

Measure for Measure

by Peter Cash



English Association Shakespeare Bookmarks
Longer Commentaries No. 3

Measure for Measure (1604)

by
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SCOPE OF TOPIC

King Henry (*incognito*)

For though I speak it to you, I think the King is but a man, as I am: the violet smells to him as it doth to me; the element shows to him as it doth to me; all his senses have but human conditions. His ceremonies laid by, in his nakedness he appears but a man.

King Henry V Act IV Scene 1

From *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Henry V* to *The Tempest*, Shakespeare is concerned to present his audiences with the Renaissance view of man; in *Measure for Measure*, writes G. Wilson Knight, his central theme is "man's moral nature". Specifically, Shakespeare's concern is with what man looks like when 'his ceremonies' are all 'laid by'; then, 'man, proud man,' looks not like an angel, but 'like an angry ape' (II.2). The purpose of this Bookmark is to give a scene-by-scene commentary of *Measure for Measure* which explains how Shakespeare arrives in this play at his vision of a creature who – for all his airs and graces, manners and laws – is ultimately a natural thing, flawed, naked and unaccommodated. Given a common humanity, what – the play asks – entitles one man to judge any other?

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ACT I Scene 1

In *Measure for Measure*, Shakespeare appears to stage an experiment. In this play, he is concerned to test out a hypothesis: he wants to know what will happen if a human judge is left to dispense divine justice. Shakespeare, of course, is merely contriving to experiment: in truth, he knows full well before he starts what will happen if Angelo is asked to play God. More precisely, he is seeking to demonstrate what inevitably happens if man is put in this impossible and ironic position.

Surprisingly, Shakespeare's main aim in this opening scene is not exposition: rather, he is concerned to set up his dramatic experiment without further ado. The situation for the experiment, for the play, is that Vincentio, the Duke of Vienna, is supposedly about to travel to Poland; to deputise for him in his absence, he appoints Lord Angelo. It is important to know that Duke Vincentio is an Elizabethan Prince: that is, he is an ideal figure of authority in whom all the good offices of government are meant to repose. In being a repository for these good qualities, he is not so much akin to Nicolo Machiavelli's model in *The Prince* (1513) as like Thomas Elyot's model in *The Governor* (1531). The purpose of the experiment is to see which of these two models Lord Angelo, once in charge, will more closely resemble.

Shakespeare's immediate aim is to outline for us the political structure of Vienna that will operate throughout the action. It becomes plain that a new hierarchy is being created at the top of which Lord Angelo will sit: "What figure of us think you he will bear?" The Duke's question to Escalus (whom he has appointed Angelo's Second-in-Command) is a leading question in that it takes us to the heart of the play: what kind of prince will he make? what kind of man is he? The Duke appears anxious to know what figure Angelo will cut when 'all the organs' of princely power are invested in him. Given that the Duke – a figure who plainly foreshadows Prospero – is conducting an experiment, there runs throughout the play an eerie suggestion that he may have a foreknowledge of Angelo's actions.

The Duke's first words to Angelo seek to establish him as a model of probity, of upright character: specifically, there is 'a kind of character' in his young life which augurs well for his future. His personal history to date is evidence in itself that he is a paragon of puritan virtue. Our initial perception of Angelo is of an impeccable character, an immaculate administrator whose morality is beyond reproach. Given Angelo's exemplary case-history, the Duke has no hesitation in placing both his full confidence and his absolute power in his protégé. The balanced terms in which authority is conferred upon Angelo –

Mortality and mercy in Vienna
Live in thy tongue and heart

– are immediately important in helping us to understand the play: they are directly relevant to its central concern with weighing and measuring. It becomes apparent that the function of the good governor, of the true prince, is to exercise a Solomon-like judgement: his role is to make wise decisions about who dies [= 'mortality'] and who lives [= 'mercy']. Angelo's aim, then, is to maintain a balanced judgement of human affairs. So that his audience does not miss this crucial point, Shakespeare redefines the terms of this contract. Here, he supplies us with two verbs –

Your scope is as mine own
So to enforce or qualify the laws
As to your soul seems good

– that tally purposefully with 'mortality' and 'mercy': in deciding whether to 'enforce' or 'qualify' the laws, Angelo will show whether he is a 'good' governor or not.

It was G. Wilson Knight in *The Wheel of Fire* (1930) who originally pointed out that *Measure for Measure* owes a central debt to St Matthew's Gospel (Chapter 7 Verse 2) and St Luke's Gospel (Chapter 6 Verse 38):

Give, and it shall be given unto you ... for with what measure ye mete,
with the same shall man mete to you again.

In his title, Shakespeare has announced that his interest in this play will be in the fair meting out of justice. In the terms of this debate, Angelo is something of a weights-and-measures man; but significantly, the commodity in which he will deal is nothing less than human life

and death. How he weighs and measures mortality and mercy will determine what sort of man he is.

ACT I Scene 2

In Shakespeare's plays, there tends to be a mathematical correspondence between the scenes in which high-life characters speak verse and other scenes in which low-life characters speak prose. This deliberate contrast is not merely for comic relief, for variety's sake; it is not without serious dramatic designs upon us. Here, as in *King Henry IV Part 1*, Shakespeare rotates his scenes in order to establish his dramatic point of view: in other words, he fashions the scenes which take place in the Viennese slums so that they supply an objective correlative by which we can morally assess [= measure] the goings-on in the Viennese court.

Scene 2 takes place in Vienna's Soho, a setting not without striking similarities to London's Southwark: "I had as lief be a list of an English kersey, as be piled, as thou art piled, for a French velvet." The First Gentleman's language ('English kersey' and 'French velvet') explains that we have entered the cosmopolitan area of the city in which sexual morality is extremely lax; in particular, his pun on 'piled' (both 'pile' and 'syphilitic scab') sets the tone for this seedy world.

Lucio is a social butterfly: as this description suggests, he is remarkable for his social mobility. He anticipates Beau Brummel: that is, he is equally at ease in the company of high-life and low-life characters. He is 'a fantastic', a spiv: that is, one noted for his sharp suits and his sharp practices. He is renowned for his sartorial elegance; at the same time, his language – "but whilst I live, forget to drink after thee" – exhibits an acute awareness of the inelegant circles in which he moves.

Mistress Overdone is a madame: that is, she is a Viennese brothel-keeper. Lucio's sobriquet for her – 'Madame Mitigation' – refers presumably to her indefatigable capacity to 'mitigate' the effects of sexual desire in the local gentry; at the same time, such an epithet reveals that Shakespeare's low-life characters are to provide us with a witty view of human sexuality beside which Angelo's high seriousness appears out of proportion: that is, it lacks measure. If *Measure for Measure* has a motto, then it is "moderation in all things".

The purpose of these scenes – in which low-life characters speak the plain prose of common sense – is to provide us with a perspective in which to study Angelo's 'precise' enforcement of sexual law. The action does not proceed much further before we are given in Dumb Show an emblem of Angelo's precision: a Gaoler and a prisoner (Claudio) pass across the stage. The chorus to this action is then supplied in an exchange between Pompey (Mistress Overdone's barman and pimp) and Mistress Overdone herself. Their conversation –

POMPEY:	Yonder man is carried to prison.
MISTRESS OVERDONE:	Well! What has he done?
POMPEY:	A woman.
MISTRESS OVERDONE:	But what's his offence?
POMPEY:	Groping for trouts in a peculiar river

– conveys at once the strict temper of Angelo's rule: upon assuming office, he proclaimed that 'all houses in the suburbs of Vienna must be plucked down' and began to imprison men for the sin of fornication [= sex outside marriage]. In this instance, Claudio has enjoyed pre-marital relations with his fiancée: as a result, Julietta appears at an advanced stage of pregnancy.

In this context, Pompey's language is instructive: indirectly, the lewd terms in which he answers – Claudio has 'done a woman'/has 'groped for trouts' – show us that Angelo may have good reason for his strictness. It is in face of an epidemic of sexually-transmitted disease that Angelo, a responsible governor, is obliged to act: in other words, these

exchanges between Lucio and the First Gentleman/between Pompey and Mistress Overdone are designed to show that the political body to which Angelo has been made physician is horribly infected.

At the end of this scene, the dialogue between Claudio and Lucio does much to advance the plot. Claudio thwarts Lucio's suggestion that he appeal to Duke Vincentio with the news that he is 'not to be found'. This being so, Claudio sends Lucio in the direction of his sister Isabella who is about to enter a nunnery; his plan is that she should appeal to 'the strict deputy' on his behalf. Claudio's reasons for believing that his sister will succeed with Angelo are significant:

I have great hope in that, for in her youth
There is a prone and speechless dialect,
Such as move men; beside, she hath prosperous art
When she will play with reason and discourse,
And well can she persuade.

Claudio testifies that Isabella has a charismatic way with words: 'hath prosperous art'. Such a testimonial raises interesting questions about Shakespeare's method of composition: before composing this speech for Claudio, had he crafted the arguments that Isabella will use in Act II? if not, how could he be confident that her arguments on Claudio's behalf would be lucid and persuasive? It would be negligent to pass over that phrase 'speechless dialect' – an oxymoron in that the adjective ('speechless') expressly contradicts the term 'dialect' in order to establish that this young woman has a kind of stage-presence, enhancing whatever she then happens to say.

ACT I Scene 3

Measure for Measure is a problem play: that is, there is a problem in deciding whether it is a comedy or a tragedy. As a matter of technical fact, it is a comedy: that is, a play in which the action – in spite of numerous confusions and threats to the hero and the heroine – issues in the achievement of happiness. What is more, it is a play in which we are reassured – almost from the outset – that there will be a happy ending: into this play, as into all the other plays of this genre, Shakespeare implants a device to reassure us that 'all shall be well' (Puck). Bertrand Evans contends that, even though Shakespeare's Vienna may be more wicked, dark, dangerous and unhealthy than many of his tragic worlds, "our view of it is profoundly affected by our certainty that all is well and will end well." More wicked, dark and dangerous than Lear's Britain and Macbeth's Scotland apparently ...

It is at the start of this third scene that Shakespeare provides us with this comic reassurance. In Duke Vincentio's second speech, we gain an advantage [= achieve a superior awareness] over all the other characters in the play. After his justification of his temporary abdication, the Duke announces that his purpose is to conduct an experiment into the nature of man: as Wilson Knight sees it, "a scientific experiment to see if extreme ascetic righteousness can stand the test of power." His disclosure that, for this purpose, he is to masquerade as 'a true friar' establishes the mood of a comedy; it supplies us with the reassurance that the evil in the dramatic world of Vienna is under supervision. Bernard Evans explains:

This disclosure ... establishes a climate for comedy by assuring us that a supreme power of good yet watches over this world; that evil has a line drawn around it and will be contained; that though villainy may threaten, it can do no permanent harm.

In this wicked world, both 'omniscience and omnipotence' (Evans) are on the side not of Lord Angelo, but of the angels. As a result, we can regard the subsequent action with the comfort that this superior knowledge affords us. We are able to view the remainder of the action through the window of this reassuring scene.

In studying *Measure for Measure*, we must never forget that Shakespeare's encompassing interest is in man. In *Hamlet*, Hamlet (IV.4) himself asks this leading question –

What is a man
If his chief good and market of his time
Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more ...

It is this distinct possibility that comes to perplex King Lear. In that contemporary play, Lear (III.4) considers Edgar in a state of extreme destitution and momentarily asks: "Is man no more than this?" At the start of *Measure for Measure*, Shakespeare presents us with a man who *seems* to resist this basic definition:

Lord Angelo is precise;
Stands at a guard with Envy; scarce confesses
That his blood flows; or that his appetite
Is more to bread than stone.

Lord Angelo is no Caliban-figure in whom basic human appetites have gained the upper hand; on the contrary, he is a creature in whom bestial instincts *seem* to have been successfully repressed. Lord Angelo is 'precise': that is, he is fastidious/punctilious in moral matters and seems to present a perfect example of the contemplative man. He is a self-disciplinarian: however, in his rigid denials 'that his blood flows' and that he enjoys food, we are meant to perceive a critical imbalance in his human soul. To be 'a man', he must admit to and cope with the fact that a passionate blood courses through his veins. It is towards this very admission that the play proceeds. Indeed, the Duke's couplet makes a direct prophecy:

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

He suspects that Angelo is a 'seemer'; what they will 'see' is that he is not an incorruptible wielder of 'power', not the paragon he *seems* to be. Angelo's conduct will anticipate Lord Acton's remark that "power corrupts and absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely" (1887).

Lord Angelo, 'a man of stricture and firm abstinence', holds 'absolute power' in Vienna; thankfully, he does not have absolute knowledge of the city, for he merely supposes that Duke Vincentio has left it. Dramatic irony – the central mechanism of this plot – comes into operation: we know, whereas the other characters do not, that the Duke is to spend the entire action of the play in Vienna, invigilating Angelo's use of power.

For the consumption of the audience, Duke Vincentio embarks upon a historical justification of the political situation that he has brought about. He explains – nominally to Friar Thomas – that, for either 'fourteen' or 'nineteen' years,* he has been a lax governor of Vienna; he compares himself to a lenient father who has spared the rod and spoiled the child. As a result, Vienna is fast degenerating into a state of lawlessness:

So our decrees,
Dead to infliction, to themselves are dead.

In this city, 'all decorum' has been lost because the Duke has not strained the quality of mercy. Ironically, he has been guilty of a criminal failure to enforce the laws that are on his own statute book. He has grown complacent in discriminating between the law-abiding and law-offending citizens in his state. *The text is inconsistent on this figure.

Duke Vincentio confesses to having given his people too much 'scope': that is, to having created by his negligence a permissive society. Since he ('my fault') accepts full blame for the existence of this society, he feels that it would be morally unfair of him ('my tyranny') to begin now to dismantle it. He therefore appoints someone else to do his dirty work for him,

feeling – rather conveniently – that this further dereliction of duty will make moral sense; in short, he passes an uncomfortable buck to Angelo.

Significantly, it is in the 'ambush' of Duke Vincentio's name that all the Viennese miscreants will be brought to book. This ambush-image signifies that these offenders will walk – exactly as Claudio did – into an unsuspected trap: that is, find themselves guilty of a crime which they did not know they had committed. It is challenging to consider that the structure of *Measure for Measure* itself resembles an ambush: that is, its characters are taking part in an experiment without knowing that it is going on. Not unlike Prospero, Vincentio is observing and controlling the actions of others without their knowing it.

The purpose of Duke Vincentio's speech is to supply us with an objective assessment of Angelo's character. It reinforces our initial impression that Angelo is of an ascetic disposition: that is, he is dedicated to living a life of self-denial, to pursuing a frugal/spartan existence. We shall, of course, see whether he is in reality what he seems to be ...

ACT I Scene 4

In this scene, Lucio carries out Claudio's instruction: he finds Isabella – who is about to enter the Order of Saint Clare – and informs her that her brother Claudio has been arrested on a charge of fornication and that he faces the death penalty. The purpose of this scene is to give us Isabella's initial reaction to this harsh development and thereby offer us a first insight into her character. Like Angelo, Isabella is of an ascetic disposition: indeed, she is about to withdraw from the world into a Franciscan convent noted for its austerity. Her first words – 'wishing a more strict restraint' – show that she is fit to vie with Angelo for the angelic laurels; her wish for a more rigid discipline is a wish to appear holier than the next nun. In short, Isabella too is a puritan. It is this sanctimonious impression that Lucio's speech reinforces:

I hold you as a thing enskied and sainted
By your renouncement, an immortal spirit,
And to be talked with in sincerity,
As with a saint.

Dressed in a pristine habit, Isabella flatters to deceive us that such 'precise' and 'severe' cleanliness is next to godliness. Lucio's eulogy prepares us for Isabella's pious and self-righteous conduct in Act III: there, in her major argument with Claudio, her professed enthusiasm for self-sacrifice, her instinct for martyrdom, is expressed with an indecent haste. In the event, Isabella does not behave 'as a thing enskied and sainted' ought to do. As a result, her saintliness – here, Lucio talks to her as to 'a saint' – becomes a matter of debate.

Lucio performs a choric function. He it is who acts as second referee to Angelo's character. Here, he reinforces our impression of Lord Angelo,

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.

His portrait is of a frigid individual in whom the passionate part of the soul is defective. Angelo, whose 'blood is very snow-broth', exhibits a wilful determination to 'blunt his natural edge': that is, he is a perverse personality, one of those men who actually keeps his New Year Resolutions! Lucio's additional remark – that Angelo 'follows close to the rigour of the statute' in order to make Claudio an example – illustrates that he is a stickler for detail and that he is prepared ruthlessly to encourage the others.

Significantly, Lucio instructs Isabella to call upon Angelo and 'assay the power' that she possesses; this instruction pre-supposes that Isabella has a power [= a kind of verbal charisma] of which she is well aware. Consequently, Lucio outlines a strategy for her: "when maidens sue men weep like gods." The strategy is based upon his belief that Angelo will grant her petition if she cries on his shoulder. Isabella, then, will rely upon her persuasive tongue and her maiden comeliness. The problem, however, is that Isabella's comeliness is not without sex appeal ...

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ACT II Scene 1

Angelo's comparison of the law to 'a scarecrow' is a measure of his wisdom. He is a sufficiently fine governor, a sufficiently adept moral philosopher, to realise that the law must have a deterrent effect: that, if it is not actively enforced, then it will defeat the purpose for which it was designed and make a mockery of itself.

Escalus is a man of even wider ethical vision. It is left to him to point out that the law exists both to deter and to exact retribution – and, moreover, to observe that Angelo's enforcement of deterrent law is inflamed with a retributive zeal. In a voice of moderation, Escalus argues that it is unjust and extreme to punish Claudio in a capital manner for a crime that any human might commit. He argues that, if it were not for the Grace of God, then any man might have gone Claudio's way: that even the most straight-laced of individuals, 'had time cohered with place, or place with wishing', might have fallen into this particular temptation. With a proleptic irony that resounds throughout the play, Escalus then ventures to suggest that even Angelo might sometime in his life have 'erred in this point' on which he censures Claudio. Angelo's retort –

'Tis one thing to be tempted, Escalus,
Another thing to fall

– is sanctimonious to the point at which it becomes supercilious. In this passage, Angelo sermonises. Ironically, he chooses texts that have the reverse thrust of the Christian Gospels: rather than suggest that no man should cast the first stone, he makes allowances for man's Original Sin and recognises that, if justice is to be done at all, then it will be necessary to put up with a thief or two in our juries. Although Angelo is a purist, he is also a zealot: that is, pragmatic in his zealous pursuit of the written law. He has no qualms about working within an imperfect legal system if that system will bring about the kind of justice that he wants to see. Here, he exhibits his awareness of St Luke's Gospel. He will not allow that there are extenuating circumstances in Claudio's case simply because this Gospel –

Judge not, and ye shall not be judged. Condemn not, and ye shall not be
condemned. Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven

– pleads for such allowances. A. D. Nuttall argues that this un-Christian refusal to pardon Claudio is intellectually respectable and morally defensible: that, although a fallen man may not have a metaphysical right to judge and dispense justice, he cannot at the practical level afford to do otherwise; if he wishes to prevent a state of lawlessness, then he must be brave enough to act as if he is more morally fit than the next man. Angelo recognises that it is absolutely necessary to judge, even at the risk of being judged in one's own turn. Uncomfortably, his high moral stance –

When I that censure him do so offend,
Let mine own judgement pattern out my death,
And nothing come in partial

– is based on the pride that comes before a fall. This, in particular, is the statement that informs and justifies Wilson Knight's two descriptions of Angelo: 1) "a man of ascetic purity who has a hitherto invulnerable faith in the rightness and justice of his own ideals"; 2) "a man of spotless reputation and self-conscious integrity who will have no fears as to the justice of enforcing precise obedience." As a consequence, Angelo exhibits hubris: no sooner does he make this vain boast than the audience realises that his nemesis duly awaits him. Nigel Alexander remarks that Angelo's administration of the law is "so inhumane as to be inhuman". It is nevertheless important to recognise that Angelo's speeches, though they are the utterance of an evil man, express a good understanding of human nature. Escalus, a choric figure, a liberal interpreter, explains that Angelo has merely erred on the side of excess. Escalus' couplet –

Well, heaven forgive him and forgive us all.
Some rise by sin and some by virtue fall

– comes ruefully to terms with Angelo's way of doing things; he seems to reflect that it takes all sorts to make a world. But Escalus, rather more than Angelo, understands that the condition of being human necessitates the forgiveness for which St Luke calls: it is human to err and equally human, if not divine, to forgive. If justice is to be done, then there must be room for a measure of forgiveness/mercy.

Enter Elbow, Froth, Pompey and Officers.

The scene that follows provides a commentary on Angelo's administration of the law. Echoing Dogberry, Elbow inadvertently points to the situation on which 'some rise by sin and some by virtue fall.' Although he puns upon his own name, Elbow's speech makes an unfunny point: "I do lean upon justice, sir, and do bring in here before your good honour two notorious benefactors." His inadvertent oxymoron ('notorious benefactors') and his malapropistic use of 'benefactors' highlight the situation that obtains in Angelo's Vienna: namely, that it is a state in which those who do good – like Claudio – can become 'notorious' wrong-doers. It is especially ironic that Angelo himself endeavours to clear up this confusion: "Benefactors? Well, what benefactors are they? Are they not malefactors?" The irony is that Angelo sees himself as dealing only and merely with a linguistic confusion. In fact, the more serious confusion is a moral one: namely, that Angelo himself cannot tell benefactors from malefactors.

The effect of the prose dialogue that follows is to try Angelo's patience and his fitness for office. Ultimately, its sheer length and its wilful lack of consecutiveness weary him to the point where he gives up governing, delegates his authority and goes home. The issue at stake is that Pompey (Mistress Overdone's pimp) has procured Constable Elbow's wife – while she was pregnant – for sexual services at their inn. Pompey's tactic is not to answer the charge of procuring for prostitution (of which he is guilty) but to filibuster: that is, to talk and talk until the issue at stake is swamped in a welter of words and the charge against him dropped.

Although Escalus calls Pompey 'a tedious fool', he is only half right: although Pompey may be tedious and verbose, there is nothing foolish about him. Consequently, Angelo tires of hearing about the events of All-hallow Eve at *The Bunch of Grapes* and shows himself to be emptier of moral rectitude than we might have imagined:

This will last out a night in Russia
When nights are longest there. I'll take my leave,
And leave you to the hearing of the cause.

He refuses to listen any longer to this shaggy dog story and actually abdicates his responsibility to Escalus. In this respect, he ironically resembles Duke Vincentio who, having failed to take the measures necessary to control the sex industry in Vienna, has also given up

his effort as a bad job. Angelo's exit illuminates this very perception: even he, the strictest of disciplinarians, cannot be bothered to discipline Pompey. His dramatic exit therefore constitutes a moment of moral laxness that prepares us for his fall into temptation.

It is important not to overlook the issues of this prose dialogue, for they are full of poetic significance. Frequently, the diction that Shakespeare introduces into these exchanges illuminates the main themes of the play. Earlier, Elbow was afraid that, if his wife had been discovered under the roof of a brothel, then she 'might have been accused in fornication, adultery, and all uncleanness there'. But who is to accuse her? Who is to accuse any woman of adultery? Let him who is without any sexual feeling, who has never lusted after a married woman, cast the first stone of accusation. Let Angelo cast it ..? Equally, this apparently idle exchange between Elbow and Pompey has skilful designs upon us:

ELBOW: The time is yet to come that she was ever respected with man, woman or child.

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

Shakespeare makes free with Elbow's malapropistic use of 'respected'. Knowingly, Pompey makes of this misunderstood verb an impudent euphemism for the sexual act: accordingly, Elbow paid his marital respects to his wife 'before he married with her'. In Pompey's euphemistic terms, Elbow *paid her the compliment* of sleeping with her; inadvertent though it is, such a way of speaking raises the possibility that it may be *respectable* for human beings to perform this act under any circumstances. It is upon this possibility that Escalus' question touches: "Which is the wiser here, Justice or Iniquity?" This question frames for us the matters of jurisprudence which lie at the heart of the play: what is just? what is iniquitous? Foremost among the objective correlatives by which Shakespeare invites us to measure Angelo's interpretation of Viennese law is this debate between Escalus and Pompey. It is conducted in a racy prose, remarkable for the unerring consecutiveness of its logic. Escalus confronts Pompey with the charge that, although he may pass for a barman, a 'tapster', he is actually a procurer of prostitutes for the bar's clients; he is a 'tapster' in the precise sense that he pulls both pints and punters. Pompey's answer – "Truly, sir, I am a poor fellow that would live" – seeks to equate the two livings [= legal barman and illegal pimp] on the basic humanitarian ground that both – regardless of their moral standings – enable him to 'live' [= earn a living rather than die]. It becomes apparent that this prose dialogue is making more than an academic contribution to the debate upon the nature of Viennese law. This swift exchange –

ESCALUS: Is it a lawful trade?

POMPEY: If the law would allow it, sir

– lies at the heart of all law-making. It is axiomatic with Pompey that there are no legal axioms: that is, that man makes up his laws as he goes along and reserves the right to amend them as he wishes. Law is nothing more than a human invention; all law, not merely Viennese law, is therefore circumstantial. Pompey then applies this wisdom to the particular circumstances that apply in Angelo's Vienna. He points out that, in order to extirpate the 'trade' of prostitution, it will be necessary to 'geld and splay all the youth of the city'. Here, Pompey does no more than follow Angelo's logic to its inevitable conclusion; in doing so, he reduces Angelo's legislation to absurdity. He demonstrates that Angelo and Escalus are engaged in nothing less than a vain attempt to repress one of the irrepressible impulses of human nature: unless they introduce a law to castrate ('geld') and sterilise ('spay') every man ('knave') and every woman ('drab'), then this greater law will continue to operate – "they will to 't then". For this fundamental reason, the up-shot of Angelo's legislation will be the 'heading and hanging' of all Vienna's men-folk. Pompey's logic is far-sighted: he reasons that, if this bad law remains on the statute books for ten years, then the authorities will – ironically – be only too pleased when it is broken, so desperate will they then be to increase the heads of the population.

The Justice is there to remind us that the action of the play has reached its eleventh hour. Appropriately, Escalus' thoughts turn to Claudio and remind us that his execution is imminent. Moreover, this brief exchange –

JUSTICE: Lord Angelo is severe.
ESCALUS: It is but needful.
Mercy is not itself, that oft looks so;
Pardon is still the nurse of second woe

– reminds us of the 'precise' and 'severe' nature of Lord Angelo's character. Escalus' attempt to see things from Lord Angelo's uncompromising point of view – "Pardon is still the cause of second woe" – even suggests that this grave approach may be adequate. Certainly, Escalus' remark confirms that Angelo is a man of reason: in doing so, it prepares us for the following scene in which this man of pure reason is shown to be inadequate.

ACT II Scene 2

There follows one of the most important scenes in the play. It is in this scene that Angelo and Isabella come face to face.

The Provost sets the tone of this head-to-head encounter when he repeats the humanitarian argument that, since 'all sects, all ages smack of this vice', no man should die for it. Since Claudio – to his way of thinking – is only as guilty as if he had committed this crime in his sleep, the Provost ventures to suggest to Angelo that Claudio's execution 'might be too rash'. Angelo, however, does not suffer from doubt; not rash, but rational to a fault, he is certain that he will not live to regret his 'judgement'. He does not expect to repent at leisure or to suffer remorse.

Shakespeare invests Angelo with psychological realism. Shortly before Isabella's entrance, he gives Angelo a reason for his self-satisfaction: although Juliet is a fornicatress in his moral terms, he makes provision for her: "Let her have needful but not lavish means." He shows that he can give a benevolent order; in short, he shows a measure of compassion. Shakespeare, then, begins to open up his debate on the nature of man. In Renaissance terms, the balanced man must have a measure of each human quality in his soul.

In this scene, Shakespeare – in G. Wilson Knight's words – endeavours to show that Angelo is "the symbol of a fake intellectualised ethic divorced from the deeper springs of the human instinct". What Wilson Knight means is that Angelo, whose "spotless reputation" intimidates those around him with its dazzling whiteness, is "reason abstracted from emotion"; he is the contemplative courtier who refuses to admit that passion (as opposed to compassion) has a place in the human scheme of things. For her part, Isabella – "There is a vice that most I do abhor ..." – opens her suit in terms which suggest that she is a kindred spirit. She too takes the hard-line view that fornication is a capital offence: that it can be pardoned only under extenuating circumstances. Consequently, Isabella's plea rests upon a legal nicety; her co-ordinate clauses ('but that I must'/'but that I am') express – by means of a syntactical parallelism – her view that reason must be weighed against emotion. It is the very balance of these clauses, the second carefully qualifying the first, which shows that – against Isabella's natural instinct – there must be measure for measure. She shows that extenuating circumstances should be taken into consideration.

It is imperative that Isabella's part in this dialogue be heard in the context of Claudio's reference to her rhetorical skills: her 'speechless dialect' and 'prosperous art' (Act I Scene 2). Originally, Isabella argues that Angelo should condemn the sin rather than the sinner. In this case, her art does not prosper; he dismisses this sophisticated argument, this vain attempt to split a hair, with an indignant ease: acquainted with the Doctrine of Original Sin, Isabella ought to know that the function of God's Deputy on Earth can only be to punish those who

commit sins. Isabella's response ("O just but severe law") expresses her respect for this Old Testament judgement. In this scene, Lucio's function is to suggest – in a series of adroit asides – that Isabella's art will not prosper if she continues to play Angelo at his own game; her powers of persuasion will prove inadequate if she continues to share his belief in the 'severe' rule of law. Consequently, Lucio's remark – 'you are too cold', significantly repeated fifteen lines later – insists that she change her tactics. The effect of this insistence is to encourage Isabella to speak instead in that 'prone and speechless dialect' that 'moves' men. As a result, Isabella's terms of address –

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

– become more emotive. With a refreshing candour, she tells Angelo off; she lectures him upon the kingly graces, reminding him that 'mercy' is foremost among them: to coin a phrase, that the quality of mercy is not strained. She is adamant that his apparel (his judge's robe) does not necessarily proclaim a judicious man.

Isabella makes a charismatic and dramatic appeal to Angelo's better judgement. Here, her terms of address –

If he had been as you, and you as he,
You would have slipped like him, but he like you
Would not have been so stern

– become terms of endearment. Isabella applies the Golden Rule: that, if the roles had been reversed, then Claudio would not have done unto Angelo what Angelo is intent on doing unto him. Unfortunately for Isabella, this argument is equally unsuccessful in cutting the ice that preserves Angelo's stern approach; he has already told us (in II.1) that he is prepared to follow his own 'pattern' of judgement.

Directors of this scene are required to make a fine judgement as to the moment when Isabella's warmth (previously, she was 'too cold') begins to melt the iceberg of Angelo's personality. As a result, they may elect to ignore the metaphorical thrust of Lucio's next aside – "Ay, touch him: There's the vein" – and urge a literal action upon their actress. What is certain is that they must in this scene show a development in Isabella's attitude, a growth away from her initial coldness towards a sensuality which actually warms Angelo's blood.

Isabella's next move is to pit New Testament orthodoxy against Old Testament dogma. She begs to point out that God sent Christ upon Earth so that 'all the souls' which 'were forfeit once' need no longer be so. She goes so far as to suggest that God ('he which is the top of judgement') showed mercy to man and, by sacrificing his own Son, made man anew. It is for this reason, to follow this Christian example, that Angelo – so Isabella argues – should show Christian mercy. Angelo's reactions carry the accents of Old Testament prose:

It is the law, not I, condemns your brother.

The law hath not been dead, though it hath slept.

In these sententious pronouncements, Angelo seems to lack the courage of his own convictions and to hide behind the skirts of the law. Angelo, not a humanitarian, but a humanist, makes out the case for the rule of law on the solid ground that one man's freedom is another man's tyranny. Both as law-maker and as law-enforcer, he appreciates the shortcomings of Christianity as a political creed; showing mercy all the time is no way to run a society. To Isabella's accusation that he is without pity, he has a ready answer:

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

The good governor cannot espouse pious principles; he must adopt practical policies. In executing Claudio for such a common infringement, he sees himself as encouraging others and thereby acting in the defence of others' civil liberties. It is with this policy that he orders Isabella to 'be satisfied'. For this ethic to be memorably articulated, we must wait until 1759 when Voltaire writes *Candide*: "*Dans ce pays-ci, il est bon de tuer de temps en temps un amiral pour encourager les autres*" – Chapter XXIII.

It is possible to explain this scene in terms of a chess match. Every move made by Isabella (in white) is promptly matched by Angelo's counter-move. Her Christian appeal for magnanimity –

O, 'tis excellent
To have a giant's strength, but it is tyrannous
To use it like a giant

– falls on his deaf ears because it ignores practical politics. She expresses a fine and lofty sentiment ("That's well said") but overlooks the realities of post-Vincentian Vienna with which Angelo has to deal. Consequently, it becomes necessary for Isabella to turn up the volume of her pleas in order to sway him. She amplifies her next speech by means of an emotive imagery:

Merciful Heaven,
Thou rather with thy sharp and sulphurous bolt
Splits the unwedgeable and gnarled oak,
Than the soft myrtle.

One feature of this impassioned speech is that it ceases to make rational sense of the legal situation and tries instead to make poetic sense of it.

It is at this point that Isabella's art begins to prosper; it is here that she makes her first impact upon Angelo's ego and shows how 'well she can persuade'. Isabella then proceeds to give us a picture of unaccommodated man: "man, proud man, dressed in a little brief authority ...". It is her thesis that Angelo, as he stands before her, is an epitome of man himself: that is, an unnecessarily proud creature, made in God's image, who dresses himself up in the panoply of 'authority' in order to supply himself with an inflated sense of his own importance.

In this speech, Isabella's aim is to remind this man that, because he is merely a reflection ('glassy essence') of God's perfection, he himself has no divine right to put on these airs and graces. In fact, Angelo ('most ignorant of what he's most assured') appears 'like an angry ape': that is, his antics appear to the angels – who rank above him in the cosmic order – as if they are the circus 'tricks' of a beast. According to Isabella, these tricks are enough to make 'the angels weep': in other words, the angels find Angelic man so ridiculous that, if they could laugh, they would do so till they cried. The point of this diatribe against man is to put him in his cosmic place. More particularly, it is to illuminate for us an individual man who is 'most ignorant' of his true place: in other words, Angelo, in spite of his robes of authority, remains an inadequately clad ignoramus if he does not know what little right he has to feel so 'assured'. Significantly, it is at this point that Angelo's self-assurance begins to weaken:

Why do you put these sayings upon me?

For the best part of thirty lines, he has remained in rapt silence. We are meant to understand that it has been in this golden silence that his development towards self-knowledge has begun. The effect of Isabella's answer –

Go to your bosom,
Knock there and ask your heart what it doth know
That's like my brother's fault

– is to insist that Angelo examine his understanding of his own manhood. He is to knock on the door of his own bosom and ask whether or not it contains a measure of beastliness: that is, a natural guiltiness. It is this conviction – that man, by his very nature, is guilty of sexual feeling – that strikes a chord in Angelo's breast and stirs his genitals. The reason (as his aside makes clear) is not only that he can suddenly see sense: "She speaks, and 'tis such sense that my sense breeds with it." It is also that Isabella (who, in her 'speechless dialect', speaks logical sense) has herself made a sexual impression on him; she has awakened in him those feelings of sexual desire that he has been striving to repress. Consequently, Isabella's use of the verb 'bribe' is suggestive to Angelo of a corrupt practice which he – in his position of authority – finds seductive.

Parting between Angelo and Isabella therefore becomes a sweet sorrow, rich in the dramatic ironies which result when characters speak (as here) at cross-purposes. For his part, Angelo is acutely conscious that, in defiance of the Lord's Prayer, he is being led in 'to temptation'. His soliloquy – in which he attempts to apportion blame for human misconduct – constitutes a profound analysis of male sexuality:

What dost thou, or what art thou, Angelo?
Dost thou desire her foully for those things
That make her good?

He experiences the need to recognize man for the 'poor, bare, forked animal' that he ultimately is. In the course of this rigorous self-examination, Angelo attempts to come to terms with the appetitive/passionate part of his tri-partite soul: although he accuses himself of behaving 'foully', he has merely become inflamed with the natural 'desire' to 'love' a beautiful woman, 'this virtuous maid'. The value of this speech is that it makes explicit Angelo's culpability: in other words, it exonerates Isabella and attributes his fall to his susceptibility to her innocence. It becomes possible to argue that, in responding to her saintliness, being 'subdued' by it, he is responding to the qualities that he most admires.

Angelo need not be merely enthralled by a basic desire to deflower a virgin; the point is that there is nothing perverse or unwholesome (as Angelo himself automatically supposes) about such sexual attraction. This soliloquy dramatises the debate in Angelo's head: not merely about what kind of man he is, but also – more significantly – about what kind of creature man is. Shakespeare's blank verse monitors the movement of Angelo's mind as it moves to and fro; its rhythm is functional in following the manoeuvres of a mind engaged in the act of agonized thinking. By means of enjambments and of rhetorical questions, eleven of each, Shakespeare charts Angelo's stream of consciousness; by these technical means, he demonstrates how Angelo vacillates between self-righteousness and self-disgust.

ACT II Scene 3

Such are the dynamics of this plot, such is the tragi-comic nature of this play, that Shakespeare must act quickly to provide us with a reassurance that the tragedy will not materialise. The purpose of this scene, then, is to supply Duke Vincentio (disguised as a friar) with an update on Claudio's situation and to supply us with a comic reassurance. Duke Vincentio is our reassurance that, no matter what may eventuate, we remain in the world of comedy.

Drama is conflict. In *Measure for Measure*, Shakespeare's aim is to explore the conflict between two attitudes to life: between Angelo's right-wing asceticism and Vincentio's left-wing liberalism. To this exploration, this short scene between Vincentio and Julietta makes an effective contribution. It sheds further light upon Vincentio's tolerant character:

DUKE: Love you the man that wronged you?
JULIETTA: Yes, as I love the woman that wronged him.

In this exchange, the two parties are in the process of addressing the very question that Angelo's soliloquy raised: "the tempter or the tempted who sins most?" Correct grammar: '... who sins more'.

Shakespeare is a dramatic engineer: this is, he engineers the dialogue – in which the verb 'wronged', the adjective 'offenceful' and the nouns 'sin' and 'shame' are all used with a knowing irony – in order to show that, unlike Angelo, Vincentio would have acquitted Claudio for being tempted and Julietta for 'tempting' him. In other words, Vincentio's irony illustrates that his attitude to governing/ruling/law-enforcing has not undergone a transformation; his gentle imperative 'there rest' is equivalent to a pardon granted on the soft ground that Julietta has owned up and promised never to do it again. Here is a question which the play asks: who governs better, the executioner or the pardoner?

ACT II Scene 4

This scene begins with a long soliloquy in which Angelo registers an incredulous self-realisation. By speaking 'sense', Isabella has brought him to his physical senses; in his words, she speaks 'such sense' that his sense 'breeds with it': in other words, she has awoken him to the fact that he is an appetitive man and that she is a woman for whom he has an appetite/whom his senses can enjoy.

In his thirty lines, Angelo – whose blood was previously 'snow broth' – is obliged to confess that it now flows: "Blood, thou art blood." He is compelled by his sexual arousal ('the strong and swelling evil of my conception') to recognise that his previous persona – that of a 'precise' and 'severe' puritan – was a form of false 'seeming' and that, in order to be a whole man, he must now come to terms with his aroused sexuality.

Significantly, Angelo's self-searching soliloquy – "Blood, thou art blood" – is interrupted by a servant who informs him in loaded language that Isabella 'desires access' to him. When his soliloquy resumes, Angelo asks himself another desperate question: "Why does my blood thus muster to my heart?" He is deeply perplexed, puzzled: he wants to know why he can no longer keep control of his own body. With horror, he is forced to recognise that his 'desire' for Isabella is 'dispossessing' him 'of necessary fitness'. Angelo's phrase 'necessary fitness' reveals that he has been embarrassed by an erection, a 'strong and swelling evil'; in his puritan scale of values, such a reaction to the imminent arrival of Isabella does not become a self-disciplined man. His bitterly ironic line – "Let's write 'good Angel' on the devil's horn" – expresses his self-disgust at his realisation that his body (in particular, his 'devil's horn', his penis) is letting him down. Nothing illustrates his physiological shame more vividly than his metonyms for his penis; it is a 'swelling evil' and a 'devil's horn' because it betrays him and leads him into irresistible temptation.

It is on this cue that Isabella (a nun whom he must now perceive as a woman) arrives upon her second mission of mercy. The substance of Angelo's soliloquy provides an ironic context for Isabella's first remark: "I am come to know your pleasure". Although she intends that this sentence be heard as a courteous cliché, we know on the contrary that Angelo hears it as if it has an ulterior meaning: namely, that it is his pleasure (in its most basic form) which she will come to know in the course of this interview. Throughout this scene, Angelo is acutely aware that he is being tempted by the devil in his flesh. His fierce interjection – "Fie, these filthy vices" – attempts to quell the insurrection in his blood; psychologically, it is entirely right that a lapsed puritan should find his sexual nature so repugnant.

For the next one hundred lines, Angelo engages in a form of circumlocution which raises the dramatic tension. He suffers acutely from a divided personality; he struggles to reconcile his public persona (his gravity, his 'necessary fitness' for office) with his private, previously

suppressed inclinations. The opening exchange between Angelo and Isabella dramatises the conflict which the remainder of this scene will explore:

ANGELO: How now, fair maid?
ISABELLA: I am come to know your pleasure.

This conflict is between Angelo's perception of Isabella as a 'fair maid' (in whom Beauty and Chastity repose) and his intense feeling that he would like her to give him 'pleasure' (and thereby complete her own soul). Deliberately, Shakespeare puts into Isabella's mouth an ironic and provocative term: 'pleasure' [ie. passion]; innocently, inadvertently, Isabella sets the tone for their exchanges. There is a dramatic irony at Isabella's expense. Given Angelo's earlier soliloquy, we know (whereas Isabella does not) that he has conceived a powerful passion for 'this virtuous maid'.

Although Angelo ("Yet he may live a while") may sound as if he is toying with her emotions, he is actually preparing the context in which Isabella may give her consent to sex with him. To begin with, Isabella has no notion of his ulterior motive; to begin with, it sounds to her as if Angelo, a scholarly governor, is concerned to 'pose' a purely hypothetical question, asking her out of academic interest what such a governor should do in such a case. It sounds to her as if he is talking only in general terms, asking her to consider what in theory, but not in practice, should be done:

Which had you rather, that the most just law
Now took your brother's life, or to redeem him
Give up your body to such sweet uncleanness
As she [Julietta] that he hath stained?

One reason why Angelo's argument sounds purely legalistic involves the construction of Line 54 (here italicised) from which the second-person pronoun 'you' is omitted, rendering that clause ungrammatical. It is instructive to note that Shakespeare's omission of the syllable has nothing to do with the exigencies of the iambic pentameter, for the line is already eleven syllables long; indeed, to talk in particular terms and thereby to personalise his argument, Angelo had only to accommodate 'you' ("*You gave your body up to such sweet ...*") and find a monosyllabic noun for 'uncleanness' (itself already a coinage). That Angelo speaks in this hygienic way simply underlines his squeamish reluctance to come straight out with his indecent proposal, a reluctance subtly explained by that oxymoron 'sweet uncleanness' which betrays his puritanical attitude to sexual intercourse. The subsequent exchange –

ISABELLA: I had rather give my body than my soul.
ANGELO: I talk not of your soul

– illustrates the extent to which the two protagonists remain at cross-purposes and articulates the position of fornication in Renaissance theology: that is, a mortal sin for which a fornicatress would be consigned to eternal damnation. Isabella's use of the first-person pronoun ('I had rather ...') is not a response to a personalised proposition, but a generalised reflection: if she were facing execution, then she would 'rather' go to it with a *clean* conscience than fornicate [= have sex outside holy matrimony] and be forever damned. For a moment, Angelo's callous disregard for a woman's soul stuns her ("How say you?") but does nothing to awaken her realisation that he is a 'corrupt Deputy'. Still speaking around the point, Angelo recovers his composure and puts a second theological question to her:

Might there not be a charity in sin
To save this brother's life?

It is another poser: is it not possible to find a way out of the original dilemma by adopting an alternative attitude to the mortal 'sin'? What if the 'sin' were an act of charity, one of the three Christian Graces? Would not this act of charity then compensate for the 'sin', triumph

over it? Thinking that Angelo is looking for a way to square a pardon for Claudio with 'the most just law', Isabella ("Please you to do 't") agrees that such a pardon would not be a sin, but an act of charity.

Realising that Isabella remains obtuse to his meaning, Angelo ("Please you to do 't") recycles her reply, delightedly turning her moral argument against her; in his riposte, the impersonal pronoun 'it' refers not to a charitable pardon, but – by the same ethic – to a charitable act of extra-marital intercourse. When Isabella thinks that he is admonishing her merely for begging a pardon, Angelo ("Your sense pursues not mine") loses patience again and talks tougher: "Your brother is to die."

Still, Isabella's sense pursues not his. Still, Angelo resorts to circumlocution, asking her to suppose that there were 'no other way' to save Claudio's life but that she, his sister, finding herself 'desired' by 'such a person' who could pardon him, should consent to sex with 'this supposed' person. Here is the third formulation of the same dilemma:

but that either
You must lay down the treasures of your body
To this supposed or else to let him suffer,
What would you do?

Despite the pointed use of pronouns, the dramatic irony at Isabella's expense persists. Both the glamorous metaphor for vaginal access ('lay down the treasures') and the conditional tense ("What *would* you do?) continue to suggest to this innocent novice that Angelo is engaging her in theoretical debate. She knows the answer to this question and retorts with rhetorical indignation that, if she were under sentence of death, then she would

strip myself to death as to a bed
That long I have been sick for ere I'd yield
My body up to shame ...

Better it were a brother died at once
Than that a sister, by redeeming him,
Should die for ever.

Isabella's passionate answer to Angelo is that there *is* a fate worse than death: namely, eternal damnation for having committed the mortal sin of fornication. She advances their argument still in the ironic belief that it is merely academic and that she is being asked hypothetical questions:

Ignomy in ransom and free pardon
Are of two houses: lawful mercy
Is nothing kin to foul redemption.

Still not experiencing the heat of the moment, Isabella is cool enough to make the critical distinction – between 'ignomy in ransom and free pardon'/'between 'lawful mercy' and 'foul redemption' – to which Angelo's actions will ultimately give point. She recognises that there is no comparison between Christian clemency [= 'free pardon'/'lawful mercy' and shady deals ['ignomy in ransom'/'foul redemption'].

For the purpose of *Measure for Measure*, Shakespeare asks us to imagine that Angelo is Jove/Jehovah [= God in the Old Testament] who is intent on pursuing malefactors and exacting retribution for their wrong-doings: that is, an unforgiving God. Against Angelo, Shakespeare pits Isabella whose dramatic purpose is to show that Angelo's relentless/pitiless pursuit of justice is out of date in a post-Christian world where justice is no longer absolute because Christ's mercy is an available alternative. Now that the human factor has been introduced into the sum of his own existence, Angelo is painfully aware that 'we are all frail'.

It is with the zeal of the convert that he makes the mistake of supposing that Isabella can be crudely included in this equation: "Nay, women are frail too." Consequently, he makes so 'bold' as to suggest that she should stop pretending to be a nun and be herself:

Be that you are,
That is, a woman; if you be more, you're none.
If you be one – as you are well expressed
By all external warrants – show it now,
By putting on the destined livery.

Angelo responds to her as a woman: that is, to all her 'external warrants', her face and her figure. Quite naturally, he then desires to see her in the secular clothing ('livery') for which such a body is 'destined'; he wants to see her in an Elizabethan dress, its neckline cut fashionably low. Converted, Angelo automatically assumes that Isabella has come to him from a world in which copulation thrives and that she has been merely pretending (as he has been) to find sex so distasteful. It is only very slowly that it begins to dawn on Isabella both that she is being offered a live deal and what the deal is. At first, she overlooks Angelo's directness ("Plainly conceive, I love you") and pretends to preserve protocol. Even though her ironic observation –

My brother did love Juliet,
And you tell me that he shall die for 't

– goes to the heart of Angelo's dilemma, this irony remains within the bounds of etiquette and is not yet aimed at his sheer villainy. It can only be when the Angelo-actor performs an amorous action to emphasise his 'purpose' that an epiphany occurs and Isabella finally sees to her horror that his 'purpose' (here, she picks up his very word) is 'pernicious':

Seeming, seeming!
I will proclaim thee, Angelo, look for 't!
Sign me a present pardon for my brother,
Or with an outstretched throat I'll tell the world
What man thou art.

Like all Shakespearean villains, Angelo is guilty of 'seeming'; that is, his appearance is deceptive. Like Iago, he is a dissembler: that is, he is an evil man going under the guise of a good/honest man. In Angelo's case, he has been ambushed by his own nature and is now in the embarrassing position of keeping up his former front. It is in this predicament that Angelo begins to act like a complete tyrant. He endeavours to use/abuse his position, to exercise the full weight of his brief authority in order to get his own lascivious way; the pounds of flesh that he demands are hers and he will have them. It is here that Angelo wilfully confuses his social rank (Deputy Governor of Vienna) with his cosmic rank (below God and the Angels). Although Isabella has discovered what kind of man he is, she finds herself powerless to use this evidence against him:

Who will believe thee, Isabel?
My unsoiled name, th' austereness of my life,
My vouch against you, and my place i' th' state,
Will so your accusation outweigh
That you shall stifle in your own report,
And smell of calumny.

Angelo thinks that his appointed place in the state entitles him to ignore his appointed place in the universe. Indeed, he is acutely aware that his position inures him against suspicion of corruption: in other words, it pre-empts any strike against his person: "Who will believe thee, Isabel?" For this reason, he is effectively free to give his 'sensual race the rein'. At this stage, Angelo is a man in whom the appetitive element ('my sharp appetite') predominates.

Here, Shakespeare's aim – rather than to characterise Angelo – is to show how powerful and ruinous a force man's appetite can be if it is not kept in check/reined in/controlled by compassion. In order to ensure that Isabella yields up her body to his will, Angelo is quite prepared to torture Claudio to death in an admittedly tyrannical manner. Angelo's threat – "I'll prove a tyrant to him" – is not empty. Within the moral pattern of this play, it signifies those lengths to which a man will go in order to satisfy his sexual appetite.

In her soliloquy, Isabella accepts that Angelo is in an impregnable position. He has opened up such a wide gap of credibility between her private knowledge of him and the public perception of him that it is pointless to 'complain': "Did I tell this/Who would believe me?" Ruling out completely the possibility that she should 'stoop to such abhorred pollution', Isabella self-righteously races off to Claudio to give him the *good* news that he must die:

Then, Isabel live chaste, and brother, die:
More than our brother is our chastity.

Shakespeare's intention is that we should regard this peremptory decision as self-indulgent. He intends us to feel – as Isabella herself plays God with her brother's life – that there is an imbalance in her soul too. In this couplet, her triumphant tones suggest that it is all right with her that she should keep her chastity and her brother lose his head – in which case there is hardly measure for measure.

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ACT III Scene 1

It is for his role – rather than for his character – that Duke Vincentio commands attention in this scene. The common criticism of his great speech to Claudio is that, rather like Jaques' speech in Act II Scene 7 of *As You Like It*, it stands outside the context of the play. It is an aria that does not belong to its opera. Even so, the theme of this aria –

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

– is nothing less than the transience of human life. In recommending that Claudio 'be absolute for death', the Duke is making a contribution to Shakespeare's analysis of man. Like Hamlet (Act II Scene 2) and like Lear (Act III Scene 4), he is pointing out the irony of the human condition: that is, that man is a finite creature in an infinite universe.

The Duke's statement, then, is a further product of Renaissance humanism: in arguing that Claudio should evolve an attitude to sustain him in the face of death, he is offering conventional advice. The Duke's speech reduces man's life to the perspective in which man's inevitable death compels us to view it: since man is no more than a 'quintessence of dust', no more than 'a poor, bare, forked animal', there is no logical reason why he should wish to cling to life. On this ground, the Duke goes so far as to maintain that man's brief life is little more than an illusion:

Thou hast nor youth, nor age
But as it were an after-dinner's sleep
Dreaming on both, for all thy blessed youth
Becomes as aged ...

The Duke's thesis – that man is no sooner young than he is old – argues that human life is effectively not worth living. One man's life (such as Claudio's) is so fleeting in the vast context of time that it may as well not have been lived. Knowing this, why, then, does man fear death? Not – according to the Duke – because he fears its physical impact, but because it 'makes these odds all even': that is, it reduces all human endeavours to the same dusty level.

In preparing Claudio for his death, Duke Vincentio is inhabiting his assumed role as Friar. Although his theological argument is watertight, it is flawed in that it leaves out of account a man's emotional attachment to his own life. Although Claudio initially accepts the rationale of Vincentio's case, he discovers – in the course of his following interview with Isabella – that he is really being offered cold comfort. In the end, Claudio will humbly thank this Friar for nothing.

Here, Vincentio, more role-player than character, is more god than man. Consequently, an audience, hearing his command that Claudio be resolute in the face of death, is aware that his operatic speech, for all its philosophical grandeur, is a charade. We know, whereas Claudio does not, that the Duke (our comic reassurance) will not be prepared to let the condemned man die. It is through this special frame of awareness that we view this scene.

It is through this same window of awareness that we must view the dramatic encounter between Claudio and Isabella. Upon this scene between brother and sister, Vincentio is an eavesdropper; our perpetual awareness that this third party is there, not so much waiting in the wings as effectively on stage, conditions our appreciation of the dialogue. Indeed, it enables us to feel that their heated exchanges, their agonisings over body and soul, are much ado about nothing. Up to this point in the play, Vincentio has lagged behind us in awareness of the situation in Angelo's Vienna. The purpose of this scene is to bring him up to date with the moral mismanagement of his city; in this scene, he catches up with us never to fall behind again.

Isabella acquaints her brother with the news that 'there is a devilish mercy in the judge'. Her use of euphemistic and oxymoronic circumlocutions shows that she is reluctant to broach the subject of Claudio's pardon, to come to 'the point' upon which his life depends. Understandably, Isabella is afraid that Claudio – although ostensibly resigned to death – may 'entertain' a natural desire to live for a few more years. Fearing that Claudio may submit to Angelo's blackmail, her strategy – before she divulges Angelo's exact terms – is to adopt a high moral tone in order to 'shame' him into accepting them and going quietly to his execution. Isabella's tactic, the purpose of her "I do fear thee, Claudio" speech, is to mount a pre-emptive strike against the suggestion that her brother's life is worth more than her chastity: that is, to place her chastity – rather than his life – on the moral high ground. At first – that is, until he learns the exact terms of the deal – Claudio manages to remain 'absolute for death'. He is prepared to embrace it initially with a grand romantic gesture:

If I must die,
I will encounter darkness as a bride
And hug it in mine arms.

Being passionately human, he is willing to countenance his death for as long as he can conceive of it in terms of life – somehow hugging it as if it were Julietta. Once he learns from Isabella that 'this outward sainted deputy' is a devil in disguise, he begins to change his attitude. Initially, Claudio is incredulous that 'the precise Angelo' is not what he appears to be; but once he has heard the terms of the bargain, he is tempted actually to answer Isabella's rhetorical question:

Dost thou think, Claudio,
If I would yield him my virginity
Thou mightst be freed?

Understandably unnerved by the complacent statements ("yes, thou must die" and "be ready, Claudio, for your death tomorrow") with which his sister has condemned him to death, Claudio confirms this inhuman sister's worst suspicions. His vision of the grave –

Ay, but to die and go we know not where,
To lie in cold obstruction and to rot

– is both lurid and vivid. Shakespeare's vigorous handling of the iambic pentameter adds weight to this graphic depiction of physical life-after death (either in 'fiery floods' or 'in thrilling regions of thick-ribbed ice') and provides us with a dramatic counter-weight to Duke Vincentio's dignified advertisement of death. Claudio's speech exults in a grotesque imagery; in its depiction of a 'horrible' reality, it might be said to look back a century to the iconography of mediaeval art – for example, to Grünewald's *Isenheim Altarpiece* and Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*. With poetic power, it states the necessary opposite case: that even the worst 'worldly life ... is a paradise to what we fear of death'.

Claudio rehearses a familiar argument: namely, that Isabella's 'venal sin' would instantly translate itself into a 'virtue' if it were to save his life. Quite reasonably, from Claudio's imperilled point of view, her loss of chastity would transform itself into an act of charity. Isabella's immediate retort relies for its dramatic effectiveness upon its context in the play. Her outburst –

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

– is indignant to the point of ferocity. It arouses in us a moral repugnance – that she should dispense so freely with her brother's life and call him such names – which would not have been so keenly felt if Shakespeare had not previously been at such pains to establish his heroine as 'a thing enskied and sainted'. Her virtue turns on her and becomes a vice. This is why Wilson Knight, when he originally characterised Isabella, used two oxymoron: from the start, he was appalled by her 'self-centred saintliness' and her 'ice-cold sanctity'. Here, her outright repudiation of Claudio's plea confirms her fall from a notional grace.

Shakespeare's handling of Isabella's rhetoric is instructive. So far as Isabella herself is concerned, her questions are rhetorical in that they assume that it would be a 'vice' for her to sleep with Angelo and 'a kind of incest' if this intercourse were to save her brother's life; accordingly, Isabella opens the emotional bidding at an extremely high price. To Claudio, however, her questions are not rhetorical. On the point of execution, he is naturally inclined to take an alternative view: namely, to ask – together with the audience – whether or not the loss of Isabella's maidenhead would represent an unnatural vice. The argument of the play rather suggests that it would not: that, although it may be wrong to give in to a tyrant's/a terrorist's blackmail, giving in to a man is not in itself a crime. Isabella's parting shot – "Thy sin's not accidental, but a trade" – betrays an unexpected awareness of the way of the world, together with an expected – but extremely revealing – reaction against the sin of sexuality: that is, Isabella equates Claudio's love-making to his bride with Mistress Overdone's intercourse with her customers at the tradesman's entrance. Both a novice and a virgin, Isabella is proving inflexible to the point of bigotry ...

It is at this critical moment that the process of Isabella's development begins. Vincentio steps forward and utters a convoluted sentence – "the satisfaction I would require is likewise your own benefit" – which signals his interest in her education: although Shakespeare will be concerned primarily with the mechanics of his plot, he is also interested in the growth of Isabella's character/in her progress towards Renaissance womanhood. It is for this reason that Duke Vincentio ("Angelo had never the purpose to corrupt her") proceeds to tell Claudio

a pack of lies: if he abandoned his masquerade now, then he could not complete his own assay of Isabella's temperament and bring her to full womanhood.

There is a schism in Isabella's soul: that is, there are currently divisions in her personality which need bridging. In order fully to understand Isabella's character, it is necessary to understand the Renaissance view of woman. To Shakespeare – as a Renaissance writer – it is important that Isabella appears ultimately to combine within herself the Three Graces that Botticelli depicts in *Primavera* (1478): beauty, chastity and passion. At the end of this scene, her problem [= the disharmony in her soul] is that she cannot reconcile her chastity (*costitas*) with her desire (*voluptas*) that her brother Claudio should live. It is in order to solve this equation that Mariana (*dea ex machina*) is introduced; her love/beauty (*pulchritudo*) for Angelo – who has shown her unjust unkindness – will supply the grace that is missing. Vincentio's mission is to bring about this state of spiritual harmony – which a triangular dance traditionally represents.

ACT III Scene 2

To Shakespeare's debate, Elbow contributes the view that Pompey and other traders who 'sell men and women like beasts' are reducing man to the appetitive element in his soul. Duke Vincentio, who has ceded power to Angelo on account of his own failure to restrict this trade, recognises now how remiss he has been. The very strength of his language – "Fie, sirrah, a bawd, a wicked bawd" – amplifies the extent to which he reproaches himself for being so lenient. He inveighs against Pompey, not merely because he despises his way of making a living, but also because he feels strong remorse at having allowed such an illicit trade ('such a filthy vice') to prosper.

Vincentio's tirade has the zealous accents of a convert: as such, it represents a growth in his personal development from one extreme (abject tolerance) to the other (intransigent tyranny). Shakespeare's view is that man – both an Angelo and a Vincentio – should measure one extreme against the other and try to achieve the harmonious median. In this speech, Vincentio is in the process of redressing the balance in his own character/soul; he is castigating Pompey for living off immoral earnings and himself for having permitted him to be so 'stinkingly depending'. Pompey's reply – "Indeed it does stink in some sort, sir. But yet, sir, I would prove ..." – states the necessary opposite case: that this living is 'a life'/that it is nice work if he can get it. Pompey's 'but yet' is critical in directing the argument of the play towards a conclusion in which man (a 'rude beast') is seen to require both stick and carrot in order to mend/redeem himself:

Correction and instruction must both work
Ere this rude beast will profit.

Shakespeare's vision is of a bestial man who requires equal measures of correction and instruction to nurture his nature. Vincentio's next couplet is equally philosophical in its scope. His wish –

That we were all, as some would seem to be,
From our faults, as faults from seeming, free!

– expresses his former compassion for fallen man: that is, that we were all – as Angelo appears to be – free from our faults and not in need of rehabilitation. In *Measure for Measure*, Shakespeare is concerned to make allowances for the fact that man is a recidivist. As if to give point to this observation, Lucio enters and makes fun of Pompey ("Is the world as it was, man?") in terms that recognize this innate tendency in man towards recidivism. Both Pompey and Mistress Overdone ("Procures she still, ha?") are characters who cannot help returning to their bad old ways.

In their own ways, both Vincentio and Angelo are 'seemers': if the first secret of the play is that Vincentio is disguised as a Friar, then the second secret is that Angelo (a villain, a hypocrite, who uses political power for personal ends) goes under the guise of a virtuous man. This is what Lucio means when he says that Lord Angelo 'dukes it well' in Vincentio's absence.

Deceived though Lucio may be about Angelo's ducal qualities, he is less deceived about Angelo's lack of moderation. His two remarks – 'a little more lenity to lechery would do no harm in him' + 'something too crabbed that way, friar' – contain adjectives indicative of the fact that Angelo's misgovernment of Vienna is a matter of degree. Lucio's retort to the Duke's provocative suggestion that such 'severity' is necessary – "It is well allied; but it is impossible to extirp it quite, friar, till eating and drinking be put down" – should remind us of Pompey's 'poor opinion' that, in order to extirpate sexual vice entirely, it will be necessary to castrate/sterilise all Viennese youth. Both low-life characters (Pompey and Lucio) contribute valuably to the debate in the play: they are agreed that copulation is a primal appetite of man which cannot be exterminated. Only those who have not been made after 'this downright way of creation', only those who are themselves impotent or sterile – those like Angelo, an 'ungenitured agent', whose urine is 'congealed ice' – would think to be so absolutely ruthless in administering the law and thereby threaten to 'unpeople the province'. Lucio's argument – that 'the rebellion of a cod-piece' [= an erection] should never be allowed to 'take away the life of a man' – enlists both basic good sense and basic good humour to his cause. Lucio's dramatic value, then, is that he is likely to voice an audience's gut-reaction.

Vincentio's reaction to Lucio's criticism of Angelo's anti-vice campaign sheds an instructive light on his character. His sonorous pronouncement – "It is too general a vice, and severity must cure it" – purports to show that the Duke has learned the error of his charitable ways [= that venereal diseases kill people if you do not ruthlessly stop them] and is eager to correct the impression of excessive compassion which Lucio attributes to him: "he would have paid for the nursing a thousand [bastards]". Lucio contends that the Duke had the common touch: "He had some feeling for the sport" and had "crochets in him". He reasons that this character-flaw is what 'instructed him to mercy', but this contentious conclusion is refuted promptly by the Duke's denials that he ever thought in quite that way ...

As if he has had an eerie premonition of Russell Brand, G. Wilson Knight argues that "Lucio's running wit ... pays no consistent regard to truth" and adds that his commentary on Viennese affairs is "merely a careless, shallow, truthless wit-philosophy which enjoys its own sex-chatter". Certainly, the series of insulting epithets which Lucio applies to Duke Vincentio – 'a very superficial, ignorant, unweighing fellow' – is entertaining for the dramatic irony that it contains; on the other hand, it has a more important purpose which is to show that Vincentio did not competently weigh up all moral considerations, did not – as Governor of Vienna – ensure measure for measure. Despite the dramatic irony at his expense, Lucio provides us with a yardstick by which we can measure Vincentio's kind of government: by contrast with Lord Angelo, he was clearly not 'crabbed' enough, not ruthless enough in dealing with the Viennese vice-trade and its venereal epidemic. This being so, Vincentio's denials must not be heard as if they are defences of his public record. More specifically, his denials are defensive of his private 'disposition': namely, that he 'was not much detected for women' [= not reputed to use prostitutes] and 'not inclined' to womanise. By his own estimation, he should – on the contrary – 'appear' to have met Plato's expectation of an ideal man:

Let him be but testified in his own bringings-forth, and he shall appear
to the envious a scholar, a statesman and a soldier

Despite his tolerant rule of Vienna, Duke Vincentio has managed to live his own life according to the Platonic Doctrine of the Tri-partite Soul. Accordingly, Escalus' testimony to the Duke's character confirms that he cherishes no less worthy an ambition and has always been

One that, above all other strifes, contended especially to know himself.

Such testimony reminds us that the central aim of an Elizabethan education was to 'know thyself' and implies that Duke Vincentio's quest for such self-knowledge remains in progress. Escalus' epithet – 'a gentleman of all temperance' – adds that the Duke is an advocate of moderation in all things and as such supplies the model of good character towards which his two protégés, Angelo and Isabella, should also aspire.

It is an account of his own failure to master the tripartite life that Vincentio has asked Angelo to deputise for him. Now, more learned, more a master of himself, Vincentio feels that he is finally in a position to judge Angelo, to *weigh up* his character, to measure his conduct. It is only after this significant development in his own education that Vincentio becomes morally entitled to rebuke his deputy for having strayed from the 'straightness' and the narrowness of his path. The couplets out of which Vincentio's concluding soliloquy is constructed –

He who the sword of heaven will bear
Should be as holy as severe:
Pattern in himself to know,
Grace to stand and virtue, go:
More nor less to others paying
Than by self-offences weighing

– present to our mind's eye the figure of Justice, holding in one hand a sword (for punishment) and in the other a pair of scales (for weighing evidence). The message seems to be that only a complete man (one who is aware of the 'pattern' in himself) is fit to dispense Justice: that is, to temper retribution with mercy. It is in this context that Vincentio asks the central question of the play:

O, what may man within him hide,
Though angel on the outward side!

It is the 'pattern in himself', not what appears on 'the outward side', which determines what a man is. Although Angelo may appear to be an *angel*, such a man may well be a *beast* unless the three parts of his soul have been disciplined and harmonised. The Duke's remaining purpose is therefore to demonstrate that Ariel (angel/spirit) and Caliban (beast/flesh) can and must coalesce peacefully in a man's soul. To this end, Vincentio will employ a justified measure of 'craft' against Angelo's measure of 'vice'.

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ACT IV Scene 1

In a Shakespearean comedy, the function of any song is to encapsulate its main theme. Here, the Boy's song to Mariana –

Take, O take those lips away
That so sweetly were forsworn,
And those eyes, the break of day,
Lights that do mislead the morn:
But my kisses bring again, bring again;
Seals of love, but sealed in vain, sealed in vain

– is skilfully constructed to show that man's appearance, an angel on the outward side, is deceptive: that, although he endeavours to resist temptation, he longs at the same time to be led into it ("take those lips away ... but my kisses bring again"). The distinction in the song between 'lips' and 'kisses' has only a lawyer's sophistication; it is not real. In fact, Shakespeare uses this semantic division to show how deep the conflict is in man's soul

between its Ariel-element and its Caliban-element. Both for Angelo and for Mariana, reconciling these opposites, resolving the tension between these elements, is no easy matter.

The function of this scene is to prepare us for the bed-trick. First, Shakespeare introduces us to the figure of Mariana, here at the 'moated grange'. The dramatic function of Mariana is that of a *dea ex machina*: rather than a rounded character, endowed with psychological realism, she is a necessary agent for the plot. Second, Shakespeare supplies us – by way of Isabella, who also has conveniently turned up at the moated grange – with the practical circumstances under which Isabella's assignation with Angelo is due to take place. It transpires that Isabella is to meet Angelo in a walled garden and there, 'upon the heavy middle of the night', go with him to perform the coital act.

One measure of Mariana's representative function is that the Duke makes no special effort to prepare her for this traumatic turn of events. Mariana is not a fully developed character designed to engage our sympathies; rather she is a cipher, required to square the circle of the plot. The standard view of Mariana is that she supplies the third grace (Passion) that complements Isabella's Beauty and Chastity; regarded in this way, she becomes more than a piece of convenient machinery and can be integrated comfortably into the symbolic design of the play. In short, we are asked to accept that Isabella and Mariana between them constitute the perfect woman in whom the three parts of the Platonic soul are in harmony.

It is significant that the clandestine assignation takes place in the middle of a 'vaporous night': this being so, it might seem plausible that Angelo could mistake one unknown female (Mariana) for another (Isabella). This detail is a modest gesture in the direction of credibility. Furthermore, it is significant that Angelo should be Mariana's husband on a 'pre-contract': because they are betrothed, Mariana will not be engaging in fornication and will therefore commit 'no sin': that is, she will not lose the grace that she brings to the triangular dance. Consequently, the trap is set to show that Angelo's 'place' is no guarantee of his 'greatness'.

ACT IV Scene 2

Pompey's function in the play is to represent the common-sense attitude towards human sexuality. At the start of this scene, his retort to the Provost establishes the superiority of his point of view:

If the man be a bachelor, sir, I can; but if he be a married man, he's his wife's head; and I can never cut off a woman's head.

The wholesomeness of this viewpoint he illuminates by means of his ready wit: here, his triple pun upon 'head' (male foreskin/master/virginity) reminds us that sex is not to be taken too seriously, that at best it is fun. It was Samuel Johnson who maintained that Shakespeare wrote "without moral purpose". He meant not that Shakespeare's drama encouraged immorality, but that it declined to take a didactic stance: in this case, the playwright offers us Pompey's approach to sex and allows us to make up our own minds about it.

Pompey's dramatic value as a representative of Vienna's bawdy underworld/seedy underclass enables Shakespeare to present us with an ironic reflection upon the political outlook of Angelo's Vienna. His confession –

Sir, I have been an unlawful bawd time out of mind, but yet I will be content to be a lawful hangman

– draws a deliberate comparison between fornication (which creates life) and execution (which exterminates it); ironically, Angelo's oxymoronic sense of values has brought about a state in which love-making is 'unlawful' and killing is lawful. It is upon this utterly ludicrous contradiction that Abhorson ("A bawd, sir? Fie upon him, he will discredit our mystery") comments so indignantly. Not for the first time, Shakespeare's aim is to reduce Lord Angelo's

dogmatic ethic to absurdity. In Act III Scene 2, Lucio had claimed satirically that Angelo was so severe and strict that he would condemn 'lecherous' sparrows to death for building their nests 'in his house-eaves'. Here, Abhorson's comment is a *reductio ad absurdum* of a legal system which mysteriously condemns to death men for making love and creating life.

The Provost presents Claudio with the warrant for his death. At this eleventh hour, Duke Vincentio (disguised) makes his entrance. At this critical point, Vincentio presumes that the bed-trick has worked and that all is going according to plan. Ironically, he rebukes the Provost for saying that Angelo is 'a bitter deputy'. There is no doubt that this defence of Angelo –

He doth with holy abstinence subdue
That in himself which he spurs on his power
To qualify in others: were he mealed with that
Which he corrects, then were he tyrannous;
But this being so, he's just

– is deeply disingenuous. He knows that Angelo has long since ceased to subdue 'with holy abstinence' the sexual part of himself for which he condemns others; on the contrary, he knows full well that, because Angelo *is* 'mealed with that which he corrects', he has become a 'tyrannous' hypocrite: in Wilson Knight's words, he has "swiftly become an utter scoundrel". What Duke Vincentio does not yet know is that Angelo is not about to keep his part of the bargain. Consequently, Vincentio's presumptuous assertion – "and here comes Claudio's pardon" – involves a dramatic irony at his expense; his confidence (expressed by his rhyming couplets) that Angelo will release his prisoner upon payment of the ransom is entirely misplaced. Here, Vincentio's experimental research into the nature of man discovers an even lower level of evil, an even filthier pond: "Whatsoever you may hear to the contrary, let Claudio be executed by four of the clock ..." Given this unexpected turn of events, Vincentio – presumably struggling to keep his composure and thinking on his feet – finds himself having to hatch Plan B. For the record, this involved plan is that the reprobate Barnardine should be executed before Claudio so that his head ("O, death's a great disguiser") can be presented to Angelo instead. In short, Vincentio is stalling for time. Of course, this rather casual and impromptu re-alignment of the plot is not especially important; intricate though it is, it is merely a convenient way of bringing events to a moral conclusion. In short, the turn of events (which here are mere details) is entirely subservient to the dramatic purpose: namely, to present us with a bleak vision of man.

The circumstantial description at the end of this scene – "Look, th' unfolding star calls up the shepherd ... it is almost clear dawn" – is a measure of the speed towards which the play is proceeding to its climax.

ACT IV Scene 3

Duly installed as Assistant Hangman, Pompey conducts a tour of the prison. The cast of characters which he enumerates for us – thirteen former clients of *The Bunch of Grapes* who have fallen on hard times, plus 'forty more, all great doers in our trade' – is designed to illustrate the scale of Angelo's operation against the Viennese sex-trade.

The episode involving Barnardine is designed to present us with a vision of bestial man. Although Pompey cracks a number of jokes both at the expense of Barnardine and at the expense of Death itself, the purpose of his remarks ("I hear his straw rustle") is serious: 'unaccommodated man' is no more than such a 'poor, bare, forked' creature as Barnardine is. In other words, Barnardine is an emblem of condemned man: that is, man condemned to eat and sleep and die. Because Barnardine refuses to take seriously the prospect of his execution, because he has not come to terms with death, Vincentio pronounces him 'unfit to live or die'. Implicit in this pronouncement is a vision of man which echoes Claudio's vision in Act III

Scene 1 and which looks forward to that Hobbesian creature whose 'nasty, brutish and short' life is to be seen merely as a preparation for his grisly death.

The next turn that the plot takes illustrates how firmly events in Shakespeare's Vienna are rooted in the theatrical world of comedy. This Vienna turns out to be a world in which no one will be allowed to meet his death: if a man must die, then it will be 'a most notorious pirate' by natural causes. It just so happens that Ragozine (who looks not unlike Claudio) has died at the very moment when the plot requires him to. The Duke's explanation – "O, 'tis an accident that heaven provides" – is there to pass off as an accident an incident which has occurred more by design. The Duke, then, has become a mouth-piece through which Shakespeare is prosaically describing the way in which his complex plot will develop. When the Provost re-enters with Ragozine's head, the Duke's comment ("Convenient is it") refers specifically to the convenient machinery of the plot.

Duke Vincentio's dealings with Isabella have more artistic purpose. In soliloquy, the Duke tells us that he intends to keep Isabella 'ignorant of her good': that is, unaware that Claudio has been rescued. He tells her to the contrary that Angelo has released Claudio from the world [= executed him]. The decision is not a wanton act of mental cruelty, but must instead be seen in the context of Shakespeare's dramatic design. According to this design, it is necessary that Isabella –

Unhappy Claudio! wretched Isabel!
Injurious world! most damned Angelo!

– should be supplied with an opportunity to atone for her peremptory condemnation of the unhappy Claudio. To accomplish this end, she must be given an opportunity to show undeserved clemency/to redeem the most damned Angelo.

The Duke sets up the complicated arrangements by which he will return to Vienna in order to ensure that justice is done: to see that there is 'measure for measure'. The scene ends with a further bout of banter between the Duke and Lucio in which there is further dramatic irony at Lucio's expense. During this bout, Lucio's commentary on the Duke continues to run wild: to Lucio, he remains 'the old fantastical Duke of dark corners' of whom 'pretty tales' can be told ... Of Lucio, J. M. Nosworthy remarks that "he scarcely speaks one word true throughout the whole play"; accordingly, the dramatic purpose of this episode is to signal that, in Act V Scene 1, such hubris will meet its nemesis when Duke Vincentio removes his disguise ... In particular, the Duke will dispense poetic justice to Lucio if, at the end of the play, he orders him to marry 'the rotten medlar' whom he got with child two years earlier!

Lucio's parting pronouncement on himself ("I am a kind of burr, I shall stick") reminds us that he belongs to the irreducible contingent of mankind required to complete a dramatic pattern.

ACT IV Scene 4

The action switches back to Vienna. Angelo, not realising that Duke Vincentio is having to react on the spur of the moment to his unscrupulous actions, expresses his bewilderment at Vincentio's commands and countermands: "and why meet him at the gates and redeliver our authorities there?" The ironic point at Angelo's expense is that, 'if any crave redress of injustice, they should exhibit their petitions in the street ...' So is the climactic scene of the play set up.

Now, Angelo (from whom we have not heard since the bed-trick was practised upon him) goes into soliloquy in order to express aloud his true thoughts upon the nefarious deeds which he has committed. His confession, his self-analysis, is made more dramatic and poignant by his knowledge that Isabella can legitimately 'crave redress' for injustice. The diction of his soliloquy is alive with adjectives, nouns and verbs which betray his fear that he may have impregnated Isabella. His first statement – "this deed unshapes me quite" –

indicates his loss of personal identity. At the back of his mind, there lies the ironic thought that, while he may be 'unpregnant' [= not alert] to things happening around him, Isabella may literally be pregnant. Clearly, he is beginning to suffer from a guilty conscience; this suffering, writes Wilson Knight, in a brilliant phrase, is "the reward ... of an idealism not harmonized with instinct." Not only because he has 'deflowered' a maid, but also because the 'eminent body' that did the deflowering [= his] should have known better, Angelo is becoming acutely aware of his own hypocrisy and villainy.

On the one hand, Angelo begins to suffer from an acute remorse for what he has done; on the other, he suffers from an acute fear that he will be found out. Consequently, he cross-examines himself in this soliloquy, not about the damage that he has done to a maid, but about the damage that he may have done to himself. First, he reasons that Isabella would 'tongue' him if it were not for the fact that she would be ashamed of having lost her virginity. Second, he calculates that, even if she overcomes this shame, his position in the state/his 'eminent bulk' will daunt her; he calculates that his position of authority makes him immune to such suspicion/prosecution. Third, Angelo reasons that Claudio – 'who should have lived' – had to be executed lest he came back 'in the times to come' to take his 'revenge' upon Angelo for the dishonourable circumstances under which his sister lost her virginity. Angelo, then, is acting in the tradition of the Machiavellian politician: that is, he is thinking first and foremost of his own survival. Although his mind moves to and fro between the alternatives that were open to him, he convinces himself (on Machiavellian grounds) that he was right to proceed with Claudio's execution. In the event, Angelo had opted for Machiavellian self-preservation; in the end, he finds himself suffering from remorse: "Would yet he had lived."

Angelo, then, failed to keep his part of the bargain simply because he considered that it was expedient not to do so; at the end of this soliloquy, he is a more complex character, regretting his duplicity in Claudio's apparent execution. The final image is of a confused human individual ("We would, and we would not") who cannot free himself from the horns of his dilemma.

ACT IV Scene 5

The purpose of this brief scene is to re-introduce Vincentio in his own habit. Furthermore, it presents him refining his plot against Angelo and warning his cohorts (Flavius, Valencius, Rowland, Crassus) that this plot may take surprising turns. The function of this warning is that of a safety-catch: that is, it warns the audience that, although the Duke may appear to make mistakes, he remains in tactical control.

ACT IV Scene 6

This scene fulfils a similar function. Isabella – it is clear – has been primed by the Duke to make only an indirect appeal for justice; moreover, she has been warned not to worry if – as part of the Duke's plan – he speaks against her ('on the adverse side'). The purpose of these statements is again to alert the audience that Act V will not take an entirely straightforward course. Duly, Act IV ends with the triumphant return of Duke Vincentio to his city.

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ACT V Scene 1

To the sound of trumpets, Duke Vincentio returns to Vienna and – for all Angelo knows – begins to resume control of events in his capital in complete ignorance of the turns that they have taken. Since we know that the Duke's knowledge is superior, we may view this scene through the comfortable window of our superior awareness and hear how disingenuous and ironic his remarks to Angelo are. Bertrand Evans' analysis of this scene cannot be bettered.

Commenting on the multiple layers of irony, he forewarns us in italics that 'every flash' of irony will

*come of just such an utterance as the Duke would have made without
ironical intent if he had truly just returned to Vienna.*

For a start, the Duke's comment that "we hear such goodness of your justice" is loaded with a heavy irony because it pays to Angelo the very compliment which he does not deserve.

To assess the dramatic effectiveness of this scene, it is vital to remember what Isabella, its chief protagonist, does not know. She speaks 'indirectly' to Duke Vincentio because Friar Lodowick* told her to do so: in short, she does not know that the Friar was the Duke in disguise. For this reason, she is able to petition her 'worthy prince' for justice without the disadvantage of feeling that she plays a part in a staged scene. *Given that the Duke is playing games with every other character in the scene, this pseudonym – derived from the Latin verb *ludere* – is poetically appropriate for him.

The dramatic effect of her unawareness is that she responds to Duke Vincentio's ironic remark – "Here is Lord Angelo shall give you justice" – with righteous indignation. It is important to remember that her response is emotional because she also does not know that Claudio is still alive. Consequently, Isabella –

That Angelo's a murderer, is 't not strange?

– can begin to call Angelo names in the categorical and uncompromised belief that they apply to him. An advantage of Isabella's half-knowledge is that she can call Angelo both 'murderer' and 'virgin-violator' (even though neither cap actually fits) with complete integrity and moral rectitude: "for truth is truth". She is not put at the disadvantage which would occur if she were having merely to pretend that Claudio has been murdered.

The Duke spends the entire scene in disingenuous mode. First, for Angelo's benefit, he assents to the suggestion that Isabella – to say such slanderous things – must be of unsound mind. Subsequently, and equally for Angelo's benefit, he appears to change his opinion; he remarks that Isabella's accusation [= that Angelo, for all his 'dressings' and 'titles', is an 'arch-villain'] makes a great deal of sense to him: "Her madness hath the oddest frame of sense." Mischievously, the Duke entertains the possibility that there is method in her madness ...

It is worth noting that, before allowing Isabella to proceed with her tale, Shakespeare inserts an interlude of inconsequential banter between the Duke and Lucio. The function of such episodes is to remind us that, although the play seems headed for a tragic climax, its characters continue to inhabit a comic world in which all shall end well.

Isabella does not mince her words. The invidious remarks that she makes about Angelo ('pernicious caitiff deputy'/his concupiscent intemperate lust) entitle Vincentio to spring vehemently – and very ironically – to Angelo's defence. If Isabella's condemnations had not been so extreme, then the Duke could not have put Angelo in such an embarrassing and intimidating spot: "first, his integrity stands without blemish ... if he had so offended he would have weighed thy brother by himself, and not have cut him off." Oh no, he wouldn't! Knowing all the while that Angelo is 'an hypocrite', the Duke enjoys a pantomime pretence to his Deputy's face that he could not possibly be such a man/could not possibly be guilty of moral turpitude. Furthermore, the Duke's comment – "This needs must be a practice" – is ironic because the trick is being played not by Isabella upon the Duke, but by the Duke on Angelo. At the same time, Lucio's continual interjections – "I know him, 'tis a meddling friar; I do not like the man" – constantly remind us that Shakespeare's Vienna is ultimately a comic world. The dramatic irony at Lucio's expense continues to prepare us for his comic nemesis.

It is important to note that Friar Peter (either a misnomer for Friar Thomas or a reincarnation of Friar Thomas from Act I Scene 3) shares the secret of the Duke's disguise. If Act IV Scene

5 and Scene 6 are to be believed, then he is acting as an agent of Vincentio's plot. Here, Friar Peter/Friar Thomas' function is to supply a convenient reason why Friar Lodowick [= Duke Vincentio] is unable to appear and explain his part in Isabella and Mariana's case against Lord Angelo.

The Duke continues to control proceedings in his own person. His disingenuous question – "Do you not smile at this, Lord Angelo?" – and his genial imperative – "Be you judge of your own course" – are consciously designed to make Angelo squirm in his uncomfortable seat of power. Such is the poetic justice to be done that Angelo will be compelled to pass his own precise/severe judgement on his corrupt behaviour and in this way come finally and fully to know himself.

We witness the entrance of the veiled Mariana in the enjoyable knowledge that Angelo does not know who she is; we richly enjoy the advantage that we and she hold over the corrupt Deputy. The Duke's cross-examination of Mariana –

DUKE Are you a maid?
MARIANA No, my lord

– is entirely disingenuous and carried out by the Duke for Lord Angelo's benefit. It is vital to note that the Duke – in his endeavour to bring his protégé to a full knowledge of himself – is in full control of proceedings; in this respect, the Duke displays the manipulative powers that Nicolo Machiavelli would rightly have applauded in a 'royal prince', a good governor. Mariana's declaration that Angelo has been the victim of a bed-trick represents the first stage of his encounter with nemesis in this scene. The dramatic moment of anagnorisis when Mariana unveils –

My husband bids me; now I will unmask.
That is the face, thou cruel Angelo,
Which once thou swor'st was worth the looking on

– is the moment when Angelo realises that his own cruelty has been exposed. In blank verse that reflects her nobility and her poise, Mariana – to Angelo's obvious astonishment – narrates the circumstances under which he knew her 'as a wife'. Angelo's grim response – "I did but smile till now" – announces not that he is about to capitulate and confess, but that he is going to try to bluff his way out of his predicament. His request – that Vincentio give him 'the scope of justice' – is one of the most hypocritical statements that he makes in the play and it illustrates the depth of his moral depravity.

Of course, Angelo – in trying to dig himself out of this deep pit – succeeds only in digging himself further into it. First, it is ironic that he should ask the Duke, who has conceived the practice, to let him 'find this practice out'. Second, it is ironic that the Duke (while appearing to go along with Angelo's self-righteous scheme) should condemn the 'foolish friar' and the 'pernicious woman' and pay tribute to Angelo's non-existent 'worth and credit'.

It falls to Escalus publicly to cross-examine Friar Lodowick. During this cross-examination, Shakespeare has fun in creating dramatic ironies not only at the expense of Lucio, but also at the expense of the assembled throng which is equally ignorant of the Friar's true identity. Accordingly, he puts into Lucio's mouth a series of pejorative epithets ('rascal', 'goodman Baldpate', 'a flesh-monger, a fool and a coward', 'bald-pated, lying rascal') that builds towards the eagerly anticipated moment when Lucio pulls off the Friar's hood and discovers the Duke in his own person, not in a dark corner, but in broad daylight: *He pulls off the Friar's hood and discovers the Duke*. Shakespeare prepares this moment of anagnorisis with such care because it is the moment when Lucio comes literally face to face with his nemesis.

Into Escalus' mouth, Shakespeare puts a less pointed series of expressions ('the Duke's in us', 'thou unreverend and unhallowed friar', 'this worthy man') which echoes the public's

unawareness of the Duke's successful experiment. The great advantage of Duke Vincentio's experiment [= his disguised absence as a friar] is that he has been able to adopt the impartial position of an onlooker upon the Viennese state. It is not, however, clear whether this overview of the city –

Where I have seen corruption boil and bubble
Till it o'errun the stew

– is a description of Vincentio's city (from which he absented himself so that Angelo's new broom could sweep clean) or of Angelo's city (in which the Deputy added his own dimension to the corruption). The Duke's line – "I protest, I love the Duke as I love myself" – suggests a measure of complacency. Certainly, he feels free to sentence an astonished Lucio to a fate 'worse than hanging'; certainly, he feels entitled to mete out justice [= marriage to Mistress Kate Keepdown] to a minor miscreant ... Now that the unserious business is over, Duke Vincentio, on his return, must in addition show that he is a reformed ruler by virtue of the justice that he metes out to Lord Angelo. His treatment of Angelo (for whom the Friar's unhooding was a second moment of anagnorisis) may determine our ultimate opinion not only of the Duke, but also of man himself.

Upon retaking his seat of authority, Duke Vincentio turns to Angelo – who, now, at long last, is aware that the Duke as Friar Lodowick has all along been implicated in the practice against him. The Duke asks him how he pleads in response to the charges of corruption ... Without hesitation, Angelo's response to the 'good prince' is to plead guilty, confess his sins and beg for an immediate death-sentence. By this response, Angelo demonstrates publicly that he has learned what just measure needs to be taken in his case: that is, he judges his own case, thereby re-affirming his original vow (sworn in II.1) that any misdeeds of his should provide the 'pattern' for his own death.

At this moment, Duke Vincentio orders that Angelo must marry Mariana immediately. By doing so, the Duke, at one and the same moment, is not only rewarding Mariana with a husband and thereby redeeming her, but also – apparently – passing a merciful judgement upon Angelo's corrupt conduct ... Next, Duke Vincentio turns his attention to Isabella's pleas for justice. Ultimately, the Duke's treatment of Isabella may determine whether we think that man – in the form of Angelo and Vincentio – is a fallen creature for whom redemption is impossible. It is significant that the language in which he addresses Isabella ("Your friar is now your prince") is ambiguous: it is both that of a prince to a subject and that of a man to a woman who owes him a favour.

Now, the uneasy suggestion – "Your friar is now your prince" – is that Isabella should find some way to thank Vincentio for pardoning her for her outspokenness ... This suggestion – not without an equivalence to Angelo's emotional/moral blackmail – stands only to be reinforced when Isabella later learns that the Duke has also saved Claudio's life for her. Deliberately, he has continued to withhold from her the news of Claudio's pardon: suddenly, it becomes possible to assign an ulterior motive to his decision to keep up the pretence far longer than is necessary or kind ...

Upon the re-entry of Angelo ('this new married man') and Mariana, the Duke, comfortably inhabiting the role of a true prince, tells Isabella that, although *she* must pardon Angelo for Mariana's sake, so that Mariana is not immediately widowed, *he* – as a 'royal duke', a true prince – cannot afford the luxury of such leniency. He tells the assembled populace that he has learned the error of his lenient/tolerant ways and that he must now exact retribution:

"An Angelo for Claudio, death for death!"
Haste still pays haste, and leisure answers leisure;
Like doth quit like, and Measure still for Measure.

It is accordance with Old Testament law (such as operates in *King Lear*) that the Duke condemns Angelo to 'the very block' on which Claudio was supposedly executed. His new dispensation of justice is no more enlightened than an eye for an eye: in other words, it does without Christian mercy. It is for such mercy (after all, the quality of mercy is not strained) that Mariana and Isabella then plead in concert. The Duke makes it clear that he has married Mariana to Angelo simply so that her honour can be satisfied and her financial future secured; so left, she should be able to buy herself 'a better husband'.

Mariana, however, continues to think not only of herself. Mariana, an agent of Christian grace, entreats Isabella to assist her cause on the Christian grounds that redemption and rehabilitation are possible for all men. Her argument – that 'the best men are moulded out of faults'/'so may my husband' – applies not only to Angelo, but also of course to the Duke who at this very moment is inspired by a reformist zeal. After Mariana ("O Isabel, will you not lend a knee?") has implored Isabella to plead with her for Angelo's life, there is a huge moment when the Isabella-actress can hold the audience in silent suspense for as long as she dares. Because this silence is so long and tense, the Duke ("He dies for Claudio's death") reiterates that Angelo's nemesis awaits him ... It is only when Isabella, learning at last not to be so puritanical and sanctimonious, does kneel and intercede on Angelo's behalf that the Duke softens. Isabella's argument –

My brother had but justice
In that he did the thing for which he died.
For Angelo ...
... Thoughts are no subjects;
Intent, but merely thoughts

– exonerates Angelo on the flimsiest of grounds (that her beauty naturally tempted him) but in so doing illustrates that she herself has learned to temper her selfish passion with a selfless compassion. Her further argument – that an intention to commit a crime is not itself a crime – may raise important issues for the student of jurisprudence; its function here, however, is to illustrate that Isabella has developed/matured into a Christian soul upon whom the votarists of Saint Clare would now impose too strict a restraint.

Now that Isabella has passed this critical test, Duke Vincentio proceeds to master the ceremonies towards a finale. He proceeds to exercise control over the Viennese state in keeping with New Testament morality. Escalus pronounces a final judgement upon Angelo's moral turpitude/his 'lack of tempered judgement'. As a consequence, Angelo expresses the contrite judgement upon himself that he deserves to die and, as a consequence, attains that degree of self-knowledge [= becomes a better man] which permits his redemption in a Christian world.

The Duke thereupon produces and un-muffles Claudio – who is very much alive. Now that both Angelo and Isabella have in their different ways redeemed themselves, the plot can proceed towards its comic conclusion. If *Measure for Measure* is 'a problem play', then the problem is that this conclusion seems to have been artificially achieved. The poetic justice which results from Shakespeare's masterly organization of events does not always seem consistent with our own sense of natural justice/of fair play. In the first case, Angelo –

Well, Angelo, your evil quits you well,
Look that you love your wife: her worth worth yours

– seems to get more than he deserves. For his corrupt behaviour, his reward is not merely a free pardon from execution, but also the love of a good woman. Given this dispensation of justice, Duke Vincentio's remark – "I find an apt remission in myself" – seems well wide of the mark: such leniency towards such arch-villainy suggests that he is an unreformed liberal who is incapable of ensuring measure for measure. In the second case, Lucio, never worse than a 'lewd fellow', does get exactly what he deserves:

Marrying a punk, my Lord, is pressing to death, whipping and hanging.

His nemesis – which takes the form of an immediate marriage to that ‘rotten medlar’ Kate Keepdown, the prostitute by whom he has a 15-month-old child – is poetically suited to his misdemeanours. Such an ignoble marriage is perfect reward for a career in which the sins – at least by Lord Angelo’s standard – have been of the second rank: for example, insolence, insubordination, slander. The Duke’s genial verdict upon Lucio’s conduct is entirely in keeping with his relaxed instincts; he is not in favour of whipping and hanging anyone, let alone a ‘lewd fellow’. In the third case, Vincentio supplies us with an insight into his own way of thinking which perhaps explains why – at the end of the play – he is no stricter than he was at the beginning. His repeated proposition to Isabella –

for your lovely sake
Give me your hand and say you will be mine

Whereto if you’ll a willing ear incline,
What’s mine is yours, and what is yours is mine

– is distinctly problematic in that, in the final analysis, it is tantamount to Angelo’s original attempt to blackmail Isabella. It seems reasonable to the Duke that Isabella, by way of recompense for his saving of her honour and her brother’s life, should agree to his offer of marriage. The moral deal is nothing more dignified than the calling-in of a favour: what is more, it begins to look especially reprehensible when we consider that the good governor (as opposed to the scheming, self-interested prince) should be endeavouring to see innocents receive justice *in any case*.

As a consequence, the conclusion of the play ties up the loose ends of the plot, but leaves hanging the moral question which *Measure for Measure* set out to answer: namely, what kind of a creature is man? Given Vincentio’s unreconstructed state, the answer seems to be that man is no more than an incorrigible recidivist: that is, a fallen creature who cannot be expected to reform himself for good.

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