard for conventional morality or law except when it threatens him directly. He is lecherous and slanderous, wholly given to an unabashed hedonism the very opposite of Angelo's fasting and stricture. He mocks everyone--Pompey, Angelo, Isabella, and the Duke--and gets away with it right up until the final scene. He is given the wittiest and often the most astute lines in the play. He is troublesome to the Duke's purposes, and yet it is

hard to condemn him for it. He is punished in a manner suggestive of scapegoating in the end, it is true; and yet, to the end, he seems undefeated, making cracks and attempting to slip away:

Duke. ...[to Lucio] Sneak not away, sir, for the friar and you / Must have a word anon.--Lay hold on him.

Lucio. [aside] This may prove worse than hanging.  
(V, i, 356-58)

To castigate him seems distasteful, more harmful, perhaps, to the punisher's image in the play than to the punished himself.

As sympathetically portrayed as they may be, the characters of the subplot are also disturbing enough to demand and make us anticipate change or at least control. And yet the characters do not really develop or change in such a way as to suggest conclusively that they do, or ever will. They suffer the effects of Angelo's proclamation to the extent that Overdone and Pompey are forced to change professional tactics ("though you change your place you need not change your trade" I, ii, 99-100), but there is little to suggest that they will be stopped, proclamation or no proclamation. Pompey is charged and tried for bawdry, but is pardoned by Escalus, feigning contrition but determining to follow advice "as the flesh and fortune shall better determine" (II, i, 250-51). When caught again, and sent for rehabilitation to be the hangman's assistant, he appears to take it all light-heartedly:

Sir, I have been an unlawful bawd time out of mind, but yet I will be content to be a lawful hangman. I would be glad to receive some instruction from my fellow-partner. (IV, ii, 14-17)

Barnardine, who has evaded the law for nine years without a ruling on his guilt, also simply changes tactics to survive his condemnation: "I swear I will not die today for any man's persuasion" (IV, iii, 59). Lucio comically fasts to control his libido in order to save his head from the proclamation, but doesn't seem to change his character or views even when he is caught at the play's end: "if you will hang me for it, you may: but I had rather it would please you I might be whipped" (V, i, 502-03). The comic characters appear to be simply what they are from start to finish, and there is little suggestion they will ever be anything different. They seem, instead, like Pompey, simply "a poor fellow that would live" (II, i, 220).

### 3. "a kind of burr:" The Comic Influence

The principal plot of Measure for Measure seems to promise resolution of the Duke's search for a way of justice and good rule. Similarly, the disclosures of "seemers" promises some subsequent self-knowledge and reform. Finally, we will expect that the comic characters will be, if not exactly reformed--they don't appear to undergo any inner conflicts which might lead to self-knowledge--at least effectively restrained. They are "headstrong jades" who require rule. But the thorniness of the issues of justice and good rule, and of the acquisition of self-knowledge, are in proportion to the thorniness of the characters who rule and are ruled, and they all seem troublesome indeed.

The characters of both plot levels are interrelated in

certain ways. In one way, the characters of the principal plot are exemplars of those who will rule, while the comic characters are an image of what must be ruled. Furthermore, the Duke is concerned not only with the mere application of law, but with its effect on those who are judged, so that the principal and comic characters are the polarities of his experiment and search. But there are much further complexities in the relation between the comic and serious worlds of the play than this.

The principal and comic characters are polarized as the extremes of "stricture" and license.<sup>12</sup> Angelo's strict law lacks the mercy that comes of the realization that all are culpable and it needs correction; the anarchy of the comics is equally unacceptable and requires restraint or change. But these opposites are paradoxically interrelated. While the comic world certainly experiences the bite of Angelo's law, the principal characters are also in various ways affected by the influence of the comics. It seems that the excesses of the main characters are not only accentuated by parallel comic scenes but are corrosively and consistently derided through direct or implicit criticism, parody, open mockery, and outright ragging.<sup>13</sup> The seriousness of the Duke's plans and machinations are followed, for example, by the vivacity of street scenes (I, i vs. I, ii), or are interrupted by the absurdities of characters like Pompey and Barnardine (III, ii; IV, iii). Angelo's stern statements of law are faced with the ludicrous Elbow and Pompey (II, i), or are followed by comic scenes which illustrate the extremity of his positions (I, ii). Lucio openly mocks Angelo (III, ii, 99-108) and Isabella (I, iv, 16-37), and ironically rags the Duke-in-

disguise (III, ii; IV, iii; V, i). Some of the comic scenes present situations parallel to those of the principal plot, suggesting comic parodies which mock their serious counterparts.<sup>14</sup> The comic scenes and characters are presented with such wit, humour, candour, and vivid language, that they seem to encourage our alignment with them against the cold stricture, self-deception, hypocrisy, or corruption of the principal characters. The result, it seems to me, is an undermining of the principals, their beliefs, and concerns. The comic aspect of Measure for Measure appears to be more than an image of what must be corrected, more than a mere foil to the serious. It seems, in fact, to help bring about the unmasking of the unnatural and the extreme in the main characters.

Ironically, the world that is to be ruled appears to help pull down its rulers to their same base level--Vienna's human "stew."

Philip Sidney defined comedy as "an imitation of the common errors of our life, which he [the comedian] representeth in the most ridiculous and scorneful sort that may be; so that it is impossible that any beholder can be content to be such a one."<sup>15</sup> The comic characters are ridiculous, and in spite of our affection and, perhaps, alignment with them, it is unlikely that we would be content to be like them. But they make the principals appear ridiculous too, pointing up their unnatural qualities, their deceptions and self-deceptions, and the distance of their ideals from actual life as it is lived, daily, in the streets, prisons or courts of Vienna. Laughter is, then, corrective. James Feibleman develops this idea, discussing the

gap he perceives between cultural ideals and actual human capacity, claiming humour enters at this point to correct the imbalance: "But the comedians soon correct this error in estimation by actually demonstrating the forgotten limitations of all actuals....The corrosive effect of humour eats away the solemnity of accepted evaluation, and thus calls for a reevaluation of values."<sup>16</sup> The idea seems to me to be corroborated in the relation of the comic and serious in Measure for Measure. The rigidities of the principal characters cause them to apply rigid ideals as if they were absolute conditions, when in fact the comics make clear that these ideals are remote from human actuality. Ideals are derided accordingly, opening the way for a reconsideration of what was thought to be true. The interrelation of the plot levels in Measure for Measure is an instance, it appears, of a condition several theorists have noticed in comedy: that there is a "clarifying" tendency in going beyond acceptable bounds, and that folly cures folly.<sup>17</sup> To this extent, the comic characters are involved in the process of self-education and social change which the principal plot leads us to expect.

The principal and comic characters of Measure for Measure may be seen, perhaps, as "contrapuntal," as C. L. Barber puts it, "each conveying the ironies limiting the other."<sup>18</sup> I return, then, to my premise that there are two related problems regarding the play's resolution: questions regarding both the serious and comic characters make the settlement of the play's issues uncertain. The questions may be put this way: are the excesses and delusions of the main characters effectively limited and then

resolved, so that we are satisfied that the ostensible resolution in IV, i is comic in spirit or mood;<sup>19</sup> and does the world of the comic sub-plot seem willing to receive, or is it even capable of receiving, instruction and correction?<sup>20</sup> Neither seems certain.



NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

<sup>1</sup> I mean "problem" in Ernest Schanzer's use of the word, that is, a situation that results in "uncertain and divided responses... [being] possible or even probable." The Problem Plays of Shakespeare (New York: Schocken, 1965), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Theorists generally agree on this characteristic of comic form. Northrop Frye's general description of comedy is an example:

...the movement of comedy is usually a movement from one kind of society to another. At the beginning of the play the obstructing characters are in charge of the play's society, and the audience recognizes that they are usurpers. At the end of the play the device in the plot that brings hero and heroine together causes a new society to crystallize around the hero, and the moment when this crystallization occurs is the point of resolution in the action...

Anatomy of Criticism, 3rd. ed. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), p. 163.

<sup>3</sup> Coghill, p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Lever, p. lxxxiii.

<sup>5</sup> Lascelles, p. 138.

<sup>6</sup> Miles, p. 87; Miles, p. 228; Powell, p. 120; Wylie Sypher, Comedy (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1956), p. 276.

<sup>7</sup> Lascelles, p. 138.

<sup>8</sup> Raymond Powell refers to a "myth of perfection" that he believes limits approaches to problems in the plays. Similarly, Miles argues that "even when the problems are identified, they are unlikely to be solved." Powell, p. 154; Miles, p. 14.

<sup>9</sup> Miles, p. 274.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 7: 1-5.

<sup>11</sup> Measure for Measure, II, ii, 1. 65, I. 89, 11. 135-42.

12 Henri Bergson argues that such extremes are complementary, and that it is one function of humour to erode extremes of social rigidity:

Tension and elasticity are two forces, mutually complementary, which life brings into play. If these two forces are lacking in the body to any considerable extent, we have sickness and infirmity and accidents of every kind. If they are lacking in the mind, we find every degree of mental deficiency, every variety of insanity. Finally, if they are lacking in character, we have cases of the gravest inadaptability to social life, which are the sources of misery and at times the causes of crime....Society will therefore be suspicious of all inelasticity of character, of mind and even of body, because it is the possible sign of a slumbering activity as well as of an activity with separatist tendencies, that inclines to swerve from the common centre round which society gravitates: in short, because it is the sign of an eccentricity.

Laughter, trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (London: Macmillan, 1911), pp. 18-19.

13 Mikhail Bakhtin discusses the idea of "misrule" as apparent in Medieval festive tradition in Rabelais and His World, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana Univ. Press, 1984). His assessment of social tradition appears to have important parallels with the dramatic use of comic matter:

...the official feast [in Medieval times] asserted all that was stable, unchanging, perennial: the existing hierarchy, the existing religious, political, and moral values, norms, and prohibitions. It was the triumph of a truth already established, the predominant truth that was put forward as eternal and indisputable. This is why the tone of the official feast was monolithically serious and why the element of laughter was alien to it. The true nature of human festivity was betrayed and distorted. But this true festive character was indestructible; it had to be tolerated and even legalized outside the official sphere and had to be turned over to the popular sphere of the marketplace. (p. 32)

Bakhtin proposes that festive laughter--usually taking the form of parody and travesty--was as virulent as was official religious, political, and moral control, and that its imagery--copulation, pregnancy, birth, growth, old age, disintegration, dismemberment--was in direct opposition to the ideal, "classic images of the finished, completed man, cleansed, as it were, of all the xoriae of birth and development." (p. 25) All of this, he stresses, was not merely a contrast to the sublime, but was an opposing, dialectical pole to the serious. The social tradition of an active "misrule" seems to me a useful analogy to what

appears to be a similarly corrosive effect of the comic on the serious in Measure for Measure.

14 Pompey's trial of II, i, and Barnardine's "instruction" in IV, iii are two examples.

15 In Coghill, p. 17.

16 James Feibleman, "The Meaning of Comedy," in Theories of Comedy, ed. Paul Lauter (Garden City, N.Y., 1964), p. 464. See also Bergson, p. 130, and Bakhtin, p. 11.

17 C. L. Barber, Shakespeare's Festive Comedy (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972), p. 13; Sypher, p. 222.

18 Barber, p. 14.

19 Rosalind Miles surveys this question at length in The Problem of Measure for Measure.

20 Barber argues that "misrule" must subside and fall into place under chastened "rule." The audience, he writes, must:

...swing the mind round to a new vantage,  
where it sees misrule no longer as a benign  
release for the individual, but as a source of  
destructive consequences for society. (p. 213)

Similarly, Sukanta Chaudhuri discusses a related problem in Henry IV:

The problem is that while Falstaff declines in stature, these normative values, as embodied in the royal ideal, do not acquire a compensatory validity. This is what makes Henry IV...so uncertain in dramatic effect. We are presented with two opposite, incompatible approaches to life: ethical alternatives that seem to cancel each other out.

Infirm Glory (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 129.


## CHAPTER II: "this Angelo"

Angelo is so marked by inner conflict that interpretation of his character is necessarily complex. Careful scrutiny discloses a character who, early in the play, isn't what he seems to be, either to himself or to others, so that what he does and says begins to jar with an emerging sense of his underlying motives and nature. That dislocation is remedied as the full force of his actions becomes aligned to the disclosure of his actual self. The need for that disclosure--his unmasking and uncrowning--is emphasized through the influence of Lucio and the comic characters. The process of unmasking is itself precipitated through Lucio's influence. Once begun, the process gains its own momentum until he is quite undone. The comic and serious elements of Measure for Measure are entangled in the development of Angelo; misrule turns faulty rule inside out, promising change and resolution.

Angelo was long seen by critics as a monster. The twentieth century, however, has generally regarded him as a complex and tragic figure and, perhaps, the most interesting character in Measure for Measure. Arthur Quiller-Couch and Dover Wilson have both proposed that Angelo could have become a comic figure, but

instead indicates "a true 'soul's tragedy.'" Wilson Knight says "his story exactly pursues the Macbeth rhythm." F. R. Leavis sees Angelo as an average man "placed in a position calculated to actualize his worst potentialities and Shakespeare's moral certainly isn't that those potentialities are exceptional."<sup>1</sup> W. M. T. Dodds sees Angelo as "an experiment by Shakespeare: an attempt to humble, in a comedy, a character comparable to the characters of the tragedies."<sup>2</sup> However we wish to view him, he is much more than the conventional "corrupt magistrate"<sup>3</sup> he resembles, and is developed beyond the scope of facile interpretation.

Angelo appears to be a reclusive scholar early in the play, who is serious about government, strict in virtue, and altogether worthy to fill the Duke's position. The Duke gently chastises him for not using his virtues for the betterment of others:


 Thyself and thy belongings  
 Are not thine own so proper as to waste  
 Thyself upon thy virtues, they on thee.  
 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. (I, i, 29-35)

It seems to be kindly advice, and a recognition of Angelo's apparent seriousness and goodness. We are told he concerns himself "With profits of the mind, study and fast" (I, iv, 61). He speaks of "The state whereon I studied" (II, iv, 7), and we hear from Escalus that his worth--presumably his virtue and knowledge--is unexcelled:

If any in Vienna be of worth  
 To undergo such ample grace and honor,  
 It is Lord Angelo. (I, i, 22-4)

When commissioned, he appears deferential and humble:

Now, good my lord,  
Let there be some more test made of my metal,  
Before so noble and so great a figure  
Be stamp'd upon it, (I, i, 47-50)

Angelo seems almost perfect--too perfect in fact, as the Duke's later speech on "seemers" indicates: he is not all he seems.

Doubts about Angelo may emerge almost immediately. The suddenness and unequivocality of his proclamation in I, ii may be seen to question his earlier deference to the Duke. He may, no doubt, have been instructed by his commission to proceed with the law in haste; yet the Duke had earlier twice stressed that "mortality and mercy" were in his hands and that he was free to "enforce or qualify" the laws as he saw fit. But his proclamation is swift and sure, and without qualification or mercy. This action suggests several things: it may indicate Angelo's sure hand in government, or his belief in the "terror" of the law, or, perhaps, the coldness of his heart. It might also be seen to suggest a certain arrogance in Angelo, a sense of his own superior judgement in matters the Duke had let slip for so long. Claudio suggests something like this in I, ii, where his sense of the injustice of the proclamation and its arbitrary nature is clear: it is an act of tyranny by Angelo, either "in his place," that is, in the office of Deputy itself, or in the nature of power, "Or in his eminence that fills it up" (I, ii, 152-53), that will "for a name/ Now puts the drowsy and neglected act/ Freshly on me: 'tis surely for a name" (I, ii, 158-60).

Either way, he is to die for a word --whether "fornication" or "tick-tack"--or for the "name" of Angelo's reputation. Angelo feels no hesitation to act in matters the Duke had, for obscure reasons, hesitated over, so that Angelo's "Let there be some more test made of my metal" seems, in retrospect, a questionable humility.

We next observe Angelo in Act II, i debating with Escalus over the issue of justice and mercy. Escalus claims that Angelo is capable of erring, but Angelo is so sure of his own strength and virtue that he ironically says:

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)

There is something about the extremity of his sureness which suggests how wrong he is regarding his own humanity--the possibility, if not propensity, to err--and which makes us anticipate, accordingly, his fall. Strict virtue may, at least in theory, permit strict judgement, but if all are culpable, as Escalus suggests, compassion for the human condition should teach mercy. Angelo appears self-righteous here, and perhaps self-deceived. He silences the wiser Escalus--the character the Duke says is as knowledgeable and experienced in "The nature of our people,/ Our city's institutions, and the terms/ For common justice," as "any/ That we remember" (I, i, 9-31). The pompous tone of Angelo's argument, his coldness to Escalus, and the merciless proclamation are difficult to view as virtuous and prepare us, instead, for the suggestiveness of the ensuing lines: "Some rise by sin, and some by virtue fall./ Some run from brakes

of ice and answer none,/ And some condemned for a fault alone" (II, i, 38-40). It is a theme that has already been sounded by Claudio in I, ii, with "The words of heaven; on whom it will, it will;/ On whom it will not, so" (I, ii, 114-15), and will again be sounded by Abhorson ("Every true man's apparel fits your thief" IV, ii, 41), and by the Duke ("Shame to him whose cruel striking/ Kills for faults of his own liking" III, ii, 260-61). Justice is seen as arbitrary when the judge is as guilty as the condemned, or could easily be; by this point in the play, that theme seems increasingly directed at, and illustrated by, Angelo.

The beginning of II, ii continues to develop this counter-view of Angelo's perfect virtue. The Provost, a character similar to Escalus in kindness, attempts, as had Escalus, to influence Angelo towards mercy for Claudio. As before, Angelo is unbending and abrupt, this time not only peevishly disregarding, but actually threatening a loyal servant:

Do you your office, or give up your place,  
And you shall well be spar'd. (II, ii, 13-14)

He callously refers to Juliet as "the fornicatress" and orders the Provost to "dispose of her" and that she "be remov'd." The language seems to refer less to a pregnant woman than to an inanimate object. He seems, simply, too dispassionate, too cold, to be properly human, particularly given Juliet's character and situation.



The only favorable description of Angelo is from the kindly Escalus (I, i, 22-4). Beyond that, the Duke describes him as:

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

Lucio is more explicit: Angelo 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)

Angelo is sarcastically described by both as believing himself to be above common human desires. But his blood does flow and he has appetite, whether or not he realizes it. Lucio explicitly connects the "blood" with sensuality, and concludes that Angelo has a "natural edge" which is merely blunted by his repression of it, and not negated. Angelo is not perceived by the Duke or Lucio to be what he projects or may think himself to be, and when he appears in the play he progressively demonstrates this discrepancy.

The comic characters erode Angelo's image and what he stands for in the play through direct or implicit criticism and parody. Act I, ii follows abruptly upon the serious matters of I, i, in effect juxtaposing the two scenes and dramatic worlds. Angelo's proclamation is an unwelcome intruder in this social milieu, a cold, life-negating edict imposed upon an ambience characterized by a red-blooded humanity, freedom, and license. The mean spirit of Angelo's strict imposition of the law is contrasted to what seems a sympathetic portrayal of those who will suffer because of

it. Mistress Overdone's cheerful attitude to prostitution and Pompey's consolations regarding her threatened livelihood are in sharp relief, for example, to the "stricture: of Angelo's view of vice. Overdone's description of Claudio's "crime" highlights the nature of Angelo's views: he is sentenced "for getting Madam Julietta with child" (I, ii, 66-7) while for Angelo, Juliet's pregnancy is the result of fornication, "that evil," and "filthy vices." Because Claudio and Juliet appear merely to be caught in the jaws of an inappropriate law, and because of the comic's sympathetic characterization, Angelo's attitude seems pinched, even fanatical, and one which only moral zealots might find just.

Elbow's malapropisms of II, i make wry comment on Angelo's views, forming a pattern of parody obliquely directed at Angelo and everything he represents. The sequence gains ironic and satiric force particularly because it comes directly after Escalus' speech about the arbitrary nature of justice and fortune (II, i, 38-40). Elbow enters, saying:

If these be good people  
in a commonweal, that do nothing but use their  
abuses in common houses, I know no law. (II, i, 41-3)

Elbow's sense of law is no more than a moral prejudice regarding "goodness," and seems to parody Angelo's moralizing about "filthy vices" that will lawfully decapitate Claudio without consideration for the circumstances. Elbow lacks proof of anything, simply maintaining that "precise villains they are, that I am sure of" (II, i, 54-5), ironically echoing Angelo's being "precise." There is a similarity suggested between Elbow's sense of the law, such as it is, and the manner in which Angelo

just previously terminates his argument with Escalus (II, i, 1-40). Escalus' careful reasoning is ignored and personal conviction takes precedence, and that is all. Angelo's "Sir, he must die" seems as peremptory and as irrational as Elbow's "that I am sure of." Deputy and constable are bound together by the law they administer and enforce, and if Elbow appears ridiculous, some of that mockery may cling to Angelo as well.

Misplacing "respect" for "suspect", Elbow's substitutions make the bawdy houses, Mistress Overdone and Pompey "respected," while he denies that his wife is so. Everything is inverted, so that "respected with" acquires sexual innuendo which is comically confused with respectability:

Pom. Sir, she was respected with him, before he married with her...

Elbow. ...I respected with her, before I was married to her? If ever I was respected with her, or she with me, let not your worship think me the poor Duke's officer. (II, i, 165-6; 172-75)

Prostitution is respectable, then, while marriage is derided, and the pulling down of the institution, which Angelo regards as the only admissible framework for sexuality, implicitly mocks him also. The parody of the sanctity of marriage continues--mockery which will, perhaps, reverberate in Act V's marriages--as Elbow "detests" his wife who is not "cardinally given," connecting her to bawdy houses and adultery through his misplacings.

This sequence seems more than merely a humorous interlude. Pompey's trial is, in effect, a test case for Angelo's new rule, but the absurdity of Elbow's presentation of the charges against Pompey parodies the conventional morality represented by the

principal plot and makes a mockery of justice. Elbow's malapropisms emphasize the theme introduced by Claudio (I, ii, 112-15), and later repeated by Abhorson (IV, ii, 41) and the Duke (III, ii, 260-61). Righteous appearances do not ensure righteousness, or seeming wickedness, evil: the law is therefore potentially unjust, condemning some, while passing over possibly more corrupt, but undetected, guilt. The parody seems to include everyone. Angelo's views of morality are thrown together with those of the outlaws of street and brothel in the mangling of words. Seemingly upright men are varlets, and the pimps are honourable men; marriage is unrespected and compromised; the representative of the law is ridiculous, and the law itself arbitrary, lacking in rational justice. In effect, Elbow turns the orderly world upside down so that, by implication, Angelo's serious beliefs and concerns are qualified.

Pompey's presence in II, i points out the limitations of institutions and laws that attempt to restrain disorderly humanity. Escalus asks "Is it [being a bawd] a lawful trade?" to which Pompey characteristically replies "If the law would allow it, sir." (II, i, 222-24). Legal matters have no importance whatsoever to Pompey, whose attitudes cannot be effectively countered by Escalus or Angelo. As the scene progresses, he makes such good sense that what he says questions Angelo's view of vice:

Pom. Does your worship mean to geld and splay all the youth of the city?

Esc. No, Pompey.

Pom. Truly, sir, in my poor opinion, they will to't then....If you head and hang all that offend that way but for ten year together, you'll be glad to give out a commission for more heads: if this law hold in Vienna ten year, I'll rent the fairest house in it after three pence a bay.  
(II, i, 227-39)

When he receives instruction from Escalus he replies, aside:

But I shall follow it as the flesh and  
fortune shall better determine.  
Whip me? No, no, let carman whip his jade;  
The valiant heart's not whipt out of his trade  
(II, i, 250-53)

He will, it seems, ironically illustrate the sense of the following:

Thou seest,  
thou wicked varlet now, what's come upon thee.  
Thou art to continue now, thou varlet, thou  
art to continue. (II, i, 186-89)

Lucio also degrades and erodes Angelo's position. What the Duke implies or suggests about Angelo, Lucio parallels, but with savage directness. His disgust is uncompromising: Angelo is "this ungenitured agent" who negates nature so that "Sparrows must not build in his house-eaves because they are lecherous" (III, ii, 169-70). He is viciously satiric:

They say this Angelo was not made by man and woman, after this downright way of creation....Some report, a sea-maid spawned him. Some, that he was begot between two stockfishes. But it is certain that when he makes water, his urine is congealed ice; that I know to be true. And he is a motion unregenerative; that's infallible. (III, ii, 99-108)

Ungenitured and unregenerative: Angelo is regarded as sexually unnatural, a great criticism and reason for scorn from this character who celebrates, without reserve, his own natural propensities. Whenever Lucio speaks of Angelo his language is

characterized by physical and sometimes grotesque images, emphasizing the difference between himself and Angelo, and deflating Angelo's distended self-image. Lucio's views of Angelo's proclamation are presented sympathetically. Lucio's "I had as lief have the foppery of freedom as the morality of imprisonment" (I, ii, 125-26) follows Claudio's grasping for some moral justification for his condemnation, and cuts through confusion to an affirmation of freedom and life. What to Lucio is natural freedom is to Claudio "A thirsty evil" that is punished arbitrarily. Lucio's presence changes Claudio's mental tack; Claudio moves from moral confusion to the business of the rest of the scene: to find a way for a reprieve. The moral questioning becomes certainty that the offense is "surely for a name." For Lucio the "thirsty evil" is simply "a game of tick-tack" (I, ii, 181), or "filling a bottle with a tun-dish" (III, ii, 166); the "vice" is so natural that "it is impossible to extirp it quite...till eating and drinking be put down" (III, ii, 98-9). He may be flippant and grotesque in his expression yet he makes clear sense. Finally, the absurdity of Angelo and his law is emphasized by Lucio's humorous attempt to avoid the rebellion of his own codpiece:

I am fain to dine and sup with water  
and bran: I dare not for my head fill  
my belly: one fruitful meal would set me to't.  
(IV, iii, 151-54)

Rascal that Lucio is, his celebration of freedom is surely more appealing than Angelo's dour "stricture"; and disturbing as it may also be, Lucio's permissiveness seems to degrade everything that

Angelo represents.

Lucio is indirectly responsible for the removal of the mask of Angelo's "seeming." Act III, ii's interview between Angelo and Isabella is carefully guided by Lucio. He seems to be scrutinizing Angelo's responses and directs Isabella towards certain ideas and a manner of expression which he judges to be effective. He has made it clear that he regards Angelo as repressing the propensities which must exist within him as a human being: Angelo has simply blunted his "natural edge," and this intuition seems to lead Lucio to manipulate the interview towards this repressed matter. Certainly, Isabella on her own would have avoided or been uncognizant of the kind of sensual suggestions Lucio encourages her to proffer. It is Lucio who is the judge of man's deeper nature here, and he is proved completely right.

The scene opens with Angelo's callous treatment of the Provost and his orders regarding the "groaning Juliet:" "Dispose of her/ To some more fitter place" (II, ii, 16-17). When Angelo hears of Isabella's virtue, his tone regarding Juliet softens a little, and he expands on his terse orders with at least a measure of sympathy: "Let her have needful, but not lavish means" (II, ii, 24). As the Provost is leaving to obey this order, he is called back when Isabella and Lucio enter. But Angelo does this only when he sees whom he is to interview. Interpretation of this strange behavior must remain conjectural, viewed as a desire to conduct the interview in proper form, as a wish to be seen fair, or as evidence of a sudden self-doubt--whether conscious or unconscious--upon seeing the virtuous maid.

As with so many ambiguous instances in the play, it raises doubts which may alert us to what is to come.

The interview in II, ii exposes the human desire which Lucio had rightly assumed Angelo had suppressed. The interview opens with a reluctant Isabella ("For which I would not plead, but that I must" II, ii, 31) easily giving in to Angelo's rational argument regarding law:

Condemn the fault, and not the actor of it?  
Why, every fault's condemn'd ere it be done:  
Mine were the very cipher of a function  
To fine the faults, whose fine stands in record,  
And let go by the actor. (II, ii, 37-41)

Lucio urges her to appeal to what is most human in Angelo, that is, to his emotional side:

To him again,  
entreat him,  
Kneel down before him, hang upon his gown;  
You are too cold. If you should need a pin,  
You could not with more tame a tongue desire it.  
To him, I say. (II, ii, 43-47)

Angelo is unmoved, still clinging to rationality alone: "He's sentenc'd, 'tis too late" (II, ii, 55). She would, probably, give in again but for Lucio's "You are too cold" (II, ii, 56). She attempts flattery:

No ceremony that to great ones longs,  
Not the king's crown, nor the deputed sword,  
The marshal's truncheon, nor the judge's robe,  
Become them with one half so good a grace  
As mercy does. (II, ii, 59-63)

Angelo's "Pray you be gone" suggests less intellect now than some degree of worryment; at any rate, she has broken through his brittle exterior so that he seems in some way affected. Flattery



has proved more effective than discourse with Angelo, suggesting his seeming humility is not inviolable. He will later let slip an interesting revelation: "my gravity,/ Wherein--let no man hear me--I take pride" (II, iv, 9-10). Isabella's flattery regarding statesmanship--and we have been told that that is Angelo's main interest and object of isolated study (I, iv, 60; II, iv, 7)--is next tied to sexual suggestion:

{ If he had been as you, and you as he,  
 You would have slipp'd like him, but he like you  
 Would not have been so stern. (II, ii, 64-6)

She suggests that Angelo is subject to sexual desire and moral weakness and that because of this he should be merciful, which quality will, in turn, "become" him. She uses the ambiguous word "potency," and Lucio immediately cheers her on, in similarly ambiguous and physical terms, with "Ay, touch him: there's the vein" (II, ii, 70). She then returns to discourse, appealing to Christian doctrine. This has no effect on Angelo at all except to separate the law from himself:

Be you content, fair maid;  
 It is the law, not I, condemn your brother.  
 (II, ii, 79-89)

When she returns to the more personal theme of sexual desire, observing "There's many have committed it" (II, ii, 90), once again with Lucio's approval, Angelo's language in turn begins to acquire sexual overtones: he speaks of evils "new conceiv'd,/ And so in progress to be hatch'd and born" (II, ii, 97-8). We can't be certain whether Isabella is completely aware of what she is doing in the interview, but she is effective when she addresses Angelo in ways that are contrary to his seeming

character--his pride, political ambition, and sexuality.

The rest of what Isabella says during the interview is a passionate attack on man's pride and tyranny, and on the pathetic absurdity of misdirected authority. Lucio disregards Isabella's chaste aspirations and image, crying "O, to him, to him, wench! He will relent;/ He's coming: I perceive't" (II, ii, 125-26). Angelo seems to be affected by her passion or by the substance of the speech for he has no reply, uncharacteristically, until she again implies that he is not guiltless: "That in the captain's but a choleric word,/ Which in the soldier is flat blasphemy" (II, ii, 128-29). Angelo answers "Why do you put these sayings upon me?" (II, ii, 134). He has abandoned argument now, as if overwhelmed or surprised by the passion of her invective--as is Lucio: "Art avis'd o' that? More on't" (II, ii, 133). Lucio urges her on and she continues:

Because authority, though it err like others,  
Hath yet a kind of medicine in itself  
That skins the vice o' th' top. (II, ii, 135-37)

It is an image of repression that is then blown open--fatally for Angelo's former self-image--by:

Go to your bosom,  
Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know  
That's like my brother's fault. (II, ii, 137-39)

Angelo discovers, at last, the truth of what Isabella says: "She speaks, and 'tis such sense/ That my sense breeds with it" (II, ii, 142-43). "Sense" and "breeds" are highly suggestive here: Isabella has made Angelo intellectually realize that he is not immune to the "Motions of the sense," and he begins to experience

it. The usage of "sense" as sensuality may be unconscious here, but as William Empson says in his study of the use of the word in Measure for Measure, "...if you take the character [of Angelo] as capable of struggle and development you need to suppose that his language carries the marks of it."<sup>4</sup> There appears to be a struggle between Angelo's awakening desire, and a self-image he would cling to. Angelo's language is suggestive from this point on, as lust eclipses his former virtue. His response to Isabella's "Hark, how I'll bribe you" is a startled one, as if his mind is fast moving towards awakened desire: "How! Bribe me?" (II, ii, 147). The line may simply indicate that he is offended that he, the virtuous Magistrate, should be so assayed, but the ambiguity of II, ii, 142-43 makes interpretation of line 147 similarly uncertain.

In II, ii Lucio has led Isabella towards particular subjects and a certain manner of presentation which parallel both his generally permissive attitude towards sensuality, and his assumptions about the universality of weakness and desire. She is most successful with Angelo when she speaks of the hypocrisy of authority when it pretends it is guiltless, implying that Angelo too has "blood" and "appetite." Owing to Lucio's manipulation, she argues that we are all subject to desire, and is thereby successful, if not in releasing Claudio, at least in tearing away the mask of Angelo's mistaken self image.

The rest of II, ii reveals the extent of Angelo's fall. He suddenly sees himself as "the tempted," with "fault" and "sin." He discovers the truth of what Escalus had said about the arbitrariness and pretence of judgement, observing that "Thieves

for their robbery have authority, / When judges steal themselves" (II, ii, 176-77). He may, at this point, be considering the corrupt bargain as he wrestles with temptation and considers mercy over mortality: "Dost thou desire her foully for those things / That make her good? O, let her brother live!" (II, ii, 174-75). Angelo chooses his lust instead, and his fall is conclusive.

Act II, iv opens with Angelo's struggle with himself, and with the full exposure of the "swelling evil / Of my conception" (II, ii, 6-7). He now accepts that "Blood, thou art blood." (II, iv, 15), and he will nihilistically pursue the dictates of that blood, granting license to his lust under the guise of virtue:

Let's write good angel on the devil's horn--  
'Tis not the devil's crest. (II, iv, 16-17)

His choices made, Angelo's fall is compounded with a cover-up which will not only desecrate his office but bind others to the effects of a desire grown evil.

Isabella, without Lucio as coach, is cold again in II, iv, and after only one line is ready to accept Angelo's judgement. Ironically, it is Angelo who now assumes Lucio's former role as he guides Isabella from her intellectual approach back into the more human subjects of error, fault and the flesh. His new understanding is that "we are made to be no stronger / Than faults may shake our frames" (II, iv, 131-32). Man is therefore subject to his appetite, and Angelo now deflates "filthy vices" to "A merriment," trapping Isabella in her own words. She had suggested Claudio's fault was universally human; Angelo makes

both that argument and her appeal for mercy rebound upon her in II, iv: "Were you not as cruel as the sentence/ That you have slander'd so?" (II, iv, 109-10). He suggests that her concern for chastity lacks the mercy of charity for her brother. Isabella had addressed herself to Angelo's potential culpability in II, ii; Angelo now cunningly turns those arguments back upon Isabella. Angelo has learned much about himself in a short time, but his new view is as extreme as was his former view. He is as corrupt as he thought he was virtuous, as permissive as he was strict.

Angelo's exposure accomplished, what we see of his character is not attractive. And yet his degradation doesn't diminish the complexity of his character. I agree with W. M. T. Dodds that:

Angelo's passion of cruelty is as extreme as the suffering that gave it birth, and it is in his enormities that we see fully what had been the pitch of his agony before...5

There is genuine surprise in what he finds within himself, as he asks, appalled:

O fie, fie, fie!  
What dost thou, or what art thou, Angelo?  
(II, ii, 172-73)

Angelo hasn't been aware of what he is; his virtuous life, removed from the faults and appetites of others, has proved itself a sham, an illusion. He has proved to be the "seemer" the Duke suspects he may be in I, iii, suffering from the delusion that he is immune--or that anyone can be immune--to the weaknesses of an errant humanity. When his "natural edge" is exposed, the effects are monstrous; and yet we may feel sympathy for Angelo as he struggles with prayers which will not come:

When I would pray and think, I think and pray  
 To several subjects: Heaven hath my empty words,  
 Whilst my invention, hearing not my tongue,  
 Anchors on Isabella: Heaven in my mouth,  
 As if I did but only chew his name,  
 And in my heart the strong and swelling evil  
 Of my conception. (II, iv, 1-7)

He has, undoubtedly, real stature here--his struggle resembles Macbeth's--as all he has valued is devalued, emptied: statecraft has "Grown sere and tedious;" and his "gravity" has become "an idle plume/ Which the air beats for vain" (II, iv, 9-12). A deep self-disgust is suggested by the soliloquy, which is then projected outwards in the recognition of the baseness of humanity, of a vileness infecting judge as much as those who are judged. The authority and government he had loved is now contemptible:

O place, O form,  
 How often dost thou with thy case, thy habit,  
 Wrench awe from fools, and tie the wiser souls  
 To thy false seeming! (II, iv, 12-15)

Angelo's love for the state and statesmanship is reduced to a vision of absurdity in which government is itself a seemer and the governed merely fools.

Angelo's complexity demands more than a merely conventional response to a conventional type. If he were to be regarded as simply a "corrupt Magistrate" we might expect the play to satirize, punish, and expel him. However, the principal plot not only exposes Angelo to others but to himself, and it is this fact which encourages his final reclamation more than scapegoating. What he learns about himself and about rule seems to promise a recovery of Angelo and therefore his inclusion in a reformed

society. In order for that promise to be fulfilled, however, Angelo's education must be seen to change him--his self-delusion, his political and legal positions, and his new contempt for self and state. Act V will determine whether that change is realized.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

1 Miles, p. 72.

2 W. M. T. Dodds, "The Character of Angelo in Measure for Measure," in Discussions of Shakespeare's Problem Comedies, ed. Robert Ornstein (Boston: Heath, 1961), p. 95.

3 Discussions of the convention are in Miles, pp. 204-06 and in Lever pp. xxxvi-xliv.

4 Empson, p. 284.

5 Dodds, p. 94.



CHAPTER III: "a thing enskied and sainted"

Isabella's character has been highly contentious among critics. Discrepancies between the respect other characters show her and her questionable treatment of Claudio, or between her insistent chastity and her willingness to use the bed-trick, have posed difficulties. As heroine and victim, we might expect her to emerge from her self-education fit for comic renewal. Yet such a resolution isn't certain, and her character throughout the play remains ambiguous to most commentators. She has been praised for her charity, criticized for her lack of it, seen as inexperienced, and called self-ignorant.<sup>1</sup> As with any of the principal characters, interpretation and evaluation of the play depend upon how we view her. Mary Lascelles, for instance, sees interpretation of her character as central:

Here is an extreme, if not a singular, instance of a character fluctuating between two and three dimensions. I believe that the explanation must be sought through scrutiny of a greater anomaly within the character... Suppose we should find a single explanation valid for all those...apparent anomalies in this character...it would surely be a master-key.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter examines Isabella's character as it develops, in search of an explanation for those anomalies, and of her place in the play.

Isabella seems to be a perfect heroine. Claudio describes her as youthful, intelligent, and attractive:

For in her youth  
 There is a prone and speechless dialect  
 Such as move men; besides, she hath prosperous art  
 When she will play with reason and discourse,  
 And well she can persuade. (II, ii, 20)

Lucio comments about her "cheek roses," finding her "Gentle and fair" (I, iv, 16 and 24). The Provost describes her as "a very virtuous maid" (II, ii, 20), Francisca addresses her as "Gentle Isabella," Angelo as "fair" and "virtuous" (II, ii, 79 and 185), while the Duke says "The hand that made you fair hath made you good" (III, i, 179-80). It appears that her beauty is considerable and her virtue beyond reproach. It seems appalling that she is victimized by Angelo's corruption. There is, however, something that jars.

Placing Isabella in a convent presents a potential problem regarding her character because of a contemporary scorn for the monastic life. Rosalind Miles notes that mild satire was a common response to Catholic monasticism in England,<sup>3</sup> and J. W. Lever writes that the reformed church regarded religious chastity as pagan.<sup>4</sup> Lavatch's mockery in All's Well That Ends Well is one illustration of such satire:

Countess. Will your answer serve fit to all questions?

Lavatch. ...as the nun's lip to the friar's mouth.  
 (II, ii, 19 and 25)

In Measure for Measure the beautiful and intelligent young woman is about to shut herself within the enclosures of a convent, and if there is felt to be an element of scorn towards such extreme restraint, it is desirable to bring her back into the world of common humanity. For Miles, Isabella's placement in the convent suggests the need for change:

Isabella is not to be taken by the audience quite as seriously as she takes herself. It [her novitiate] also suggests that the character will undergo some change and development in the course of the play.<sup>5</sup>

But there may be more amiss than the eccentricity of her retreat. Her first words may remind us of descriptions we are given of Angelo. We are introduced to her as she requests a more "strict restraint" of an order noted for its extreme austerity:<sup>6</sup>

Isab. And have you nuns no further privileges?

Nun. Are not these enough?

Isab. Yes, truly; I speak not as desiring more,  
But rather wishing a more strict restraint  
Upon the sisters stood, the votarists of Saint Clare.  
(I, iv, 1-5)

She is about to take her vows for a cloistered life of fasting and prayer. Her wish for "strict restraint" recalls Angelo's "stricture." But if the Duke chastises Angelo for wasting "Thyself upon thy virtues, they on thee" (I, i, 31), and if, as "A man of stricture and firm abstinence" (I, iii, 12), Angelo is regarded as a possible "seemer," Isabella's clearly parallel circumstance is similarly questionable. What is insinuated, derided, or doubted about Angelo is applied to Isabella. The only apparent difference between the two in Act I is that Angelo's stricture, study, and fast is concerned with statecraft, while Isabella's is concerned with the church.

This mirroring of Angelo is reinforced immediately. Lucio enters on the heels of Isabella's wish for more restraint, fresh in our minds from the rabble and moral looseness of the streets of I, ii. Satire is suggested by Francisca's fussing over the

order's elaborate rules regarding men and nuns; and Lucio is not just any man, but a mocking lecher. His greeting--"Hail virgin, if you be" (I, iv, 16)--is satirical, as is much of what he says to Isabella in the first half of the scene. Chastity and the serious business of the convent are far from Lucio's sense of life, and it seems ridiculous to take him seriously when he says:

I hold you as a thing enskied and sainted  
 By your renouncement, an immortal spirit,  
 And to be talk'd with in sincerity,  
 As with a saint. (I, iv, 34-7)

Isabella's response--"You do blaspheme the good, in mocking me"--leaves little doubt about Lucio's attitude to "renouncement." As he later scorns Angelo's "snow-broth" blood, Lucio also mocks Isabella's chastity. There is little evidence to suggest that he views this particular virgin any differently from virgins with whom he plays "the lapwing," jesting with "tongue far from heart" (I, iv, 32-3): to Lucio, it seems, Isabella is merely a maid and not a saint with cold senses.

The contrast between Isabella's and Lucio's views regarding chastity is striking in Lucio's subsequent speech, full as it is of the imagery of natural fertility and increase:

Your brother and his lover have embrac'd;  
 As those that feed grow full, as blossoming time  
 That from the seedness the bare fallow brings  
 To teeming foison, even so her plenteous womb  
 Expresseth his full tilth and husbandry. (I, iv, 40-44)

Natural life is implicitly contrasted to the convents, or to Angelo's restraint. A. P. Rossiter notes of the passage, "Lucio's very remarkable 'fertility' speech...is 'implied criticism' (F. R. Leavis) of Christian tradition."<sup>7</sup> This

contrast and criticism is emphasized when, a few lines later, Lucio describes Angelo as:

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, 58-61)

Lucio could easily be describing our early impression of Isabella with these words, and if that is felt to be so, it is implied that Isabella too has a "natural edge" which restraint will blunt or repress, but not negate. Lucio's very presence in the convent is a kind of ragging of what he sees as unnatural tendencies in her, and may be seen as implicit criticism of her views on chastity and sexuality.

Act I, ii is contrasted to the play's opening scene, and obliquely mocks Angelo's morality and sense of justice; Isabella's similarities to Angelo place her in an analogous position. Mistress Overdone, for instance, is a sensual and warm-hearted foil to Isabella's cold, strict chastity. Whorehouse Madame that she is, Mistress Overdone is portrayed sympathetically, perhaps the most so of all the comic characters, and when compared to Isabella, that portrayal is corrosive to Isabella's image. For instance, Overdone immediately senses the injustice of Claudio's arrest and aligns herself with him by praising him: "Well, well! There's one yonder arrested and carried to prison, was worth five thousand of you all" (I, ii, 56-7). She makes no lewd comments about Claudio's circumstance; on the contrary, for her, Claudio's "crime" seems a natural event which it would be absurd to judge negatively or to speak of with

innuendo: "it is for getting Madam Julietta with child" (I, ii, 66-7). On the other hand, Isabella's reaction to Lucio's "He hath got his friend with child" (I, iv, 29) seems prudish, for she refuses to believe Lucio that her brother could be guilty of such a thing: "Sir, make me not your story" (I, iv, 29). For Isabella, Claudio's "crime"--even though described in a positive fashion by Lucio--is "a vice that most I do abhor" (II, ii, 29), and one which she would suppress with "the blow of justice." Compared to Madam Overdone's simple-hearted view, Isabella's seems fanatical and out of place. The play persistently juxtaposes opposing views of sexuality, and when Isabella's are placed alongside Mistress Overdone's, or when the extremes of Lucio and Isabella meet, in the convent of all places, it is Isabella's views which suffer.

From the start, Isabella seems strangely hesitant to do anything to help her brother. In I, iv she is full of doubt about her abilities:

Isab. Alas, what poor ability's in me  
To do him good!

Lucio. Assay the power you have.

Isab. My power? Alas, I doubt. (I, iv, 75-7)

Yet Claudio had described her in very different terms than this:

...she hath prosperous art  
When she will play with reason and discourse,  
And well she can persuade. (I, ii, 174-76)

Her hesitancy seems more like a retreat from involvement in an unsavoury matter than doubt, given Claudio's confidence in her. What is interesting, however, is the sudden confidence she finds a few lines later: "I'll send him certain word of my success"

(I, iv, 89). What has intervened is Lucio's suggestion that she plead as a woman rather than as Claudio's sister or as a would-be nun:

Go to Lord Angelo,  
And let him learn to know, when maidens sue,  
Men give like gods. (I, iv, 79-81)

The immediacy of her response, "I'll see what I can do," suggests that she is here on familiar ground, and Claudio's description reinforces this view:

For in her youth  
There is a prone and speechless dialect  
Such as move men. (I, ii, 172-74)

There is a discrepancy, then, between Isabella the novice, and Isabella the youthful and beautiful maid. Her doubts may be regarded as a puerile lack of confidence in her intellectual powers, but may as easily be seen as an initial unwillingness to place herself in a position to "move men." She is, after all, about to become a nun who may not even look on a man's face while speaking to him, a restraint which she welcomes. These contradictory aspects of her character suggest a conflict within her which dominates her behavior throughout the play. Lucio has begun, however, in his characteristic manner, to draw out the more natural "woman" in her.

In Chapter II, I discussed Lucio's role in directing Isabella towards Angelo's weak points in II, ii, thus bringing about Angelo's unmasking. If we shift attention to Isabella, the interview suggests a similar, ironical, unmasking of Isabella. In I, iv she is hesitant to become involved with Claudio's

predicament, claiming doubt in persuasive abilities which we are told by Claudio she effectively has. When Lucio suggests that she use her womanly powers so that "men give like gods," she is confident that she will be successful. But faced with the actual interview, she seems reluctant again, renouncing illicit sexuality and admitting her unwillingness to plead for clemency regarding it:

There is a vice that most I do abhor,  
 And most desire should meet the blow of justice;  
 For which I would not plead, but that I must;  
 For which I must not plead, but that I am  
 At war 'twixt will and will not. (II, ii, 29-33)

The "must not plead" may be attributable to the convent, for it cannot condone Claudio's actions. Nevertheless, her brother's life is in the balance, which must qualify religion's principles. She seems torn between familial duty--"I must" plead--and her own unwillingness--"I would not plead." Her brief argument, "I have a brother is condemn'd to die;/ I do beseech you, let it be his fault,/ And not my brother" (II, ii, 34-6), is a poor illustration of either discursive prowess or her "prone and speechless dialect," and she is willing to retreat immediately with "O just but severe law!" (II, ii, 41). Similarly, Angelo's immediate "Your brother cannot live," at the beginning of the second interview is answered, without argument, "Even so" (I, iv, 33-4). She is aware of the seriousness of the situation, and her cold behavior must indicate either a lack of real care for Claudio, or an unwillingness to "move men" concerning her most hated subject. Ironically, she is most effective in II, ii when Lucio leads her to that very subject--the universality of sexual



weakness and desire; and yet everything about her suggests an excessive disgust for it and a reluctance to include herself in that human condition.

In spite of Isabella's seeming immunity to sexual fallibility, the interview of II, ii discloses an awareness of such matters. Lucio urges Isabella to abandon her cold, intellectual approach, so easily refutable by Angelo, and tells her to "kneel before him, hang upon his gown" (II, ii, 44). She had agreed to seek Claudio's reprieve when Lucio suggested she employ such methods:

Go to Lord Angelo,  
And let him learn to know, when maidens sue,  
Men give like gods; but when they weep and kneel,  
All their petitions are as freely theirs  
As they themselves would owe them. (I, iv, 79-83)

Isabella doesn't "weep and kneel," but she does appear to summon her "prone and speechless dialect," flattering Angelo with how mercy would become him and addressing his humanity with the certainty that "You would have slipp'd like him" (II, ii, 65). Lucio encourages Isabella to contradict Angelo's "stricture" and abstinence, and leads her on with his interjections: "Ay, touch him: there's the vein" (II, ii, 70), and "Ay, well said" (II, ii, 90). But Lucio is simply the catalyst for knowledge which Isabella must herself possess. She says with assurance, for example, that even the virtuous Angelo would have fallen had he been in Claudio's place. She is sure that Angelo is as potentially culpable as her brother:

Go to your bosom,  
Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know  
That's like my brother's fault. (II, ii, 137-39)

What he may find there, she says, is a "natural guiltiness" which those in authority are heir to as much as others.

Isabella's preface to her plea for Claudio (II, ii, 29-33) is judgemental and harsh, her abhorrence for the "vice" suggesting a belief that she is not herself capable of such faults. Isabella applies different moral standards to herself than she applies to others: "We cannot weigh our brother with ourself" (II, ii, 127). This is not dissimilar from Angelo's pompous rejoinder to Escalus' similar suggestions regarding "the resolute acting of your blood" (II, i, 12): "When I that censure him do so offend,/ Let mine own judgement pattern out my death"(II, i, 29-30). Angelo, we learn, is deceived in his superiority, and, though Isabella experiences no parallel release of awakened lust, her inflated self image is likewise questionable. If she sees the tendency to err and slip as natural and universal it is contradictory for her to loathe it so vehemently and to desire its strict punishment. By doing so, she is as brittle in her moral code as is Angelo in his justice, and even more pompous, for she assumes that she is above slipping while she suggests that Angelo is not. There are, then, confusions in Isabella which the interview of II, ii reveals: the "vice" is "natural" yet doesn't include her; it is common and therefore deserving of mercy, and yet she wants it to "meet the blow of justice;" Claudio simply "slipp'd," and yet she abhors his "vice" above all others. Her excessive hatred of and imagined immunity from what she regards as natural suggest she may be, like Angelo, self-deceived.

Isabella becomes most passionate, and is most strongly

encouraged by Lucio, when she speaks of men in authority. She is at the height of her persuasive power here, demonstrating those abilities we are told she has, but which until this point she has not demonstrated:

Could great men thunder  
 As Jove himself does, Jove would ne'er be quiet,  
 For every pelting petty officer  
 Would use his heaven for thunder; nothing but thunder.  
 Merciful Heaven,  
 Thou rather with thy sharp and sulphurous bolt  
 Splits the unwedgeable and gnarled oak,  
 Than the soft myrtle. But man, proud man,  
 Dress'd in a little brief authority,  
 Most ignorant of what he's most assur'd --  
 His glassy essence--like an angry ape  
 Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven  
 As makes the angels weep; who, with our spleens,  
 Would all themselves laugh mortal. (II, ii, 111-24)

There is a contempt for man and power here, and she is so passionate about it that Lucio quite ignores her self-image, cheering her on in language fit for Overdone's girls: "O to him, to him, wench!" (II, ii, 125). Hers is a vision of egoism that deflates "great men" from "giants" to "pelting petty officers" to "angry ape" concerned only with thundering their own self-importance. Because of his vanity, man in authority becomes ludicrous, but pathetically, tragically so. She continues with "That in the captain's but a choleric word,/ Which in the soldier is flat blasphemy" (II, ii, 131-32), and even the cynical Lucio is surprised at her knowledge of the world: "Art avis'd o' that?" (II, ii, 133). In II, iv, Isabella's contempt for men in authority seems to be extended to men in general:

Women?--Help, heaven! Men their creation mar  
 In profiting by them. (II, iv, 126-27)

Isabella's disgust for the victimization of what she regards as female frailty is revealed again in her later over-reaction to Angelo's desertion of Mariana: "What corruption in this life, that it will let this man live!" (III, i, 231-32). It is strange to find such disgust revealed in this "Gentle Isabella," one of the "anomalies" Mary Lascelles finds so peculiar. As the play proceeds, the discrepancy between what Isabella first seems, and what we actually observe, grows more and more pronounced.

Isabella's reluctance to help Claudio in I, iv, II, ii, and II, iv raises questions about another aspect of her seeming virtue: her charity. In II, iv she falls into a trap which Angelo has cleverly prepared. In this second interview with Angelo, Isabella makes the distinction between heavenly and earthly law: "'Tis set down so in heaven, but not in earth" (II, iv, 50). But Isabella disregards her own argument by sidestepping Angelo's proposal, clinging to her imagined sanctity and heavenly aspirations. She completely excludes herself from the earthliness which she argues pertains to humanity. She is willing to yield her body to death but not to "shame," for she perceives this shame to be the loss of her soul:

...were I under the terms of death,  
 Th' impression of keen whips I'd wear as rubies,  
 And strip myself to death as to a bed  
 That longing have been sick for, ere I'd yield  
 My body up to shame. (II, iv, 100-04)

Angelo asks her "Might there not be a charity in sin/ To save this brother's life?" (II, iv, 63-4) and she agrees until she realizes the sin he has in mind. Isabella regards the violation of her chastity as "foul redemption" (II, iv, 113) for which she

"Should die for ever" (II, iv, 108).

We have seen, on the other hand, that to the comic characters and to Lucio such an act is merely "a game of tick-tack." Claudio, faced with death, argues:

What sin you do to save a brother's life,  
Nature dispenses with the deed so far  
That it becomes a virtue. (III, i, 133-35)

He is sure "it is no sin;/ Or of the deadly seven it is the least" (III, i, 109-10). Claudio's and the comic characters' attitudes towards sexuality--ranging from flippancy to pastoralism--are juxtaposed to Isabella's views. Given Claudio's circumstance and desperation, the comic view helps to create an extreme tension regarding her dilemma. On the one hand, the act would undoubtedly have serious consequences for Isabella; on the other hand, however, the comics diminish its gravity, while Claudio's very life depends on her acquiescence. What seems germane is not that the act is of little consequence, but the degree of Isabella's horror and her complete refusal to even consider it--that she refuses to weigh seriously her own degradation with her brother's life. She decides his death is "the cheaper way" (II, iv, 105), and this refusal to consider a "charity in sin" closes Angelo's trap:

Were you not then as cruel as the sentence  
That you have slander'd so? (II, iv, 109-10)

Although Isabella's response, "Ignomy in ransom and free pardon/ Are of two houses: lawful mercy/ Is nothing kin to foul redemption" (II, iv, 111-13), is a valid argument, it side-steps the gravity of what is at stake--Claudio's imminent execution.

The seriousness of the situation should, it seems to me, cause some deeper sense of conflict within her regarding her crucial choices than she here demonstrates. Her conflict seems more concerned with avoiding the predicament than with facing what is by now clearly inevitable. Isabella attempts, instead, to evade the issue:

...it oft falls out  
 To have what we would have, we speak not what we mean  
 I something do excuse the thing I hate  
 For his advantage that I dearly love.  
 (II, iv, 117-20)

According to Angelo, Isabella abhors a vice which she regards as simply "merriment" (II, iv, 116) in others. He concludes she should therefore regard it so for herself: "I do arrest your words. Be that you are,/ That is, a woman" (II, iv, 133-34). There is no answer she can give to this except an attempt to retreat: "Let me entreat you speak the former language" (II, iv, 139). Isabella is caught in the net of her own contradictions and confusions, and that situation, in spite of the outrageous threat of her violation, increasingly reveals what appears to be her lack of charity to consider seriously the reality of her brother's plight.

Isabella's soliloquy in II, iv clarifies her conflict. When she begins to understand Angelo's meaning, and Angelo tells her "Your brother is to die," her characteristic aloofness returns as she simply replies "So," and "True" (II, iv, 84-7). She is resolute by the scene's end, and the meaning of her often-remarked reluctance to plead is made explicit:

Then, Isabel live chaste, and brother, die:  
More than our brother is our chastity. (II, iv, 183-4)

Here is her answer to Angelo's incisive question about charity and sin. The suggestion remains, however, that Angelo is correct--that her refusal to consider the bargain effectively makes her as cruel as his harsh law. As we have seen, Isabella regards sexual temptation as universal, and succumbing to it a "natural guiltiness" in others; but for herself it is "abhorrent and despised--"the thing I hate," "abhorr'd pollution," a thing worse than death that she "abhor[s] to name." The extremity of her revulsion seems to indicate more a personal horror than a moral or theological principle,<sup>8</sup> and any charitable consideration seems outweighed by a self-preserving chastity.

Act III, i further reveals this underlying characteristic. Her first words to Claudio in prison belie her motives: his "comfort" is to be that "Lord Angelo, having affairs to heaven,/ Intends you for his swift ambassador." Claudio is therefore to his "best appointment make with speed," preparing himself and accepting death willingly, even with gratitude (III, i, 55-60). To her life is worthless and death to be welcomed. Barnardine will later make clear the absurdity of the Friar-Duke's similar advice. When Claudio questions her about a remedy, she begins to manipulate him for her own purposes:

O, I do fear thee, Claudio, and I quake  
Lest thou a feverous life shouldst entertain,  
And six or seven winters more respect  
Than a perpetual honour. (III, i, 73-6)

The language is loaded: Claudio's life is merely "feverous," his future shrunk to "six or seven winters." The number and season

are ridiculous when applied to a young man, and clearly an attempt to make Claudio devalue his life. She claims that she would throw her own life down "As frankly as a pin" (III, i, 105) for Claudio, and yet this image recalls Lucio's admonishment of Isabella's lack of ardour in pleading for her brother's life: "If you should need a pin,/ You could not with more tame a tongue desire it" (II, ii, 45-6). It seems she cares more for her honour than for Claudio's life.

Isabella's charity is highly questionable after Claudio begs her to let him live. The rest of the dialogue amounts to a diatribe against Claudio, and is devoid of any trace of compassion (III, i, 135-49). Claudio is a "dishonest wretch" who, in effect, would sacrifice Isabella's virginity to save his own life. He is a bawd, undeserving of mercy; he is a bastard; she tells him to "Die, perish," and there is, in her fury, little sense of the consolations of heavenly life. She will, finally, "pray a thousand prayers for thy death" (III, i, 145). These are hardly charitable words. Claudio is to die, and Isabella is to avoid violation because "shamed life" is "a hateful" life (III, i, 116). The Duke, who overhears this dialogue, will subsequently tempt her with an assurance of honour.

When the bed-trick is proposed in III, i, Isabella's benefit will be, as she is later told,

And you shall have your bosom on this wretch,  
Grace of the Duke, revenges to your heart,  
And general honour. (IV, iii, 134-36)

In addition to honour, she is to have her full measure of revenge, which amounts to the gratification of rancour: a



strange priority for an aspiring nun, as the Duke must realize. Moreover, the bed-trick, which is itself questionable in view of Isabella's apparent love of honour and abhorrence of lechery, is agreed to without hesitation: "The image of it gives me content already"(III, i, 260). The trick will expose Angelo, and Isabella will get her revenge; but it is difficult to view her deception of Angelo, or the consequent consummation of an unwanted marriage, as honourable. Isabella seems little different from Mistress Overdone, effectively acting as a procuress. The familiar pattern of the juxtaposition of comic and serious in the play underscores this troubling suggestion. Pompey is tried for pimping in III, ii immediately following the bed-trick plan of III, i. He too arranges sexual assignations. Moral boundaries are blurred through such parody, implying criticism of the bed-trick as much as of prostitution. A legal system which punishes one and not the other will therefore be seen to be arbitrary or hypocritical, demonstrating Isabella's earlier observation: "That in the captain's but a choleric word,/ Which in the soldier is flat blasphemy" (II, ii, 131-32). The issue of sexuality is neatly reversed now: what was regarded as natural for others but not applicable to herself, is now acceptable for her to perpetrate, while others are imprisoned for the same thing. It may be argued that Elizabethan marriage law legitimizes the trick,<sup>9</sup> and that it is, in any case, merely literary or theatrical convention. Still it is hard to ignore that the supposedly good characters--Isabella and the Duke--initiate a deception and a sexual act, that Isabella has



Angelo will require of her. When she limits her offer to "such gifts as heaven shall share with you," Lucio's comment is the relieved "You had marr'd all else," suggesting that her "bribe" was ambiguous (II, ii, 146-49). She has come to know Angelo's "pleasure" in II, iv, and says she would "rather give my body than my soul" (II, iv, 56). It would be foolish, however, to suggest that this ambiguity or innuendo were conscious on her part. Her ambiguous words are more likely instances of irony to further the sexual theme; but they also suggest a self that is not all it seems. Marvin Rosenberg argues that the submerged sexual reference in Isabella's language is intentional:

Shakespeare does not use prone images like this accidentally. They are stipulations of character; they are a link between Vienna's two worlds...<sup>12</sup>

This seems to me wholly plausible. I do not mean to suggest that Isabella "has a feeling for the sport" any more than does the Duke necessarily, but her language, when Lucio prompts her to plead as a woman, seems to recall the kind of equivocation of which the comic world is fond. What is suggested is that she is more natural than she knows. It should be remembered that from the start she has been described in terms which are at odds with her notions of herself; that is, in spite of her novitiate, she has a "prone and speechless dialect" which moves men.

Isabella is self-ignorant, as J. W. Lever argues, and as such is a "seemer." Like the Angelo we first see, she is deluded about her virtue and immunity to sexual fault. Although the Duke's intentions regarding Angelo's "recovery" remain obscure, he is explicit about Isabella. By III, i, the Duke has seen the law

re-activated, has observed the influence of power, and the exposure of Angelo's actual self. But he prolongs Isabella's agony in a manner similar to his treatment of Angelo--that is, "By cold gradation and well-balanc'd form." He tells Isabella he is working "a physic/ That's bitter to sweet end" (IV, vi, 7-8). That that process also applies to her is made clear when he says:

But I will keep her ignorant of her good,  
To make her heavenly comforts of despair  
When it is least expected. (IV, iii, 108-10)

After III, i, the Duke seems to be testing Isabella in the manner in which he tests Angelo--he places her in circumstances which will reveal what she actually is. But he will prolong her suffering that she might be changed and fully recovered.

But there seems, finally, something more in Isabella's character, some "greater anomaly" as Lascelles suggests. Isabella's religious views regarding earthly life are brittle, removed from the actual world of "poor souls who would live." In II, iv she no longer pleads for Claudio's life. Had Lucio been there, she might have been so influenced, but left alone she is concerned only with preparing Claudio's soul for death: "That in his reprieve,/ Longer or shorter, he may be so fitted/ That his soul sicken not" (II, iv, 39-41). In her soliloquy at the end of the scene Isabella is resolved simply to "fit his mind to death, for his soul's rest" (II, iv, 186). She asks Claudio:

Dar'st thou die?  
The sense of death is most in apprehension;  
And the poor beetle that we tread upon  
In corporal sufferance finds a pang as great  
As when a giant dies (III, i, 76-80)

She would, she tells him, throw down her own life as if it were nothing (III, i, 105), and Claudio's life, she says, is merely "feverous" (III, i, 75). When she learns of Mariana's position as an abandoned woman, she exclaims "What a merit were it in death to take this poor maid from the world!" (III, i, 231-32). The world is to her "Injurious," and she would gladly "strip myself to death as to a bed/ That longing have been sick for" (II, iv, 102-03). Surely these views, which she would have people live and die by, are excessive and life-negating. Like Angelo, Isabella's character reveals qualities which she seems not to have known she had, and with that exposure, a striking contempt for life. Her apparent disgust for sexuality, authority, men, and her devaluation of corporeal existence generally suggest a parallel with the Angelo of II, iv: his disgust and contempt for form, place, government, and the governed (II, iv, 1-15). It seems to me that such disillusion increasingly characterizes both of them, Angelo's leading to nihilism and hypocrisy, and Isabella's to despair, and is far from any affirmation or reconciliation which the resolution will require of them. The "Gentle Isabella" seems to have a surprising knowledge of and disgust for the world, which suggests a possible reason for her desire for seclusion. When she snaps at the Friar-Duke "I have no superfluous leisure; my stay must be stolen out of other affairs" (III, i, 156-67), it seems likely that the "other affairs" are those of Saint Clare. Her interviews with Angelo and Claudio seem to fill her with anger and fear and to propel her back to high walls within which she may find refuge from harsh realities. If she is not a pleasant

character, those realities may at least permit compassion for her, for she also suffers much.

What underlies Isabella's underlying character is unmasked in the play. The problem remains, however, that although certain other characters as well as the audience may see her for what she actually is, Isabella doesn't appear, unlike Angelo, to become unmasked to herself. The consequence of that will be the Duke's continued efforts with her in Act V. Whether her unmasking will be complete, together with a subsequent clarification and reevaluation, remains to be seen.

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

<sup>1</sup> Miles, p. 214; Darryl F. Gless, Measure for Measure, the Law and the Convent (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1979), p. 209; Knight, p. 104; Miles, p. 223; Lever, p. lxxxii.

<sup>2</sup> Lascelles, pp. 148-50.

<sup>3</sup> Miles, p. 223.

<sup>4</sup> Lever, p. lxxx.

<sup>5</sup> Miles, p. 217.

<sup>6</sup> See note to I, iv, 5 in The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. G. Blackmore Evans (Boston, 1974).

<sup>7</sup> Rossiter, p. 159.

<sup>8</sup> J. W. Lever argues that Angelo's proposal makes Isabella's violation "compelled sins," which qualify their spiritual gravity. He concludes: "Chastity was essentially a condition of the spirit; to see it in merely physical terms was to reduce the concept to a mere pagan scruple." Lever, p. lxxviii.

<sup>9</sup> W. W. Lawrence, Shakespeare's Problem Comedies (New York: Ungar, 1960), pp. 94-102.

<sup>10</sup> Miles, p. 223.

<sup>11</sup> See Lever's note to the lines.

<sup>12</sup> Marvin Rosenberg, "Shakespeare's Fantastic Trick: Measure for Measure." Sewanee Review, 80 (1972), p. 59.

<sup>13</sup> Lever, p. lxxxii.

CHAPTER IV: The "duke of dark corners"

Duke Vincentio is as critically controversial as Angelo and Isabella. He has been seen as King James and as Divine Providence, while several critics have viewed him as little more than a puppet. Mary Lascelles calls him a kind of "producer" in the play, a strategist who merely controls events. What has been perceived as a lack of feeling in him, a disengagement, has led critics to see him as more convention than character. J. W. Lever places him mid-way between personality and type; having failed as "an authentic human being" he remains "a stage duke" for the purposes of the comic resolution. William Empson is one of many who are disgusted by him: "it is offensive...that he should treat his subjects as puppets for the fun of making them twitch."<sup>1</sup>

The convention of the "Disguised Ruler" had been widely used before Shakespeare's time.<sup>2</sup> J. W. Lever writes that by the sixteenth century it was a popular literary device for romance and comedy, "for popular 'exposures' of low life and, in the early years of the new century (the seventeenth), for a more critical, self-wounding expression of social malaise. In its most serious form it confirmed the central humanist concept of royal authority, according to which the true ruler set an example of wisdom, temperance, and magnanimity."<sup>3</sup> As Lever points out, it was a topical theme at the time of the ascension of James I, and many critics have claimed the Duke was modelled after him.



Rosalind Miles describes two uses of the convention: one in which the ruler is presented as a "benevolent and impersonal authority figure," and one in which he is presented as "receiving, and therefore needing, an education in statecraft and humanity."<sup>4</sup> These are mutually contradictory, and she places the Duke as an authority figure rather than as a fallible character. But, she adds, "We are made uneasy because we are not given enough help in placing the Duke."<sup>5</sup> Seen as purely an authority figure, interpretation of the Duke has usually favored allegory; and when he is seen as fallible, he has commonly been placed in a tradition that views his actions as disturbingly dark, calculating, and cold, and probably irreconcilable with a comic resolution.

The Duke initially seems primarily a conventional figure. We learn in Act I that he will assume a disguise in order to implement a dormant law, observe the effect of that law, and to observe the Deputy who applies it. From the start he claims a close interest in what will occur in his absence: he says he will "look to know/ What doth befall you here" (I, i, 57-8). He later makes clear his intention to "Visit both prince and people," and to "behold his [Angelo's] sway" (I,iii, 43-5). This scrutiny suggests that whatever ensues will be controlled by him: his position of authority remains implicit. Miles notes, "If the disguiser is a duke, or prince, or king, he will then hold, in a novel way, the most authoritative position in the drama."<sup>6</sup> Any irony that arises from other characters' ignorance of the Friar-Duke's actual identity may be expected to strengthen this position. The Duke has usually been regarded as the central

figure in the play, commanding respect and trust. F. R. Leavis, for instance, writes "His attitude, nothing could be plainer, is meant to be ours--his total attitude, which is the total attitude of the play."<sup>7</sup> Mary Lascelles argues that he must "stand fast, while others come and go;" he is necessarily a strategist who must not become too en+angled with the characters, or with his own character, "for, since the stuff in which he is working is (supposedly) life itself, he may find himself fast in the very web he is weaving."<sup>8</sup> For her, however, the result of this conventional role is a lack of engagement she sees as a problem: he is widely regarded as a "deus ex machina," and is consequently thought to be overly mechanical, so that his orchestrated resolution seems artificial in view of the complex character development of the others. On the other hand, Rosalind Miles views this conventional aspect of the Duke as a problem, not because he is too central or too coldly controlling, but because his removal from the intensity of the conflicts of Act II effectively removes him from the centre of the play.<sup>9</sup> According to Miles, this leaves us adrift with no moral centre and no character we can trust, while events becoming increasingly disturbing.

There may be doubts about the Duke's purposes and character from the start, however, which suggest a development of his character quite apart from convention. Seen as a more human and fallible character he still presents problems; and yet I do not agree with Miles that to view him as a fallible character is to place him in the "bad prepotent tradition;"<sup>10</sup> which regards him

as dark, cynical, or disgusting.

Questions may arise about the Duke from Act I, in spite of his authoritative position and manner. He has "let slip" for fourteen years "strict statutes and most biting laws," which he claims are "needful" (I, iii, 19-20). When we observe the state of affairs in Vienna in I, ii we may be entertained by the city's "low-life" characters, especially in contrast to Angelo and the spirit of his proclamation, but the city is in need of control. Sexual license has brought about open prostitution and widespread disease, and, as we later learn from Pompey, the prisons are overflowing with all manner of criminals. The Duke admits "we bid this be done,/ When evil deeds have their permissive pass,/ And not the punishment" (I, iii, 37-9). There is an implicit question regarding this abrogation of responsibility: why has he permitted this "permissive pass" to occur? Similarly, he has somehow ignored Barnardine's case for nine years, while it is immediately dealt with upon Angelo's assumption of power. Barnardine confesses to a murder for which he may now be punished: why has the Duke been unable to accomplish the same? He tells Friar Thomas he has "ever lov'd the life remov'd" over the life of city and court "Where youth, and cost, witless bravery keeps" (I, iii, 10). He claims to "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" (I, i, 67-70). The suggestion that this is an unwilling Duke is difficult to ignore; he seems an inadequate portrait of "royal authority."

The Duke's treatment of Angelo is ambiguous. The main

reason for his removal and disguise is to enable Angelo to activate laws which are: "The needful bits and curbs to headstrong jades" (I, iii, 19). While he informs Friar Thomas that this is specifically what he expects Angelo to do, and while the sealed commissions may well specify his wishes regarding the "tied-up justice," he takes pains to emphasize to Angelo that "Mortality and mercy in Vienna/ Live in thy tongue" (I, i, 44-5), and that he has full authority "to enforce or qualify the laws/ As to your soul seems good" (I, i, 65-6). Angelo has been chosen, "with special soul" and "with a leaven'd and prepared choice." The Duke twice asks Escalus' opinion of Angelo's deputation: "What figure of us, think you, he will bear?" (I, i, 16) and "What think you of it?" (I, i, 21) He speaks of Angelo's virtues (I, i, 27-41), and yet insinuates that he is unnatural and not what he seems (I, iii, 50-54), as if the Duke mistrusts that virtue. It seems the Duke has placed an unnaturally "precise" character in power with a carefully calculated motive, for he gives Angelo full discretionary power, while intending to observe carefully both the Deputy and his manner of rule.

The Duke is concerned about good government, as his conversation with Friar Thomas in I, iii illustrates. But the nature of his chosen substitute, and the curious interest he shows in that appointment and its future effects, suggest more. The Duke's veiled purposes--as obscure as his "moe reasons for this action"--seem to outweigh mere interest in rule, and seem, rather, to have a curiously personal bearing. The closing lines of I, iii are ambiguous, but may permit such a reading: "Hence

shall we see/ If power change purpose, what our seemers be." It is unclear whether "If power change purpose" refers to the purpose of power or to the purpose of Angelo. The former reading may indicate, among other things, an interest in whether Angelo's deputation will bring about the Duke's desired change in the purpose of government. But we may as easily regard the clause as an indication of an interest in the effects of power on Angelo's purpose. We are told that Angelo resists malice and human desire, and it is implied that his ruling purpose will be likewise strict. Read the second way, if the influence of power changes Angelo's purpose, it might also reveal his complete character, which the Duke suggests isn't all it seems. Angelo is a "seemer" in that he assumes the Duke's official role. But the Duke's descriptions of him as unnatural extend the meaning, and introduces a pejorative value, to include a sense of Angelo being merely the semblance of "stricture" and virtue. Simply, the Duke implies that Angelo's blood does flow, and that he has natural appetites; Angelo is included in the conditions of common humanity, regardless of what he seems to others or to himself. Beyond the exercise of law, then, there may be seen to be an experiment in unmasking planned, for reasons which remain obscure. But if the Duke already suspects that Angelo is something other than what he seems, to place him in a position that might corrupt him, bringing about the failure of his appointed commission as well as a personal fall, seems fatuous and strangely cruel--perhaps, as Empson says, "for the fun of making...[Angelo] twitch." Lever claims the conventional ruler "set an example of wisdom, temperance and magnanimity," and the

Duke himself speaks of "the love I have in doing good" (III, i, 197); yet the ambiguity of his character increasingly appears to contradict his conventional aspect and his words. There seems, instead, a sceptical if not cynical tone to his plans for Angelo, which may make us wonder at him.

Act I, iii suggests the Duke's fallibility, as he shows himself to be a rather smug character, removed from his people, and seemingly above his own humanity. He tells Friar Thomas, for instance:

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

The image is of an armoured perfection<sup>11</sup> which is impervious to love and mirrors Angelo's "Even till now/ When men were fond, I smil'd, and wonder'd how" (II, ii, 186-87). The statement becomes ironical of course, as his proposal to Isabella later illustrates; but at this point it suggests a parallel with Angelo's self-deception. It denies an essential aspect of the Duke's humanity, and he seems mistaken in his sense of being complete and superior. Angelo is mocked for the pompous and mistaken notion he has of his removal from common humanity, and the Duke's similar behaviour may be seen to be open to the same mockery.

Similarly, if Isabella's renouncement is mocked, the Duke's chosen disguise may carry with it some of the same implicit derision. Rosalind Miles observes:

Shakespeare could not have been unaware of the attitude of his contemporaries towards friars, so that there is at least a subtle mockery in the disguise which he makes the Duke adopt.<sup>12</sup>

Such an attitude, however subtle, must erode the serious presentation of a conventional ruler. The pattern of similarities between Angelo's, Isabella's, and the Duke's predilections for a life of secluded study makes the Duke's disguise, perhaps, somewhat too fitting to completely resist some degree of transference of the mockery of the disguise to the Duke himself.

Act III, i's so-called Homily on Death is ambiguous and problematic. The Friar-Duke instructs Claudio in a world contempt similar to Isabella's subsequent position. Man is merely "servile" to forces beyond him; because of his mortality, he is "Death's fool." Man is base, cowardly, and fearful of death; he is composed of impersonal dust, with no particular identity; his body is his enemy. He is never satisfied, never happy; wealth is meaningless and acquired too late to enjoy. It is a remarkable harangue against life, which Shakespeare has given no clear reason for.

The Friar-Duke's speech to Claudio is orthodox Christian world-contempt, though it requires the completion which Claudio gives it: "To sue to live, I find I seek to die,/ And seeking death, find life. Let it come on" (III, i, 42-3). At this point, religious instruction is effective in giving the suffering Claudio some measure of comfort and resolve. The point is, however, that this comfort and resolve is extremely short-lived.

Claudio accepts the Friar-Duke's view of things, at least until Isabella's entrance, a few lines later, renews his hope for reprieve. The will to live easily re-surfaces, collapsing elaborate philosophy into "Is there no remedy?...But is there any?" (III, i, 60 and 62) The closure of that thin hope does not, however throw him back to the essence of the Homily, however. Claudio says, instead, "O Isabel!...Death is a fearful thing" (III, i, 115). His speech on death is of similar poetic intensity to the Duke's, but with quite a different conclusion:

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, 128-31)

This is far from the Homily's "either death or life/ Shall thereby be the sweeter," as Claudio clings to life at any cost.

Doctrine is confronted by the reality of a man's life and death and proves itself irrelevant. Claudio is, after all, to die for what the play widely regards as merely a fault--it is only Angelo, Isabella, and the Duke who regard it with any severity, and their positions are consistently derided--and he is to die cheerfully. His reversals--from hope, to the death-wish of the Homily, to hope again, to fearful clinging to life, to complete collapse--have been viewed as puerile, and his willingness to trade Isabella's chastity for his own life as selfish.<sup>13</sup> Such theorizing is parallel to the Homily itself: glib and inappropriate to the seriousness and desperation of Claudio's circumstance. He appears to be, rather, as J. W. Lever proposes, "the test-case...of systems and creeds."<sup>14</sup> Claudio is battered about to test the nature and efficacy of legal, and



religious creeds. I have discussed the dismal outcome of the Duke's similar testing of Angelo and Isabella. His "instruction" of Claudio illustrates how inadequate and inappropriate are institutions that fail to regard the human circumstances of individual lives. The Friar-Duke's position is as excessive as is Isabella's world-contempt and renouncement, or as Angelo's unqualified law. All of these positions require correction.

The absurdity of the Friar-Duke's position is emphasized with the attempt to similarly instruct Barnardine in IV, iii. Claudio and Barnardine may be seen to be parallel characters at this point, for purposes of parody. They are both to die and are "unfit" to do so. Isabella's sole purpose by II, iv is that Claudio "may be so fitted/ That his soul sicken not" (II, iv, 40-41); and Barnardine, spying a way out of immediate execution (to execute him unprepared would be to send him to Hell), claims he is "not fitted" (IV, iii, 43). But the parody is directed more at the Friar-Duke than at Claudio. We have observed his attempt to "fit" Claudio--ending in world-loathing more than in Christian hope--and in IV, iii he attempts the same with Barnardine. Barnardine is "Unfit to live or die" (IV, iii, 63), a "creature unprepar'd, unmeet for death" (IV, iii, 80). If Claudio's confused reversals of position question the efficacy of the Friar-Duke's doctrine when applied to actual circumstances, Barnardine's case seems to degrade it. Claudio clings to life out of fear of death, and then desires death out of loathing for life. But Barnardine simply refuses to die. "Rude wretch" that he is, his desire to live is simple tenacity. Though his life consists of eating, sleeping and drinking, it is all he has, and

he cares to live it. Barnardine's tenacity may be seen in retrospect to mock both Claudio's eroded desire to live and the Friar-Duke's "instruction." Ecclesiastical proselytizing seems ridiculous in the light of this, the lowest character in the play, who will not be moved by it. When he first hears of Barnardine, the Duke in disguise seems simplistic and pompous:

Prov. 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.

Duke. He wants advice. (IV, ii, 140-44)

Here is a character who is unafraid of death, yet who refuses to die. The Friar-Duke's advice will no doubt have to be concerned with more negation in order to "advise him for a better place" (IV, ii, 207), or to "Persuade this rude wretch willingly to die" (IV, iii, 80). But Barnardine, base as his life may be (the Duke will have trouble describing life to him in yet lower terms), rejects any of this solemn advice. The Friar-Duke and his advice seem absurd as they come up against complete recalcitrance:

Duke. ...I am come to advise you,  
comfort you, and pray with you.

Barn. Friar, not I. I have been drinking hard all night, and I will have more time to prepare me, or they shall beat out my brains with billets. I will not consent to die this day, that's certain.

Duke. O sir, you must; and therefore I beseech you  
Look forward on the journey you shall go.

Barn. I swear I will not die today for any man's  
persuasion.

Duke. But hear you--

Barn. Not a word. (IV, iii, 50-61)

Barnardine is unfit to die; but how is he "unfit to live?" He doesn't fear death, which fear was supposedly Claudio's problem. In fact, Barnardine is "fearless of what's past, present, or to come," an attitude which is precisely what the Friar-Duke suggests for Claudio. The Duke claims that death is merely a sleep (III, i, 17-19) and Barnardine "apprehends death no more dreadfully but as a drunken sleep." Is it only, then, that he is "desperately mortal?" This is precisely the condition of all the comic characters, and their simple humanity--faults and all--is the source of their virulence against the high-blown creeds of the principal characters. If there is to be instruction, it appears it will be the principal characters as much as the comics who will receive it. But unmasking accompanies any such instruction in Measure for Measure, and the parody and ridicule the Friar-Duke receives from Barnardine may be seen to do just that. Mary Lascelles, for example, gives us an effective image of comic rebellion:

Barnardine is the old soldier by the Scottish cross-roads; he is the poacher in the shadow of an English spinney; the man who will always, without effort or apparent intention, make constituted authority appear ridiculous.<sup>15</sup>

In effect, Barnardine derides rule and the result is a lesson directed at authority: the value of simple mortality, no matter how desperate.

A similar comic circumstance occurs between the seeming Friar and Pompey. The Friar-Duke claims that "Correction and instruction must both work/ Ere this rude beast will profit" (III, ii, 31-2). But we have observed the ineffectuality of Escalus' instruction of Pompey. Pompey completely ignored it: "I thank your worship for your good counsel; [aside] but I shall follow it as the flesh and fortune shall better determine" (II, i, 249-50). The Friar-Duke's extremely bitter harangue when Pompey is caught again suggests a depth of disgust for the "low-life:"

Fie, sirrah, a bawd, a wicked bawd;  
 The evil that thou causest to be done,  
 That is thy means to live. Do thou but think  
 What 'tis to cram a maw or clothe a back  
 From such a filthy vice. 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? Go mend, go mend.  
 (III, ii, 18-26)

Instruction is once again useless as Pompey responds to invective with sly mockery: "Indeed it does stink in some sort, sir." The Duke recognizes the fruitlessness of the attempt. He says "Nay, if the devil have given thee proofs for sin,/ Thou wilt prove his" (III, ii, 29-30). Ironically, the only instruction Pompey listens to is from his "fellow-partner" Abhorson, and it is the cynical "Every true man's apparel fits your thief" (IV, ii, 41): lawful hangman or unlawful bawd, lawful Deputy or unlawful

lecher--all are in the same human "stew," and it seems unlikely that instruction or rule will change that.

So far, I have discussed the stage situation of the Duke-in-disguise's testing of the influence of doctrine, for that situation is all we can know with certainty. But I am not certain the Duke's mask is impenetrable. Shakespeare never lets us know, either with a soliloquy or an aside, the Duke's thoughts regarding his Friar's advice. A. P. Rossiter shifts attention to the Duke himself, and finds a disturbing character beneath the disguise:

It [the Homily] enwraps a death-wish far profounder than 'Tir'd with all these'....It takes away all Man's proud additions, honours, titles, claims--even his selfhood and integrity; and the soul and after-life are not even dismissed as vain hopes. It cannot be the pseudo-Friar speaking Christian world-contempt: there is no redemption, no hint of immortality in the whole. The only certitudes are existence, uncertainty, disappointment, frustration, old age and death.<sup>16</sup>

Although Rossiter may go too far in his belief that it is the Duke himself who speaks the Homily--it should be remembered that Claudio does in fact introduce the missing theme of redemption and immortality--it seems to me that there are indeed grounds for questions. The passage is striking in its passion and poetic intensity; it is one of the strongest statements in the play, and it seems strange to give it exclusively to the surface of disguise. The speech would remain merely one of the play's anomalies if we were not given certain suggestions regarding the Duke's character, which are something less than congenial. The Duke's references to the court and to public life may be seen to be characterized by an element of disgust, for example, and he

prefers a life removed (I, iii, 7-10). He describes Vienna as given to slander and rumour (IV, i, 60-65). Rule is plagued by "Back-wounding calumny" which "No might nor greatness in mortality" can escape (III, ii, 179-80). Nor does the low-life escape the Duke's disgust, as he attacks Pompey with graphic suggestions of a hideous life (III, ii, 18-26). The Duke seems to me to be characterized by anger for the condition of things, and by a gathering disgust for what he encounters in his covert wanderings. If we are not given the benefit of a soliloquy regarding the Homily, we are given one regarding his views of position and of his city:

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)

Falseness is the general condition, and it runs like a pack of dogs after authority. He gives us an image of general viciousness and danger, which suggests that the Duke is something less than magnanimous (to borrow Lever's term concerning what constitutes "royal authority") towards "millions" of his subjects. His predilections for seclusion (I, iii, 7-10) are suggested again when, needing a plausible alibi for his prolonged absence, he suggests what might be believed of him: "perchance entering into some monastery" (IV, ii, 200-01). The "O place and greatness" speech seems to cap this sense of a disgusted, reluctant Duke, disclosing, perhaps, a disillusion similar to Angelo's (II, iv, 12-15). Angelo has learned a bitter lesson about statecraft and the state through his fall. Angelo's own

"false seeming" recalls the Duke's initial purposes regarding "our seemers," and Angelo's and the Duke's clearly parallel speeches make the Duke's view of things clear. He is appalled by what he knows and sees, and it is little wonder that he prefers solitude to his appointed "place and greatness."

There is no evidence to support a view of the Homily as unequivocally the Duke's own view of the bleakness of life. And yet, as so often in the play, gathering doubts tend to make us wonder, or to have "divided responses" towards situations that seem as if they should be clear. Uncertainties about the Duke may, at the least, suggest a partial penetration of his seemingly impenetrable character, so that what Rossiter calls the "sceptic deflations" of the Homily may include the suggestion that they may not be so far from the Duke's view of things. High-blown doctrine is exposed for what it is, and the mere suggestion of the Duke's attachment to or affiliation with such doctrine may cause us to sense more sharply his fallibility and need for change. Finally Rosalind Miles notes that disguise has an ironic, reverse side:

The victims of disguise are those who masquerade in confident expectation of gaining an advantage over others, but who find that their machinations rebound onto their own heads...<sup>17</sup>

If the Duke is testing orthodox views, it may be that the failure of the Friar-Duke's instruction of Claudio rebounds onto the Duke in such a way as to implicate the Duke himself in its absurdity.

Lucio plays a peculiar and important role in relation to the Duke. He has been the catalyst in the unmasking of Angelo and

Isabella through his influence in II, ii, and through his derision throughout. Ironically, he is in a sense the Duke's agent with these "seemers," and more ironically still, he may be seen as part of a comic process which catches the Duke at his own game.

Lucio usually appears immediately following the scenes of the Duke's scheming or sermonizing. The central characters of the scenes are, respectively, the Duke and Lucio, and these opposites are in effect juxtaposed. Act I, i's serious concerns with law and good government are countered by scene ii's jocular lawlessness. Disturbing social issues which the Duke must confront become devalued when presented through the quick wit of Lucio and the others, appearing merely as instances of the vitality of everyday life. In I, iii attention reverts to the Duke. His purpose is "More grave and wrinkled than the aims and ends/ Of burning youth" (I, iii, 5-6). His is an austere view and purpose, as opposed to the hub-bub of Vienna and the world of "youth, and cost, witless bravery" (I, iii, 10), and he has come to a friar's cell for aid. Scene iv places the foppish, lecherous, and jeering Lucio in a convent, once again juxtaposing him to the Duke. The contrast of the two characters enables the presentation of opposing views of lechery. But beyond that, Lucio's derision of Angelo's "profits of the mind, study and fast" (I, iv, 61) also implicates Isabella and the Duke, for all three characters may be seen to be similar in this.

The Duke and Lucio argue about lechery in III, ii, the Duke's position that "It is too general a vice, and severity must cure it" (III, ii, 96) being countered by Lucio's "it is



impossible to extirp it quite, friar, till eating and drinking be put down (III, ii, 98-9). The Duke's point is similar to Angelo's regard for the "terror" of the law. Lucio chooses, however, to align the supposedly absent Duke with himself:

Why, what a ruthless thing is this in him, for the rebellion of a codpiece to take away the life of a man! Would the Duke that is absent have done this? Ere he would have hanged a man for the getting a hundred bastards, he would have paid for the nursing a thousand. He had some feeling of the sport; he knew the service; and that instructed him to mercy.  
(III, ii, 110-17)

There is no evidence in the play that this is anything more than slander, but Lucio's sense of the injustice of harsh punishment for such a natural fault is more appropriate than the Duke's views or Angelo's repressive law. The injustice of Claudio's situation, and the sympathetic portrait of street-life illustrate the point. For the Duke to take the view of the unnatural and derided Angelo is to question his sensibilities and include him, perhaps, in Angelo's general devaluation. That doubt makes possible, if not a belief in Lucio's claims regarding the Duke, at least some pleasure in seeing the Duke slandered.

On the heels of the Friar-Duke's failure to advise Barnardine in IV, iii, mirroring his failure with Claudio, Lucio abuses the Duke himself: "He's a better woodsman than thou tak'st him for" (IV, iii, 161). Lucio's ignorance of the Duke's identity is simple irony, but it appears to rebound upon the Duke himself as he is unable to stop the slander. It is as if Shakespeare places his Duke in the stocks, subjecting him to public abuse. The Duke's credibility and position already seem

eroded through his questionable behavior and through his Friar's devalued advice, and Lucio's slander caps that. It is a bitter thrashing. In fact, at this point, the audience may enjoy Lucio's ragging and the Duke's inability to stop it. Lucio's abuse is a welcome change from the total control and pervasive manipulation which characterize the Duke in the latter half of the play. The Duke is plagued by Lucio, who sticks to him like "a kind of burr," a condition the Duke must tolerate with barely concealed irritation and rage until his unmuffling in Act V.

Lucio may be a "foul-mouthed liar" as Nevill Coghill has it. After all, the Duke's love of a solitary, scholarly life would seem to disqualify any notion of his carousing in the suburb's "houses;" and Escalus describes him as "One that, above all other strife, contended especially to know himself....Rather rejoicing to see another merry, than merry at anything which professed to make him rejoice. A gentleman of all temperance" (III, ii, 226-31). And yet we have seen Lucio to be incisive regarding Angelo and Isabella, however jaded in his views. His claims about the Duke may therefore leave at least a residue of doubt. He repeatedly insinuates an inside knowledge of the Duke which may also make us wonder. As early as I, iv he says he knows that the given reasons for the Duke's absence "were of an infinite distance/ From his true-meant design" (I, iv, 54-5), claiming to have learned this from "those that know the very nerves of state." Either this is a clever guess, or he has access to the Duke's most trusted confidants. He is suggestive with the Friar-Duke in III, ii, implying knowledge of the Duke's disguise: "It was a mad, fantastical trick of him to steal from the state and

usurp the beggary he was never born to" (III, ii, 89-90). He claims "Sir, I was an inward of his. A shy fellow was the Duke; and I believe I know the cause of his withdrawing" (III, ii, 127-29), and he tantalizes the Duke with "Come, sir, I know what I know" (III, ii, 148). Lucio's behavior may simply accomplish an irony which degrades him, for he has perhaps gone too far in his deflation of rule, and which rescues the Duke's propriety after his Friar's absurd instruction and after so much time in powerless disguise. Furthermore, it seems unlikely that Lucio would slander the Duke to his face. And yet we cannot be completely certain either about his cognizance of the Duke's presence, or about the truth of what he "knows." Lucio causes a problem regarding our view of the Duke, an uncertainty such that, as Coghill proposes, "Some of the mud will cling perhaps."<sup>18</sup> The Duke's "if your knowledge be more, it is much darkened in your malice" (III, ii, 143-44) is something of a doubt-provoking qualifier. My point is that some of the irony of the abuse may attach itself to the Duke as well as to Lucio, as doubts gather, however subtle or obscure, around the figure of the "gentleman of all temperance" who is also the "duke of dark corners." At the very least, it appears to me that Lucio could very well apply Isabella's words to Angelo to the Duke himself, and that the play's pattern of parallels and similarities between the principal characters would support it:

Go to your bosom,  
 Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know  
 That's like my brother's fault. (II, ii, 137-39)

Measure for Measure opens with the Duke in a position of authority and as the central figure in the play. But his authority seems to be progressively eroded through an accumulation of doubt. Questions are raised by his words and actions, by the corrosive influence of parody, and by Lucio's comic abuse. The more his conventional role is eroded, the more the Duke seems to become a complex, fallible character. William Empson notices this devaluation of convention:

...when the Duke buzzes from Claudio to Isabella, all agog, and busily telling lies to both, I do not see how the author can be banking on the simple-minded respect of the audience for great persons.<sup>19</sup>

But Miles also speaks for many when she says "We are made uneasy because we are not given enough help in placing the Duke." It seems to me that that problem lies in the slippage between convention and the human character the Duke progressively becomes. It is as if Shakespeare utilizes convention to raise expectations that are then ironically thwarted for dramatic purposes. The cold, impersonal Duke is not as infallible as he initially seems, and appears himself to be in a process of self-education. The comics aid that process, deflating, as Edith Kern suggests, "the individual's exaggerated notion of his own importance, considering him but a link in the great chain of death."<sup>20</sup> The Duke's relation to the comic subplot seems an illustration of an urge to pull the high and ideal down to a human level, and if the Duke requires instruction, it is surely concerning his own, and others' humanity. In many ways, the Duke is parallel to Angelo, as Robert Grudin notices:

Indeed, Angelo and the Duke are both aspects of the same character. Both are depicted from very early on as being celibate, moralistic, imperious, intellectual, and vain. Both avow the distinction of being immune to vulgar passions. Both hold the same political position, and both are attracted to the same woman.<sup>21</sup>

None of the principals are what they at first appear. Isabella could easily be included in Grudin's parallel in many ways, and all of them are implicated in a general pattern of seeming. The Duke may be seen to be caught, as Mary Lascelles puts it, in the net of his own making. It appears that he is removed from the centre of the play to become a character bound in the effects of his schemes: he is himself tested as much as are the other principals. Ironically, the Duke-in-disguise receives a lesson in humanity and his inclusion in it. He may be seen as a complex character, then, involved in a comedic process towards "recovery," and not exclusively as the puppet-master of the faults and troubles of others.

NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Pope, "The Renaissance Background of Measure for Measure." Shakespeare Survey, 2 (1949), pp. 39-40; Gless, p. 23; Lawrence, p. 102; Lascelles, p. 95; Lever, p. xcvi; Empson, p. 283.

<sup>2</sup> See Miles, pp. 125-96; Lever, pp. xliv-li.

<sup>3</sup> Lever, p. xlvii.

<sup>4</sup> Miles, pp. 182-83.

<sup>5</sup> Miles, p. 176.

<sup>6</sup> Miles, p. 135.

<sup>7</sup> F. R. Leavis, "The Greatness of Measure for Measure." Scrutiny, 10, No. 3 (1942), p. 154.

<sup>8</sup> Lascelles, p. 95.

<sup>9</sup> Miles, p. 285.

<sup>10</sup> See Miles' discussion, pp. 135-36 and pp. 180-85.

<sup>11</sup> See Lever's note to the lines.

<sup>12</sup> Miles, p. 172.

<sup>13</sup> Warren J D . Smith, "More Light on Measure for Measure." Modern Language Quarterly, 23 (1962), p. 316.

<sup>14</sup> Lever, p. xciv.

<sup>15</sup> Lascelles, p. 109.

<sup>16</sup> Rossiter, pp. 165-66.

<sup>17</sup> Miles, p. 135.

<sup>18</sup> Coghill, p. 23.

<sup>19</sup> Empson, p. 282.

<sup>20</sup> Edith Kern, The Absolute Comic (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1980), p. 11.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Grudin, Mighty Opposites, (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1979), p. 110.

CHAPTER V: "All is whole:"<sup>1</sup> The Comic Resolution

The first four acts of Measure for Measure present a world in disarray. The principal characters suffer and scheme and find themselves in a predicament which forces them to the very edge of their possibilities and fears. The comic characters bumble along in their amoral world, battered about by the exigencies of the main plot, but changing not at all. There is dark suggestiveness about the heart of man and his society: virtue is corrupted too easily by lust and pride; justice seems equivocal, exercised and controlled by figures as erring as those they would judge; the illusion or hypocrisy of seeming appears to be the general condition. The social fabric--that which would order disorderly human nature--is stretched to the limit, and so is the play's comic structure.

Comedy, it seems safe to say, leads us to anticipate some form of resolution, some degree of "happy ending," whether an "individual release which is also a social reconciliation," "revival and renewal," "clarification," or the "homeopathic" cure of folly<sup>2</sup>. Irresolution of the serious and disturbing conflicts and issues of Measure for Measure would leave us with a bleak picture of things indeed. Some degree of resolution is anticipated and required as part of the formal comic pattern. Theoreticians agree, at least, on this basic requisite of comic form.

In Chapter I, I discussed the issues the principal plot turns upon and must resolve: good rule and self-knowledge. We have seen how all the principal characters are marked by seeming, and receive an education accordingly. We have also seen the comic characters become progressively integrated with these serious characters and issues, sometimes as simple foil or relief and sometimes for purposes of parody, derision, ragging, or implied criticism. I have argued that this relation has a clarifying, renewing function: comic recalcitrance is at the service, in the end, of an affirmation of corrected rule. If this occurs, we should find it in Act V. Structurally, all of the play's conflicts and issues are brought together here in an ostensible resolution. The Duke charitably dispenses remission, Isabella forgives Angelo, Lucio is punished, and a general reconciliation seems to point towards a new social order. And yet the final scene has been widely criticized as a mechanical, purely formal resolution, a joyless "happy ending" for the sake of form.

The play's issues should not only seem to be resolved, but should be felt to be so. In Measure for Measure, however, the comic mood is questionable as even the multiple weddings, the images of sexual and social concord, are suspect. Rosalind Miles, for instance, doubts their comic spirit:

They [the weddings] seem indeed to make wry comment on the romantic idealization of marriage as the source of all harmony and of lawful sexual delight.<sup>3</sup>

Most commentators feel similarly dissatisfied with the whole resolution, or are disposed to "dark" interpretations. Wylie Sypher, for example, concludes that "All is in equipoise, yet all



is in question and unsettlement."<sup>4</sup> The Duke appears to settle everything that has been wrong, and yet there is something about the main characters which seems unchanged, unreformed, while the comic characters seem incorrigible. Harriet Hawkins suggests that these problems may be intentional: "Even in the end, when the organization of the play seems to encourage it, the characterization seems to subvert an acceptance of the Duke's far too facile settlements and solutions."<sup>5</sup> But surely we must trust the Duke by Act V; in spite of earlier doubts about him, for if we cannot trust him at the end as he makes his grand, pageant-like re-entry to the play's surface world, we can trust no-one. Without trust in someone or something at its close, the comedy would certainly crumble into a vision of disorder and absurdity. Indeed, many have seen it so. The question remains, then, whether such a dislocation of structure and mood, and thus of expectation and fulfillment, characterizes the final scene. To answer this, I will return to the main characters. After their unmasking is accomplished, theoretical questions remain: has the pushing of limits also "clarified" and "revalued" the characters and issues: has folly been cured by folly?

1

Angelo's behavior in Act V seems characterized by an uneasy self-preservation until the moment he can no longer support his charade of the virtuous Deputy. From the start, the Duke praises Angelo for his "justice" and Angelo carefully preserves his upright image. He listens to Isabella's accusations with little

to say short of a tone of dismissal. When Mariana accuses him of sleeping with her, however, he is forced to react, but he does so with self-preserving lies, continuing the alibi he had used five years previously to avoid marriage: "For that her reputation was disvalu'd/ In levity" (V, i, 220-21). Angelo feigns righteous indignation at the claims of Isabella and Mariana when it begins to be apparent he is in trouble. He continues the subterfuge until he is accused directly by the unmuffled Duke. Then, and (suspiciously) only then does he show any remorse:

O my dread lord,  
I shall be guiltier than my guiltiness  
To think I can be undiscernible,  
When I perceive your Grace, like power divine,  
Hath looked upon my passes. (V, i, 364-68)

But the tenacity of his masquerade in Act V, and the admission of guilt under duress alone, leave his penitence open to question. Cover-up seems more important to him than justice and redress. He tells us he had taken pride (however furtively) in his seriousness (II, iv, 9-10); in Act V that pride becomes a corresponding shame (V, i, 369), and not remorse.

If the play has demonstrated the cruelty and folly of Angelo's strict justice, we might expect his legal views to be revised. The Duke places him in a "Measure still for Measure" situation in Act V that approximates the situation which Angelo's proclamation had placed Claudio in. The fact that Angelo is as fallen as any whom he might judge should make him recognize the essentially wrong spirit of such strict justice. The trouble is, Angelo still seems to agree with the spirit of strict law, asking for "Immediate sentence, then, and sequent death" (V, i, 371) without any thought of mercy. It seems the Duke is still testing

him, for he pretends to apply strict law to the case:

"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, 407-09)

Even after Mariana and Isabella plead for Angelo's life, Angelo still craves "death more willingly than mercy" (V, i, 474), echoing his earlier statement to Escalus: "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). His legal creed has not altered from the proclamation of I, ii until here, in spite of his suffering and self-education, his exposure and unmasking; and in the midst of his shame, he comprehends and asks for nothing more.

The potential climax for Angelo, a turning-point from the bottom of degradation and shame, is Claudio's entrance and unmuffling. It will nullify Angelo's own measure-for-measure judgement, opening the way, instead for Mariana's love and marriage. He has much to answer for in his treatment of Isabella, to be sure, but life may at least be possible. Shakespeare seems to focus attention on Angelo at this instant, the instant when all will be made whole again. Yet the way he does it is strange. Angelo has demonstrated care for nothing save, first, his self-preservation, and then a death craved because of a burden of shame. Very suddenly his wish for death evaporates, as the Duke observes:

By this Lord Angelo perceives he's safe;  
Methinks I see a quickening in his eye. (V, i, 492-93)

In one sense, a necessary change--Angelo's renewed desire to live--has been effected. And yet that change still questions the presence of remorse. After all, Angelo had ordered Claudio's death, had supposedly defiled Isabella, and had then betrayed her: it is a considerable burden of guilt, for which we might expect some penitence. But if his desire for death is seen to stem from unreformed legal views and shame rather than remorse, his hope to live seems based on a simple reversal of the circumstances rather than on a recognition of an opportunity to set things right. His sudden hope appears to arise from the simple fact that he hadn't executed Claudio after all. That fact doesn't negate his intention to do so, however, any more than does it negate his intended violation of Isabella. But it is not merely the suddenness of Angelo's "quicken'd eye" that jars. There is also something in the Duke's language which seems to question any forgiveness of Angelo which we might expect.

Throughout I, i, the Duke addresses his deputy simply as "Angelo," an appellation as neutral as is the scene. In I, iii, however, when the Duke describes Angelo as unnaturally "precise," insinuating that he is not what he seems, he refers to "Lord Angelo." After Angelo is exposed, he becomes "this Angelo," (III, i, 213), "this well-seeming Angelo" (III, i, 223), and "this wretch" (IV, iii, 134). In Act V, he is once again "Lord Angelo" when the Duke observes, with undisguised disgust: "Do you not smile at this, Lord Angelo?/ O heaven, the vanity of wretched fools!" (V, i, 165-66). The title is not one of respect--how could it be, given the circumstances; it seems

infused with bitterness, perhaps cynicism, as the unrepentent,  
self-preserving Angelo hopes to live.

Angelo doesn't appear to be relieved that Claudio is alive --that the life of a youth is spared in spite of Angelo's corruption--or certainly not for the right reasons. We learn from the Duke's observations that Angelo simply "perceives he's safe" (V, i, 492). There is little indication in Act V of what we might expect to be Angelo's thankfulness that Claudio has been spared, regret for his machinations concerning Isabella, or his love for or at least gratitude towards Mariana; and there is no remorse at all. The Duke seems cynical regarding Angelo's behavior in the last scene, and indisposed, therefore, to offer him consolation or genuine forgiveness. His only comment to Angelo concerning his altered situation is the sardonic "Well, Angelo, your evil quits you well" (V, i, 494): he tells him that, in essence, he got off easily. There is no statement of remission and no suggestion that Angelo will be reclaimed for statecraft; there is only a terse commandment concerning what Angelo has cared so little about, and that he has shunned even in Act V, Mariana's love: "Look that you love your wife: her worth, worth yours" (V, i, 495), and that is all.

Mary Lascelles finds the forgiveness of Angelo problematic, for he has been too monstrous to be reconciled with the others. For her, Angelo has gone far beyond the bounds of the conventionally corrupt magistrate, so that conventional forgiveness of him is strained.<sup>6</sup> But it may be that the Duke's "remission" is more for the sake of the others than for Angelo. After all, Angelo's "recovery" from his brittle views of morality

and law to one which includes mercy, from self-disgust to acceptance of self, from pride and shame to true penitence, and from unloving bachelor to loving husband of the woman he has wronged, is uncertain indeed. And yet it is essential to the comedy that he be somehow included at the end, in some way made a part of a general reconciliation. Ostensibly, this happens as he is pardoned and married; but serious doubts remain that must be somehow explained or included.

2

I discussed Isabella's excessive morality, her lack of charity, her pride and her world-contempt in Chapter III. Since III, i the Duke has explicitly led her towards a low point that she may find "heavenly comforts of despair/ When it is least expected" (IV, iii, 109-10) and a "physic/ That's bitter to sweet end" (IV, vi, 7-8). In Act V that low point is a descent into shame designed, it appears, to teach her charity and forgiveness. J. W. Lever makes an important point concerning her nature:

It is in the nature of the play that Isabella's personality, like the personalities of Claudio and of Angelo, should seem neither 'good' nor 'bad', but basically self-ignorant, with inner tensions stretched to the point of moral collapse before the process can be reversed and a new psychic integration achieved.

But Isabella is not easily instructed, and her "psychic integration" is as uncertain as is Angelo's.

In Act V the Duke leads Isabella into despair. She had been promised that the bed-trick would yield her untainted honour (III, i, 254), that it would "do no stain to your own gracious



Lucio. Marry, sir, I think if you handled her privately she would sooner confess; perchance publicly she'll be ashamed.

Esc. I will go darkly to work with her.

Lucio. That's the way; for women are light at midnight.  
(V, i, 271-78)

By this point in Act V Isabella's public image has slipped from wronged maiden to mad wench, and her promised satisfactions seem remote indeed.

Isabella's motives for the bed-trick appear to be based on pride, fear of violation, and the desire for revenge. Such characteristics are in as much need of change as are Angelo's "stricture" and rigid justice, for they are excessive and dissociated from charity. Within the subterfuge, Isabella claims a compassion which she had not demonstrated in actual experience:

...and after much debatement,  
My sisterly remorse confutes mine honour,  
And I did yield to him. (V, i, 102-03)

In reality, she had neither shown "remorse" for Claudio nor "debatement," being disposed only to self-preservation. But the comic resolution will require more of her than this.

Angelo's exposure vindicates Isabella, restoring her lost honour, and his impending punishment promises her revenge. Mariana's request for Isabella's forgiveness of Angelo requires that Isabella soften her desire for retribution. Mariana is required to plead with Isabella at length (V, i, 429-40), and Isabella's delay suggests how difficult it is for her to sacrifice her revenge. But the tone of her forgiveness plea, when it finally comes, seems equivocal:



I partly think  
 A due sincerity govern'd his deeds  
 Till he did look on me. Since it is so,  
 Let him not die. (V, i, 443-46)

There is a certain smugness in "Till he did look on me," "an impulse," writes William Empson, "of personal vanity so repulsive as to surprise even Dr. Johnson."<sup>8</sup> Beyond the suggestion of vanity, there is the sense that Isabella will only go so far as to suspect that he may have been sincere before he looked on her. This is vague trust in Angelo indeed, and vague forgiveness. Isabella asks that Angelo's life be spared in view of what might have been "due sincerity" previous to their first interview, but there is no plea for his complete pardon. She continues in the intellectual manner of parts of her interviews with Angelo in II, ii and iv, arguing a point, almost a quibble, based purely on logic:

For Angelo,  
 His act did not o'ertake his bad intent,  
 And must be buried but as an intent  
 That perish'd by the way. Thoughts are no subjects;  
 Intentions, but merely thoughts. (V, i, 448-52)

Isabella's argument is restricted to technicalities. It is questionable whether the expected forgiveness, or charity, can be seen to be really achieved here. If not for Mariana--to whom she is indebted for deceiving Angelo--it is arguable whether she would have been disposed to plead at all. This need for prompting is nothing new in her, similar as it is to her dependence on Lucio's prompting in II, ii, and it continues, in Act V, to raise questions about her charity. Although it may seem to be asking a great deal of her to expect Isabella

genuinely, of her own accord, to forgive Angelo, the play's structure makes us anticipate a greater magnanimity than she displays.

In spite of her "forgiveness" of Angelo, the Duke is not finished with his testing of Isabella. The Duke rejects Isabella's plea, pardoning Barnardine instead, and he begins to test her attitudes towards Claudio. Isabella had expressed a world-contempt similar to the Friar-Duke's Homily. The Duke tests Angelo's views with the "Measure still for Measure" speech (V, i, 407-09), and he now does something similar with Isabella with a Homily-like justification for Claudio's death:

But peace be with him.  
That life is better life, past fearing death,  
Than that which lives to fear. Make it your comfort,  
So happy is your brother. (V, i, 394-97)

The speech is an echo of the position of III, i, and she agrees immediately: "I do, my lord." She later justifies Claudio's death again:

My brother had but justice,  
In that he did the thing for which he died.  
(V, i, 446-47)

Isabella demonstrates no remorse for placing her self-preservation before her brother's life, but has instead slipped into a tacit agreement with Angelo's strict sense of law. She actually speaks of "justice" being done. Several conclusions are suggested: that she retains her excessively negative view of life; that she has no sense of remorse or regret over her dealings with her brother; and that her honor and pride are still foremost to her, and remain intact.

Claudio's unmuffling should be the same climactic moment for Isabella that it is for Angelo. We are given no similar focus of observation, however, to indicate her response, and no words. Claudio and Isabella are both given silence, and that silence may be troublesome given Claudio's ordeal on the one hand and Isabella's apparent indifference on the other. She has just agreed that he is better off dead, and that he has paid fairly for his "crime." Had she learned at least compassion, if not charity, remorse for her past treatment of Claudio and for her current justifications for his death would seem more appropriate than what might be construed as ambivalence. But because there has not been evidence of any real remorse or compassion or charity, Claudio's unmuffling seems more an exposure of Isabella's icy self-regard than any resolution of their bitter conflict. Had Shakespeare given Claudio something to say it would have gone far towards his re-emergence, so to speak, from the grave, and towards a clarification of ambiguities concerning Isabella's regard for her brother. Without a line, we are left unsure about either of their feelings towards the other, and consequently we are unsure of how to view them ourselves. Certainly it is a very pregnant moment, upon which turns our interpretation of Isabella and, accordingly, the play's resolution. William Empson offers a pertinent view:

...no doubt the plot gave no room for a long speech, but the Bard is not as tongue-tied as all that if he can think of anything for a character to say. The apologists have objected that flippant modern critics merely do not understand the old reverence for virginity

if they dwell on such points. But it is impossible to suppose all these details are accidental; they are not even clumsy; they are pointed. It seems to me the only working theory is to suppose Shakespeare could not quite stomach the old reverence either.<sup>9</sup>

My analysis of Isabella may justify this view. At the very least, this dramatic moment seems another instance, so common in Measure for Measure, of a structural turning-point that is clouded by uncertainty.

Finally, the Duke twice proposes to Isabella; she is silent. Once again, much might have been clarified and resolved had she been given a response. Her silence is, instead, another factor in an accumulation of doubt. If Isabella's faults have been corrected, if she has found remorse, forgiveness, and charity, she may be the paragon of a new society, more fit for worldly happiness than the convent's stricture and hushed enclosure. But none of this is really clear. The repetition of the proposal seems to indicate hesitation in her. If Isabella is seen to accept the second offer, she may be seen to be reconciled to her rightful world, "recovered" from excess and folly. But, as J. W. Lever suggests, if we view her as accepting the proposal, it seems "a formal decision rather than a change of heart."<sup>10</sup> The plot requires its resolution; the comedy seems to promise reconciliation, and what better image of it than in the marriage of the troubled central characters. But if Isabella is not seen to be changed, her marriage seems to be, as Miles has it, a wry comment of the efficacy on the institution.<sup>11</sup> I have difficulty seeing her, as William W. Lawrence sees her, and as the plot would seem to require, turning to the Duke "with a heavenly and

yielding smile."<sup>12</sup> It seems to me that reformation of her old views and character is at best uncertain. She has been offered a place in the world, but she may, just as easily, prefer the life she was forced, in I, iv, to unwillingly leave.

3

The Duke may be seen as a character involved in a process of self-education. He appears to be a reluctant ruler who regards himself as being immune to love. Far from being a mere convention, he may be seen to be a complex character. It seems to me that comedy requires that he change, fitting him for good rule through self-knowledge, and for marriage, rather than for the "life remov'd." I have discussed the problem of an uncertain resolution of the conflicts of Angelo and Isabella. Much, however, depends upon our view of the Duke. If he is also seen to be uncertainly reformed, the play is problematic indeed; but if he has developed in ways which will salvage Vienna from the social collapse that seems to threaten it, some form of comic resolution is possible.

Rosalind Miles argues that the Duke's removal from a central position in the play leaves us in moral uncertainty. For her the resolution is consequently problematic: "We are made uneasy because we are not given enough help in placing the Duke." From another perspective, J. W. Lever concludes that, because the Duke has been merely a "stage Duke," he is the play's main problem: "But he undergoes no inner development of character and achieves no added self-knowledge."<sup>13</sup>

The Duke can be seen to develop, learn, and change, however; and he may be seen to regain the central place which he occupies in I, i, returning to us at least some firmer moral ground than the "shiftingness" which has characterized the play since his "disappearance." [The Duke has been educated by wandering in the streets and jails of Vienna. His experience seems to test, unmask, and change him, so that he finds an "apt remission" in himself (V, i, 496), In Angelo, the Duke has observed man's propensities to fall; he has witnessed the depth of Isabella's struggle with fear and pride; and he has encountered the intransigence of the comic characters. If this is a portrayal of the facts of human nature in the world of Measure for Measure, then compassion seems more appropriate than condemnation, for the Duke now must know that what he observes is simply the way of things. Accordingly, even the confessed murderer Barnardine--the very image of intractability--is pardoned. We are not told that the Duke will empty the prisons, spilling out onto already corrupt streets the likes of what Pompey described in IV, iii, 1-20. That would be a simple invitation to anarchy. But justice based on rigid interpretation of law will, Barnardine's case suggests, be softened by mercy. This is something different from the "remission" of the Duke's former laxness, for that stemmed from, it seems, his uncertainty about what constitutes good rule, or from his own political disengagement. Barnardine had, for instance, simply been passed over for nine years. Barnardine's treatment in Act V is finally authoritative and sure, and is characterized by mercy.

The Duke's re-entry into Vienna is opposite in structure and mood from his exit in I, i. He had loved the people but had been reluctant to stage himself to their eyes (I, i, 68), and had secretly slipped away to the friar's cell. At the end of Act IV, everything points towards a highly ritual return, with a mustering of nobility and trumpets (IV, v), which perplexes Escalus and Angelo: "And why meet him at the gates and redeliver our authorities there?" (IV, iv, 4-5). Symbolically, what has been will be removed from the city's enclosure; and what will be will enter a place purged and ready for it. The formerly reluctant Duke will now appear in highly public form and in new authority. Appearances will be essential to stop the effect of "Millions of false eyes" (IV, i, 60), and to replace doubts concerning rule with new confidence. A new order is required, and it must be seen to have arrived. The Duke's final "So bring us to our palace" (V, i, 535) is contrary in spirit to his earlier disdain for the courtiers of that same palace, "Where youth, and cost, witless bravery keeps" (I, iii, 10). This is a new Duke about to enter a palace and city which he will also attempt to make new.

The Duke's new authority is ironically reinforced by the same comic ragging that had previously eroded it. But the irony of Lucio's treatment of the Friar-Duke is now wholly directed back at Lucio as we anticipate the Duke himself. At last the Duke will get his own back: "You must, sir, change persons with me" (V, i, 334) suggests an imminent reversal of abuse, restoring dignity to the ~~maligned~~ Duke. Lucio's mockery is humorous, but the moment of the Duke's unmasking is the Duke's triumph: "Thou

art the first knave that e'er mad'st a duke" (V, i, 354). The Duke has been abused, slandered, and parodied, and rightly so, for his views and attitudes were out of line with those he was to rule. But the reformed Duke must now reclaim decorum; and the loss of decorum that he had described in I, iii, with the social order topsy-turvy, is restored in the pageantry of return.

But all is, of course, not well. Commentators have noticed a certain callousness and even cruelty in the Duke's methods with Angelo, Isabella, and Claudio, as well as unsettlement concerning the bed-trick. The Duke's testing of Angelo seems unscrupulous if, while suspecting he is a "seemer", the Duke places him in a situation that will likely bring about his downfall.

Furthermore, the effects of Angelo's rule are harsh, plunging Claudio into despair and causing hardship in the comic world. It seems callous that the Duke is willing to cause suffering for the sake of an experiment. His prolonged testing of Isabella may be designed to instruct her, but it seems to go beyond acceptable limits in V, i as she is maligned, imprisoned, and kept needlessly ignorant of Claudio's survival. The Duke's "instruction" of Claudio, for the sake, it appears, of another experiment, seems to leave Claudio in despair, and ignorant of any hope of reprieve. Finally, the bed-trick is highly questionable, especially in its results: it brings about what appears to be a highly undesirable marriage that seems cruel to both parties. Angelo must unwillingly marry a woman he clearly has no care for, and Mariana is bound to an unwilling and unloving husband. The device may be conventionally appropriate,



but if the characters have been developed and are seen as complexly human, the trick becomes uncertain in its effects. Explanations for any of these aspects of the Duke's behavior may be found; and yet there persists an underlying dissatisfaction with the Duke, even as he ostensibly brings everything to resolution.

The Duke's new rule is equivocal. In V, i the Duke's "remission" is merciful, excusing even those who may not deserve or learn from it. Escalus had shown mercy to Pompey in II, i, and Pompey's response was "I shall follow it [advice] as the flesh and fortune shall better determine" (II, i, 250-51). When arrested again and made Abhorson's assistant, he simply good-naturedly turns this punishment to his own ends as an escape from whipping; and the reformatory value of it is ironically expressed by his hoping to do Abhorson a good "turn"--to hang the hangman, as Lever puts it in his notes to the lines (IV, ii, 54-5). Barnardine is to be released in Act V and instructed by Friar Peter:

Thou'rt condemn'd;  
 But, for those earthly faults, I quit them all,  
 And pray thee take this mercy to provide  
 For better times to come. Friar, advise him;  
 I leave him to your hand. (V, i, 480-84)

The stinking, straw-covered and probably drunk Barnardine is to be instructed and changed, but how, I wonder, is this new instruction to be more effective than the previous, and absurd one? The image of Barnardine and the Friar formally exiting together as one of the many pairs at the play's close may be structurally harmonious, but it is ridiculous in another way,

given what we have witnessed of Barnardine's intractability, and of the incorrigibility of the comic world in general. It seems, almost, a mockery. Wylie Sypher, for instance, observes the uselessness of the Duke's new justice:

The paradox is that the Duke, attempting measure for measure, adopts a comic policy of misrule. His mercy is a sanction of license, a withdrawal of all law whatever except his own good will...<sup>14</sup>

It seems that there are no complete solutions to the human situation as we find it in Measure for Measure. Strict justice is cruel and unjust, while unlimited mercy tends to prove itself merely a bawd. The good rule that the Duke had sought throughout Measure for Measure is not completely apparent at the play's end.

Nonetheless, in spite of uncertainties regarding him, he has changed in several important ways by Act V: his former political disengagement has become an authoritative commitment to rule; his merciful treatment of Barnardine suggests a new compassion for humanity at any level; and he has opened his "complete bosom" (I, iii, 3) to love. But let us return to Lucio: "Sneak not away, sir" (V, i, 356).

4

Lucio may be seen to be extremely cynical, so jaded in his views that his impulse is to deflate all ideals. J. W. Lever suggests that Lucio may be regarded as a conventional Lord of Misrule,<sup>15</sup> and viewed as such his apparently corrosive impulses have a specific formal function: the derision and ragging of all serious institutions and persons in order to bring them down from

excessive ideals to a more human level. Certainly, deception and illusion are unmasked through Lucio; and ideals are juxtaposed with their opposites. Throughout the first four acts Lucio has been witty and lively enough to deflect, or make rebound, ironies directed at him; and he pushes grotesque humour and suggestiveness to the limit and still escapes. It seems that his abuse of the main characters has done him no harm at all, as corrosive as that abuse may have been. By the close of Act IV Lucio remains virulent and freely survives.

His role changes somewhat in Act V. His first lines are serious and kind:

That's I, and't like your Grace.  
I came to her [Isabella] from Claudio, and desir'd her  
To try her gracious fortune with Lord Angelo  
For her poor brother's pardon. (V, i, 77-80)

He was similarly kind towards Claudio in I, ii, showing surprising care and concern. But as that kindness to Claudio soon became derision towards Isabella in I, iv, in Act V, when the Duke chastises him after the above speech, Lucio instantly rebels and changes his tone:

Duke. You were not bid to speak.

Lucio. No, my good lord,  
Nor wish'd to hold my peace. (V, i, 81-2)

From this point on, he is troublesome to the Duke, interrupting and making wry observations and commentary. At the same time, he also attempts to gain favor with the Duke, and to save himself should the "Friar" inform on his slanders. His consequent slander of the Friar-Duke is highly ironic, and now points towards his demise as everything ostensibly moves towards

resolution. But it is hard, still, to castigate him even while he makes himself a fool. He goes far with his lewd comments concerning Mariana ("My lord, she may be a punk; for many of them are neither maid, widow nor wife" V, i, 180-81) and Isabella ("I think if you handled her privately she would sooner confess" V, i, 274-75), and this stepping beyond acceptable bounds may prepare us for his fall. But his rebelliousness, as the Duke attempts to unravel affairs, may still be appealing. He remains the foil in V, i to the still questionable characteristics of Angelo and Isabella, and his resistance to the Duke is not altogether undeserved or without delight, for the Duke's machinations continue to be manipulative and sometimes cruel. The Duke's rule will not, it seems, be permitted too much control right to the play's end.

Lucio's cynicism is strong in the last scene. He is jaded to the point of pulling down even Mariana to the level of any of Mistress Overdone's girls, and he is completely without care whatsoever for Isabella, as he is seemingly unable to resist lewd quips. Lucio's abuse of the Duke, who is once more in disguise (V, i, 322-353), is in expectation of, finally, the Duke's revenge. By V, i, 350 we are at the height and climax of Lucio's ragging:

you bald-pated, lying rascal!--You must be hooded, must you? Show your knave's visage, with a pox to you! Show your sheep-biting face, and be hanged an hour! Will't not off? (V, i, 350-53)

It is clear that he has gone too far, and has reached the end of his period of license. As the Duke said, "You must, sir, change persons with me" (V, i, 334) and this is symbolically what

happens. License has had its day over rule, and it is now the time for the play to reverse that.

Lucio has attached himself to the Duke-in-disguise like a burr, and claims that the absent Duke is of similar mind and habits to Lucio himself. By Act V it is imperative that the Duke disentangle himself. The Duke's casting-off of Lucio is not, however, only for the purpose of regaining decorum. Vienna cannot continue with the open license that the Duke's laxness is responsible for. I have argued that the Duke has demonstrated a preference for seclusion over social action, and that part of the reason for that disengagement appears to be a disgust for certain aspects of the world that he is to rule. If disengagement and disgust have resulted in the Duke's laxness, and if laxness has encouraged license, the Duke must rid himself of his previous manner in order to establish rule in Vienna. He does, symbolically, with the punishment of Lucio in V, i. The Duke finds remission for Angelo and even for Barnardine, yet he is unable to forgive Lucio: "And yet here's one in place I cannot pardon" (V, i, 497). The "cannot" is unequivocal. It may be that he cannot find forgiveness in himself for Lucio's slander; but it may also be that the Duke must not pardon him, for Lucio represents a social influence that must be contained.

Lucio is dangerous to the Duke's new rule. C. L. Barber discusses an analogous threat to Elizabethan society:

Shakespeare's culture was not monolithic: though its moralists assumed a single order, scepticism was beginning to have ground to stand on and look about--especially in and around London. So a Lord of Misrule figure...could become on the bank-side the mouthpiece

not merely for the dependent holiday scepticism which is endemic in a traditional society, but also for a dangerously self-sufficient everyday scepticism.<sup>16</sup>

The Duke's rule may be less than perfect, yet a scepticism such as Barber describes--and it seems to me descriptive of Lucio's role in Measure for Measure--is subversive to the Duke's attempt to make order. Lucio will be whipped, married to a whore, and then hanged--harsh treatment indeed when Angelo and Barnardine are pardoned. When the Duke finds remission to the extent that Lucio will simply marry Kate Keepdown, Lucio complains that "Marrying a punk, my lord, is pressing to death,/ Whipping, and hanging" (V, i, 520-21). In an ironic reversal, the spokesman for the "foppery of freedom" (I, ii, 125-26) will live within his own kind of "stricture." Lucio can go no lower: the "pressing to death" constriction of marriage to a whore makes him, to his shame, a perpetual cuckold.

But there is the sense that Lucio isn't quite finished. No sooner is he uncrowned--the instant of his unmuffling of the Duke--than he is trying to slip away; and when caught he remains in usual form: "This may prove worse than hanging" (V, i, 358). To the end there is no trace of remorse or penitence, but only humorous attempts to save himself as he pleads for a whipping rather than a hanging and, after being forgiven his slander, continues to complain about his marriage. There is no sign of change in him; and it seems to me that his vitality and humour remain. He is incorrigible and will, it seems, remain so.

Scapegoating Lucio is not without problems. To see him punished at the end may be humorous at Lucio's expense, but not necessarily or entirely so. Neil Rhodes writes about what seems to be a parallel circumstance in Henry IV:

We must enjoy Falstaff before we can be rid of him, and in being rid of him it would be the merest hypocrisy to say that we did not enjoy him, because Falstaff is the embodiment of a world which has its own validity, however temporary, and that world is a vital part of our own humanity.<sup>17</sup>

The punishment of Lucio, like Falstaff's expulsion, seems to have an equivocal character to it. Not only is a banishing of Falstaff a banishing of the world<sup>18</sup> (and therefore to be regretted), but that casting-off is unlikely to be complete, or for long. So it is, it seems, with Lucio: "I am a kind of burr, I shall stick" (IV, iii, 177).

It is characteristic of Shakespeare to refuse simplistic solutions to complex issues. The principal characters of Measure for Measure have suffered deeply, and have, perhaps, been brought so low into their "shadow selves"<sup>19</sup> that they are not easily reclaimed. Bergson makes a relevant point:

To penetrate too far into the personality, to couple the outer effect with causes that are too deep-seated, would mean to endanger and in the end to sacrifice all that was laughable in the effect.<sup>20</sup>

Angelo and Isabella seem to me to have been penetrated in this way, and their comedic reclamation is therefore uncertain. On the other hand, the comic characters appear to display no hint of anything but complete intransigence. We have expected a resolution of all the conflicts and issues which the play has

disclosed. But little, save the Duke's renewed authority, seems to be recovered or clarified by the play's end. The unmasking of seemers has revealed beings which are not attractive, and which do not seem to fully change. Self-knowledge seems partial. Even the Duke's good rule appears somewhat patched and questionable. And yet the equivocal nature of Measure for Measure opens other possibilities which may permit a view of the play as a work as complex as the world which it addresses.



NOTES TO CHAPTER V

<sup>1</sup> All's Well That Ends Well, V, iii, 37. The words are ironical, for the King assumes a shape of things based on Helena's supposed death. What seems to him "whole" is in fact illusion.

<sup>2</sup> Coghill, p. 17; Frye, "Argument," p. 452; Bakhtin, p. 11; Barber, p. 13; Sypher, p. 222.

<sup>3</sup> Miles, p. 253.

<sup>4</sup> Sypher, p. 276.

<sup>5</sup> Harriet Hawkins, "'The Devil's Party': Virtues and Vices in Measure for Measure." Shakespeare Survey, 31 (1978), p. 113.

<sup>6</sup> Lascelles, p. 138.

<sup>7</sup> Lever, p. lxxxii.

<sup>8</sup> Empson, p. 279.

<sup>9</sup> Empson, p. 279.

<sup>10</sup> Lever, p. xcv.

<sup>11</sup> Miles, p. 253.

<sup>12</sup> Lawrence, p. 107.

<sup>13</sup> Lever, p. xcv.

<sup>14</sup> Sypher, p. 270.

<sup>15</sup> Lever, p. xcvi.

<sup>16</sup> Barber, p. 214.

<sup>17</sup> Neil Rhodes, Elizabethan Grotesque (London: Routledge, 1980), p. 161.

<sup>18</sup> Falstaff says "banish plump Jack, and banish all the world." I Henry IV, II, iv, 520.

19 Writing of the role of the fool in comedy, Wylie Sypher speaks of man being led "down the dimmest passes of sin:"

He disguises himself as clown or devil, wearing as need arises the garb of buffoon, ironist, madman. He must lead us, finally, to the witches' kitchen and the Walpurgis Night; or to the wilderness where we meet our "shadow" selves face to face, although we have disowned these selves in our public life.

Sypher, p. 236.

20 Bergson, p. 169.

CHAPTER VI: "Simply the thing I am"<sup>1</sup>

Measure for Measure has, through its structural development, raised certain expectations. The Duke sets out to discover the nature of good rule, and in the process he tests Angelo and Isabella. That testing results in an unmasking of both of them: the beings beneath the semblances are revealed. J. W. Lever sums up his discussion of the play in these terms:

Through these characters and their interactions the drama reveals itself as essentially a quest for self-knowledge....In the course of the play their self-ignorance is fully manifested, and they are subjected to a process of moral re-education which would seem to be, in the last analysis, the true purpose of the Duke's experiment.<sup>2</sup>

It is not enough, however, to leave the characters in psychic disarray. If the experiment is not to be merely a cruel trick, they should be made new. But that reversal is uncertain by the end of the play. On the other hand, because the Duke seems to have been a less than effective ruler, we may expect that he will emerge with new understanding and authority, willingly and competently handling affairs of the court, while controlling the chaotic world of Lucio, Pompey, Barnardine, et al. Finally, we might expect that the comic characters will be controlled, if not changed. That too remains uncertain, leaving the disturbing suggestion that the world that was to be controlled is uncontrollable. If that is felt to be so the play's issues regarding justice and good rule also remain equivocal.

Through the play's development, the issue of good rule should be clarified. If Act V doesn't seem to clarify either the characters or the issues which they present or represent, it may be said that the expectations which the comedy raises are thwarted. The result is a powerful irony, that is, "the condition of affairs or events of a character opposite to what was, or might naturally be, expected; a contradictory outcome of events as if in mockery of the promise and fitness of things" (OED). What is suggested is a greater thematic complexity than the main plot has led us to anticipate, as D. L. Stevenson notices:

Measure for Measure is a comedy wholly in an ironic mode: it suggests no serious, realizable solution to the moral dilemmas it has dramatized, but it comes to an end by implicating all of us in the perception that moral dilemma is a part of the human situation.<sup>3</sup>

Viewed in this way, the comedy is certainly "darkened," the humour, perhaps, more the sardonic laughter of a chaotic "what-is" than the joyfulness of "what ought to be."<sup>4</sup>

The inclusion of the less-than-ideal in a view of man is no simple pessimism in Measure for Measure. We have been presented with a world in which the seemingly virtuous are capable of anything from the petty to the monstrous, and where the blatantly corrupt seem beyond correction. The Duke's attempts at reformation appear to be only partially fruitful, in spite of a structural resolution. Even within that ostensible resolution we are left unsure of our footing, for moral boundaries are blurred and shifting. Harriet Hawkins notices this troubling quality in the play:

...the line between saint and sinner, martyr and masochist, righteous severity and sadism--in short the borderline between angelic and demonic extremes of virtue and of vice--is indeed a very narrow one, and all too easy to cross.<sup>5</sup>

The world of Measure for Measure is equivocal to the degree that it seems to encourage a kind of "doubleness" of view, a perspective that includes imperfection as basic to human experience. The need or desire for order, that is, need not preclude a recognition of an omnipresent sub-stratum of chaos. To reject disorder or imperfection, even in a comedy, is to reject what might also be seen as true: such rejection is analogous to the expulsion of Falstaff, to be regretted, perhaps resented and questioned, for what is expelled is an undeniable aspect of humanity. Sukanta Chaudhuri explores this idea:

A comprehensive and satisfying humanity must incorporate many elements of the Falstaffian image. It must be built up through a full admission of the gross, the enfeebling, the intractable--even the sinful, because the vital energy of man is seen to lie in indivisible compound with these.<sup>6</sup>

To acknowledge imperfection is to accept a paradoxical contrariety as part of a complete view of humanity, to accept a realism which resists any virtue as strict as Angelo or Isabella initially illustrate, and which rejects easy solutions to difficult problems.

The human world of Measure for Measure is indeed Montaigne's "botching and party-coloured work"<sup>7</sup> so that, as Chaudhuri concludes, the vices of Angelo and Isabella "are the inescapable obverse or concomitant of their virtues."<sup>8</sup> If such a view is seen to be descriptive of the human condition, it need not bring

cynicism or despair, however, once acknowledged and accepted.

Ruth Nevo proposes that Shakespeare's comedies face this

"doubleness" of existence:

They do not deny the dark side of saturnalia or disinhibition, the ruthless, violent, destructive other face of nature's energies; they occupy always a danger zone of potential radical harm to the individual. Yet they take a tolerant and genial view of the vital spontaneities, the imperious instincts, the recalcitrant emotions and the chaotic appetites and desires.<sup>9</sup>

It seems to me that Measure for Measure confronts such issues head-on; and so it is that it includes, even in the comic resolution, unsettlement in the principals and intractability in the comics. Misrule does not merely clarify rule; as its opposite it is also an ineluctable part of it.

A "double" view need not be exclusively sardonic; "demonic" laughter that derides false ideals of perfection or order may be softened by compassion for the way of things. Bakhtin terms such laughter "ambivalent" when "The entire world is seen in its droll aspect, in its gay relativity."<sup>10</sup> This is certainly the comic world of Vienna in Measure for Measure, as characterized by its complete amorality and indifference to rule. A. P. Rossiter more completely develops the idea of ambivalence:

...that two opposed value-judgements are subsumed, and that both are valid (ie. for that work of art or the mind producing it). The whole is only fully experienced when both opposites are held and included in a 'two-eyed' view; and all 'one-eyed' simplifications are not only falsifications; they amount to a denial of some part of the mystery of things....irony...is a display

of an essential ambivalence. Dramatic irony causes an exact juxtaposition of opposites in the mind of the audience: opposites, in that the 'true' for one hearer (the stage Persona) must exclude the 'true' for other hearers, who take the same words in a far extended sense, of which the hearing Persona is known to be unaware.<sup>11</sup>

In such a view, "either/or" choices become both. If Measure for Measure, applying the theory, has failed to perfect the aberrations of its characters, "reconciliation" may be possible in a sceptic view that acknowledges them. By the close of the play the mood seems to me similar to that of Feste's attitude in Twelfth Night:

Anything that's mend is but patch'd;  
 virtue that transgresses is but patch'd  
 with sin, and sin that amends is but  
 patch'd with virtue. If that this simple  
 syllogism will serve, so; if it will not,  
 what remedy? (I, v, 47-51)

The Duke's new authority in Measure for Measure seems to suggest that if nothing is fundamentally altered in Vienna, there will at least be some degree of control. His disengagement appears to be replaced with a more sure-handed dispensation of justice and mercy, regardless of its questionable efficacy with Angelo, Lucio, Barnardine, or, by extension, with any of the denizens of street or prison. It does seem somewhat "patch'd," and yet, "what remedy?" Nevertheless, it seems to me, as Norman Rabkin proposes, "We need to live as if life has meaning and rules, yet insisting that the meaning is ultimately ineffable and the rules provisional."<sup>12</sup> There is at least no self-deception,

no seeming, in such a balance; and rule based on it, while inadequate of complete control, will be, at least, compassionate and humane.

Measure for Measure has presented problems for most of its critical history. A perceived dislocation between its structure and mood, between an ostensible but questionable resolution, has been the cause of an impressive critical inquiry. However, as Rosalind Miles claims, there has been an "idee fixe" of the play as failure in spite of its acknowledged power. The problematic character of the play need not, however, remain in the mode of failure if its pervasive problem is seen to lie in the nature of the issues it presents. These issues appear to me to be no less complicated than the characters who dramatize them. But if the characters demonstrate no predilection to easy solutions to their inner or outer conflicts, the issues themselves seem correspondingly complex. The tendency to attempt to reduce such problems may be one of the reasons for the plethora of seemingly irresolvable critical problems regarding the play.

Writing of another century's writers, Lionel Trilling makes a valid point for the interpretation of Measure for Measure:

...when they [Hemingway and Faulkner] are at their best they give us the sense that the amount and intensity of their activity are in a satisfying proportion to the recalcitrance of the material. And our pleasure...is made the more secure because we have the distinct impression that the two novelists are not under any illusions that they have conquered the material upon which they direct their activity.... This, we say, is to the point; this really has something to do with life as we live it...



Referring to Tolstoi and Dostoevski, Trilling continues:

They seldom make the attempt at formulated solution, they rest content with the 'negative capability.' And this negative capability, this willingness to remain in uncertainties, mysteries, and doubts, is not...an abdication of intellectual activity. Quite to the contrary, it is precisely an aspect of their intelligence, of their seeing the full force and complexity of their subject matter.<sup>13</sup>

Reaching back still further, I find Shakespeare himself on the subject:

Lafew. They say miracles are past, and we have our philosophical persons, to make modern and familiar, things supernatural and causeless. Hence it is that we make trifles of terrors, ensconcing ourselves into seeming knowledge when we should submit ourselves to an unknown fear.  
(All's Well That Ends Well, II, iii, 1-6)

Questions are raised in Measure for Measure but its failure to answer them completely may reflect more on the nature of the questions themselves than on a failure to confront them. Though we cannot know Shakespeare's intention, that failure to answer completely such questions may, in fact, be a refusal. In another analogy, Harriet Hawkins observes,

'Not a single problem is solved in Anna Karenina and in Eugene Onegin, 'wrote Chekhov to his publisher-critic, 'but you find these works quite satisfying, because the questions in them are correctly posed.'<sup>14</sup>

In this sense, much of what has been regarded as problematic in Measure for Measure may be regarded as a profound response to seemingly irresolvable problems, rather than merely the detractors from artistic success. The play's equivocal, shifting

nature may be seen to suggest a multivalence, "the mirror," as A. P. Rossiter proposes, "of an unfathomable reality which is the source of the trouble."<sup>15</sup>

It seems to me an appropriate response to Measure for Measure might be analogous to the ambivalence of Feste at the end of Twelfth Night, with an acknowledgement of an irresolvable way-of-things; of a worldly-wise disenchantment: simply, "The rain it raineth every day." Such a response remains comic, if the audience will, for although Measure for Measure acknowledges that human life may be culpable, absurd, even hideous, it is to be celebrated in spite of everything, reconciliation excluding none of it, as a player in another play has it:

2. Lord. The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together: our virtues would be proud if our faults whipped them not; and our crimes would despair if they were not cherished by our virtues. (All's Well That Ends Well, IV, iii, 66-9)

Or from another: "for man is a giddy thing, and this is my conclusion" (Much Ado About Nothing, V, iv, 108-09). And in conclusion, Measure for Measure may be seen to illustrate its own "spirit of reconciliation:" the ability to live amongst questions posed that have no answers and to celebrate anyway. It is, finally, analogous to Andre Malraux's description of dawn in India's city of death:

Below, the Ganges under the monsoon clouds,  
with its funeral pyres still dimly flickering  
in the fog; and an ascetic dancing and laughing  
his head off, shouting 'Bravo!' at the illusion  
that is the world.<sup>16</sup>

NOTES TO CHAPTER VI

- 1 All's Well IV, iii, 310.
- 2 Lever, p. xciv.
- 3 Stevenson, p. 128.
- 4 Sypher, p. 204.
- 5 Hawkins, p. 109.
- 6 Chaudhuri, p. 124.
- 7 In Rossiter, p. 154.
- 8 Chaudhuri, p. 158.
- 9 Ruth Nevo, Comic Transformations in Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 224.
- 10 Bakhtin, p. 11.
- 11 Rossiter, p. 51
- 12 Rabkin, p. 31.
- 13 Lionel Trilling, The Liberal Imagination (New York: Viking, 1950), pp. 297-99).
- 14 Hawkins, p. 105.
- 15 Rossiter, p. 140.
- 16 Andre Malraux, Anti-Memoirs (New York: Holt, Rinehart, 1968), p. 76.

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