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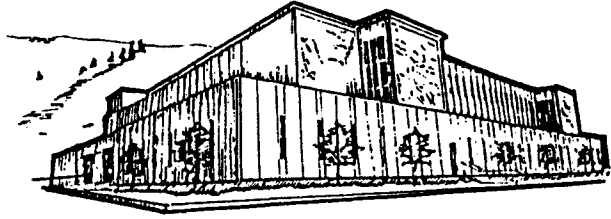
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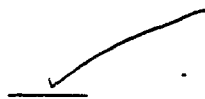


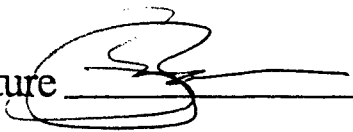
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THE COMIC POTENTIAL OF "MEASURE FOR MEASURE"

by

Russell John Banham

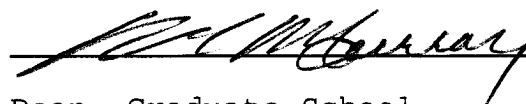
B.A., St. John's University -- New York, 1976

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Banham, Russell John, Master of Arts, May 1994 Drama

An examination of William Shakespeare's Measure for Measure and its comedic structure.

Director: Randy Bolton *Randy Bolton*

This thesis seeks to determine how Measure for Measure can be rescued from its moribund theatrical and critical state and work, as a comedy, in a reading or performance context. For two centuries, literary critics have either vilified Measure or re-configured it as a tragedy. And the tendency among many modern directors of the play is to borrow the critics' views for their theatrical conceptions. Unable to discover the comedic relationship between the play's themes of power, sex, law and religion, critics and directors frequently find the play profoundly disturbing.

A trend among critics and directors in the latter part of this century is to render moral themes out of classic comedies, from Aristophanes to Shakespeare to Chekhov. While such tinkering may invigorate classic tragedies that already delve into such issues, superimposing modern ethical concerns on classic comedies may rob them of their comic potential. In the case of Measure, many critics argue that Shakespeare intended to present his views on political power, social institutions and religion. While such themes may be derived from Measure, it's doubtful Shakespeare wanted their weight to crush the entertainment he desired to present. At best, Shakespeare is satirizing these issues, with his usual blend of wit, bawdiness and an ironic grasp of human nature.

This thesis rests its argument on an examination of the play's classical comedy structure and how it would have been received by an Elizabethan-Jacobean audience. It argues that the convention of a "happy ending" was intended by Shakespeare for Measure, and that all action prior to this ending must logically result in such an outcome. The thesis also proposes the application of modern psychological theories concerning character motivation to allow for a more modern enjoyment of the play.

Critical examinations of Measure for Measure, from the early 19th Century to the present, have fostered a deeply ingrained perception of it as Shakespeare's most problematic play. Coleridge set the stage in 1802, referring to it without any understatement as a "hateful work" and the "single exception of the delightfulness of Shakespeare's plays."¹ Swinburne concurred less caustically, complaining that the play's comic resolution precludes a sense of dramatic justice. Justice, he said, "is buffeted, outraged, insulted, [and] struck in the face."² Hazlitt also decried a lack of rectitude at the play's close: "Our sympathies are repulsed and defeated in all directions."³

The negative criticism hounding the play has continued in this century. For many critics, Measure is a "problem play," a play in which a moral problem is presented in such a manner that the intent of the play becomes uncertain.⁴ In the case of Measure, what makes it problematic for many of its critics is its comedic intent. They find the play too weighted down with so much moralistic matter to ever soar as comedy.

Yet is Measure for Measure Shakespeare's signal failure among his comedies? And is a re-interpretation of Measure as a tragedy the only way it can be read or performed today?

Many modern literary critics and directors evidently believe that Measure is closer to tragedy than to comedy. The literary critic, Northrop Frye, said Measure "becomes" a "tragic" play since it "contains" and does not avoid a "tragic action."⁵ Ronald R. MacDonald comments on its "universally

recognized somberness."⁶ Others have labelled it a "dark comedy."

For two centuries, literary critics have either vilified Measure or re-configured it as a tragedy. And the tendency among many modern directors of the play is to borrow the critics' views for their theatrical conceptions. Unable to discover the comedic relationship between the play's themes of power, sex, law and religion, critics and directors frequently find the play profoundly disturbing. This view is so ingrained that one need only type the words "Shakespeare," "problem" and "comedy" in a library computer and the screen will glare back with the words, Measure for Measure.

In this century, the critical attacks against Measure as a comedy are split into two camps: those expressing a Christian moralist view and those advocating a feminist conception. The Christian moralist critics view the play as an allegory on Christian redemption. Feminist critics claim the play dramatizes a patriarchal display of power that results in the disenfranchisement of its female characters. Both interpretations limit Measure's potential as a viable comedy for modern appreciation.

This thesis seeks to determine how Measure for Measure can be rescued from its moribund state and work, as a comedy, in a reading or performance context. To support this objective, the thesis examines the play's classical comedy structure and how it would have been received by an

Elizabethan-Jacobean audience. It argues that the convention of a "happy ending" was intended by Shakespeare for Measure, and that all action prior to this ending must logically result in such an outcome. The thesis also proposes the application of modern psychological theories concerning character motivation to allow for a more modern enjoyment of the play.

I have no desire to deride any critical or theatrical conceptions of Measure, believing that all plays -- and especially the classics -- are open to diverse interpretations. On the other hand, I believe that Measure is a potent (and certainly very funny) comedy when its classical comedy conventions are respected and applied in production. Shakespeare arguably desired that the play be accepted as a comedy and not a probing moral tragedy. As Linda Bamber correctly posits: "Literary critics tend to write about the comedies as if they were realistic fiction in which moral truths emerge from conflict. Although [this] may be a primary process in the tragedies, it never is in the comedies."⁷

A trend among critics and directors in the latter part of this century is to render moral themes out of classic comedies, from Aristophanes to Shakespeare to Chekhov. While such tinkering may invigorate classic tragedies that already delve into such issues, superimposing modern ethical concerns on classic comedies may rob them of their comic potential. In the case of Measure, many critics argue that Shakespeare intended to present his views on political power, social

institutions and religion. While such themes may be derived from Measure, it's doubtful Shakespeare wanted their weight to crush the entertainment he desired to present. At best, Shakespeare is satirizing these issues, with his usual blend of wit, bawdiness and an ironic grasp of human nature.

The basic plot device of the play, and indeed most of Shakespeare's comedies, is the subversion and violation of patriarchal order and its ultimate reestablishment. In classic comedy, disharmony and chaos are manipulated so that they become harmony and order, a "passage from distress to a happy ending," writes Leo Salingar.⁸ In Measure, therefore, the comic resolution of the Duke marrying Isabella; Angelo marrying Mariana; Lucio marrying Kate Keepdown; and Claudio marrying Juliet are, in effect, appropriate because they result in comedic harmony and order. We must then conclude that all previous action constitutes disconnection that will be righted by the Duke.

Such disconnection is represented by the plague of syphilis that has decimated the Viennese population, the sexual licentiousness that has affected all classes, the disregard for the laws of the state, and the popular view of the Duke as a removed, ineffectual leader. This chaos leads the Duke to order that all laws banning pre-marital sex and prostitution be enforced stringently.

Shakespeare was motivated to thematically underscore Measure's themes of social disintegration and restoration by

the human pox that afflicted Elizabethan-Jacobean England. During the 16th Century, plague and syphilis had travelled from Italy to the rest of Europe. Prostitution was a major factor in the spread of syphilis: A census of Vienna in the mid-1500's, the location of the play, counted 4,900 prostitutes among a population of 55,043.⁹ In London, "the theatregoer was besieged by them on the way to Covent Garden."¹⁰ Fear of contagion accounted for the closure of most English public bathing establishments and brothels in the late 1500's. It also encouraged the government to promote marital sexuality at the expense of all other sexual activity.¹¹

In Measure, a similar situation is presented. To curb rampant sexual licentiousness and disease, Duke Vincentio decides to enforce the state's laws against pre-marital sex and prostitution. When he realizes this measure is flawed, he instead prescribes marriage for each of the play's characters and for himself. The Duke knows that monogamous marital sex will reduce the incidence of sexually-transmitted diseases, as well as preserve the economy by continuing the tradition of patrilineage. "Fornication results in bastardy, and bastardy threatens the social and political privileges of the legitimate male heir within an aristocratic, patrilineal society," writes Barbara A. Baines.¹²

Shakespeare viewed marriage as a "means of restoring social order," Salinger writes.¹³ His romantic comedies are

always "in some sense about the arousal, shaping, and subsequent containing of the sexual passions by including them within the social institutions of marriage," notes MacDonald.¹⁴ Robert N. Watson concurs, noting that "from beginning to end, the dominant motive [of Measure] is the need to convert lustful fornication into fruitful married sexuality."¹⁵

Mass marriage, thus, is an appropriate comedic conclusion. We leave the theatre gratified that all is well in the world, that each of the characters got what he or she deserved and that sexually-monogamous marriage plays an important role in the preservation of society.

Most critics, however, remain perturbed by the play's ending. Watson says the ending "undermines our faith in the comic formula as a whole by the unsatisfying impositions of marriage that conclude [it]. ... [The play] evokes a tragic resistance to comic solutions."¹⁶ MacDonald claims the play's ending "offers no hope of mediating between pure and unbridled lust on the one hand and ... abstinence on the other."¹⁷ Cynthia Lewis condemns the character of the Duke as "contemptibly shallow" for foisting the play's comic resolutions on the characters and the audience.¹⁸ Harold Bloom seems to concur, claiming that the Duke's "manipulations" in Act V are as "amoral as Iago's or Edmund's."¹⁹ The Feminist Rereading

The advent of feminism in this century, particularly in

the field of literary criticism, has deepened the view of Measure as a problem play.²⁰ Essentially, such criticism posits a new way of reading texts, based on a reexamination and reconfiguration of female characters in predominantly male literary works.²¹

A recent production of Measure, directed by Barbara Gaines at Chicago's Shakespeare Repertory Co., for which I served as Assistant Director, held closely to the feminist interpretation of the play. Gaines viewed chastity as the only source of female power in Elizabethan-Jacobean times. Her Isabella was a tragic heroine, disempowered by the Duke and a social system of patriarchal authority. Isabella's loss of power leads to an absence of moral justice at the play's conclusion, destroying its potential as a comedy, Gaines argues.

Others agree. Marcia Riefer bemoans what she calls the play's "negative effects of patriarchal attitudes on female characters and on the resolution of comedy itself." Measure "traces Isabella's gradual loss of autonomy and ultimately demonstrates, among other things, the incompatibility of sexual subjugation with successful comic dramaturgy. The kind of powerlessness Isabella experiences is an anomaly in Shakespearean comedy."²² The feminist critical position largely derives from an evaluation of the play's ending as tragic (Duke Vincentio's marriage proposal to the novice nun Isabella). Isabella is viewed by the feminist critics as the

moral center of the play. Shakespeare silences Isabella after the proposal, so we never know if she will say yes or no.

The ambiguity of the ending has spawned a school of theories, with three views predominating: Isabella is pondering her choices, but likely will marry the Duke; Isabella will decline the proposal and become a nun; Isabella will marry the Duke, since his absolute power precludes a negative response from her, (the feminist perspective). The feminist critics decry Isabella's speechlessness following the Duke's "offer" of marriage, as well as her relative silence in Acts III-V. Moreover, Isabella's defiance at relinquishing her virginity to the Duke's deputy Angelo (to save her brother from execution) is so extreme that these critics have difficulty accepting that she ever would willingly comply with the Duke's proposition of marriage. They view the Duke as a bizarre and evil authority figure bent on plundering Isabella's chastity; a man whose motives are too covert, mysterious and shadowy for him to be a legitimate comic hero worthy of the chaste Isabella.

Several critics have determined that Shakespeare's handling of women in his comedies indicates he was a misogynist, especially in his treatment of Isabella. Susan Carlson, for example, notes that the play's dominant sexuality is "masculine and authoritarian, operating under the twin assumptions that women are enticements to sexual sin and that women threaten a life of dangerous fecundity."²³ Isabella is

disempowered because she has fewer options than Angelo or the Duke to rechannel her sexuality. "She lacks their authority in social and political arenas," Carlson writes.²⁴ Rieffer contends that the play "creates a disturbing and unusual sense of female powerlessness."²⁵ "Only the men resist [the Duke's] orders; the women are bound to be 'directed' by him (IV, iii, 135), 'advised' by him (IV, vi, 3), 'rul'd' by him (IV, vi, 4)," she writes.²⁶

Other critics claim the Duke is fearful of women. "The men of Shakespeare's final comedies do tend to see women as an overmastering threat to their identities, and the sexual disgust widely recognized in these plays may have its source in a characteristically male fear of being subsumed in the feminine," MacDonald asserts.²⁷ Richard P. Wheeler claims the Duke "avoids his sexuality by channeling his fear of it into a generalized death wish."²⁸ Carlson notes the Duke's fear of women in the way he refers to them: "We have the Duke and Lucio categorizing women according to types -- wife, widow, maid and punk [a whore]. There is also the persistent equation of women with sexual desire and sin."²⁹ M.G. Sprengnether, in an essay on Othello, also observes a persistent fear of maternal power among Shakespeare's male characters. Othello's murder of Desdemona, "is a desperate attempt to control," she writes. "It is the fear or pain of victimization on the part of the man that leads to his victimization of women." This victimization stems from male fears of being "feminized,"

which often inspires violence, she claims.³⁰

Barbara Gaines, in her production of Measure in Chicago, likely would agree with these analyses. Gaines ends her production with the Duke removing Isabella's wimple as she stares into the distance, a lonely, lost, abused soul. We sense that the Duke is as amoral as Angelo, but better at using his power to achieve the ends he seeks. This view of the play may be chilling and thoroughly contemporary, but it precludes the possibility of a satisfyingly comedic conclusion.

Some critics, fortunately, are perturbed by the onslaught of feminist rereadings of Measure. "The tendency among some feminist women writers today to decry Shakespeare's treatment of women as subjects of men overlooks the fact that he often understood quite clearly Elizabethan female objections of their state in society," writes Karl J. Holzknecht.³¹

While Linda Bamber decries the misogyny in several of Shakespeare's tragedies, she contends that with the comedies, "Shakespeare seems if not a feminist than at least a man who takes the woman's part. Often the women in the comedies are more brilliant than the men, more aware of themselves and their world, saner, livelier, more gay."³² Bamber claims accurately that the female characters in Shakespeare's comedies actually challenge the social order. Their subservience is not a passive one. "What is challenged by the feminine is a social order defined and directed by the

masculine Self," she writes.³³ Bamber also notes that a structural element in the comedies is the humor provided by female rebelliousness and the order provided by masculine re-assertion.³⁴

Are Shakespeare's comedies sexist then? Is Shakespeare, by linking women with social disruption, projecting his misogynistic view of women? Bamber disagrees, noting that the women in the comedies end up as comic heroines, "developing into as powerful a force ... as the social authority of the masculine Self."³⁵ She continues:

"The feminine Other is Shakespeare's natural ally. Precisely because she is Other, precisely because her inner life is obscure to the author, she seems gifted with the qualities that make for a comedy: a continuous reliable identity, self-acceptance, a talent for ordinary pleasures. It has often been noticed that the comic hero seems dull next to the brilliant heroine. Only if we refuse the challenge of comedy is the comic heroine a figure by whom we avoid reality."³⁶

The Christian Moralistic Perspective

Several literary critics ascribe to what I call a Christian moral perspective of Measure. These critics seem bent on moralizing the sexual politics within the play,

claiming Measure is either a parable resembling late medieval morality plays; an allegory on justice and mercy; a paean to the Christian notion of redemption; or all three. They note that its title is the only one of Shakespeare's plays to be drawn from the Bible: "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matthew 7:1-2).

These critics see the Duke as a Christ-like figure who also represents political justice. "No idea was more stressed by Elizabethan playwrights than that Justice lay in the hands of the magistrate, as God's viceregent on Earth," writes M.C. Bradbook.³⁷ G. Wilson Knight, comparing the Duke to Jesus, calls him a "prophet of an enlightened ethic."³⁸ Knight views the Duke as a "kindly father" who is "automatically comparable with divinity" and whose "sense of human responsibility is delightful throughout."³⁹ The play's comic resolution, according to Bradbook, is a "marriage between Truth [Isabella] and Justice [the Duke]."⁴⁰ Since the Duke and Isabella personify chastity, a marriage between the two is one "made in heaven," these critics contend. "There is no need for either Duke or cloistress [Isabella] to marry to end the play unless we are being pushed up to an allegorical plane," A. P. Rossiter argues.⁴¹

Measure's moral questions are so dense for these critics that they cannot see the forest for the trees. Samuel Johnson would have a field day with the moralists' arguments. Johnson claims in his Preface to Shakespeare that Shakespeare wrote

"without any moral purpose ... [being more] careful to please than to instruct."⁴² Others agree. David Lloyd writes that Measure "really attempts no solution to moral problems."⁴³ William J. Martz claims that Shakespeare "dissolves" the moral problems he is treating with a "life affirming comic spirit" and an "ironic twist."⁴⁴ Hazlitt concurred: "Shakespeare was in one sense the least moral of all writers; for morality is made up of antipathies; and his talent consisted in sympathy with human nature, in all its shapes."⁴⁵ Northrop Frye sums up the confusion most accurately: "A moral comedy," he writes in his essay, "The Mythos of Spring: Comedy," "is a comedy without humor."⁴⁶

Elizabethan-Jacobean views regarding the social necessity of patriarchal authority also dilute the moralists' arguments. Order ruled Elizabethan-Jacobean life and its social atmosphere. The central tenet of Elizabethan order was patriarchal law, which demanded that "women's interests [be] subsumed under those of their fathers and husbands."⁴⁷ "A woman in marrying accepted the convention of [male superiority] and therefore submitted to her husband's authority."⁴⁸ Marriage was viewed as the primary unit upon which all society was based. It was widely promulgated by both the State and the Church as a civilizing, socializing measure, and had been since feudal times. It became the new model by which English townspeople defined their sexual roles and formulated their material and spiritual aspirations.⁴⁹

While stereotypes of patriarchal marriage were called into question by playwrights in the Elizabethan-Jacobean period, their foundations were never undermined in their plays.⁵⁰

Shakespeare viewed marriage as "mutual love ... which was at once hierarchical and egalitarian," a view widely shared in the period in which he lived.⁵¹ Inasmuch as he believed that love is the great equalizer in patriarchal marriages, it's likely that he intended his audience to presume that Isabella and the Duke are falling in love throughout the course of the play. At the very least, the Duke's social rank and power certainly would convince most Elizabethan-Jacobean spectators that he is a most desirable catch.⁵²

It's also certainly possible than in his crafting of Measure as a comedy, Shakespeare was seeking to derive some humor at the expense of the "pious" characters in the play. Rather than an allegory on redemption, Measure is a satire on the more dubious and, therefore, ridiculous aspects of piety and chastity. King Lear, Othello, The Tempest, King John, As You Like It, and other works, indicate not only Shakespeare's interest in non-Christian mysticism, existentialism and the nature of the cosmos, but his desire to lampoon religion, particularly Catholicism (the bumbling Pandulph in King John, for example).

The higher values frequently are questioned by Shakespeare in his comedies. In Measure, for example,

government is painful for the Duke. He is too spiritually profound and cognizant of human nature, in a humorous context, to be an effective leader. The pretentiousness of the Duke's rule has a decidedly satirical edge to it, as does Isabella's desire for chastity and the convent. The Duke's ineffectiveness begs for a female partner to give him depth and clarity. Basically, he needs to get out of his head and into his body, to feel rather than think, as does she. He is playing at being the Duke, wearing the appropriate vestments for the role, but is clueless as to what it means to lead until he is called upon to straighten out the Isabella-Angelo debacle and save Claudio's life. The Duke and Isabella do not "know" themselves, we surmise from what others' say of them. By the end of the play, we sense that the Duke has at last got a grip on the affairs of state and, in his proposal to Isabella, on what it means to be a man. She, meanwhile, has discovered her sexuality and what it is to be a woman.

Classical Comedy Structure and Conventions

What then makes Measure into a bona fide comedy? Respect for its comedic conventions is the most obvious answer. The play abounds with conventions drawn from classical Greek and Roman comedy. Northrop Frye correctly states that comedy and romance "are so obviously conventionalized that a serious interest in them soon leads to an interest in convention itself."⁵³ Bamber concurs: "An emphasis on convention is certainly a logical consequence of the comic vision: the

conventional plot emphasizes the ease with which the author will bring about a happy ending."⁵⁴ Bamber argues that any moral problems introduced in the comedies are "neutralized" by the "patterns and conventions" of comedy. "Every time a moral issue is put on one side of the scale, something goes on the other side that mocks the process of moral analysis."⁵⁵ "The final gesture always is to sweep away the moral issue; 'that's all one, our play is done' is the message not just of Feste's song but of the multiple marriages [of Measure]."⁵⁶

An appreciation of the comedy conventions in Measure requires that we examine the differences between tragedy and comedy. For Christopher Fry, comedy is an "escape, not from truth but from despair. ...In tragedy every moment is eternity; in comedy eternity is a moment. In tragedy we suffer pain; in comedy pain is a fool, suffered gladly."⁵⁷ Fry posits that we are presented with the possibility of great revelations in a comedy that never materialize, even when we feel so close to grasping them. It allows us to escape, whereas the different feeling, form, structure and theme of tragedy -- frequently characterized by great moral conflicts and sacrifice -- force us to confront our demons.⁵⁸

Fry notes, interestingly, that when he sits down to write a comedy, he first conceives it as a tragedy. The inference is clear that the line between tragedy and comedy is a thin one indeed. What makes the transition to comedy is its conventions: the need to maintain order in the face of events

that spin increasingly out of control; the happy ending; and the life affirming spirit of the characters and their assimilation of death.

Susanne Langer, in her essay, "The Comic Rhythm," claims that the essence of comedy is the "human life-feeling." Whatever the theme of the comic work, Langer says its "underlying feeling" is its immediate sense of life. Although not specifically commenting on Measure, Langer contends that comedies frequently reveal characters' "animal drives," which "persist even in human nature."⁵⁹ Shakespeare arguably delves quite deeply into the animal drives that torment Angelo, Isabella and the Duke.

Shakespeare's comedies always involve both the upset and the recovery of the protagonist's equilibrium, Langer adds.⁶⁰ The comedic protagonist's "contest with the world" is won through his "wit, luck, [and] personal power," as well as his "humorous, ironical or philosophical acceptance of mischance."⁶¹ If the contest is won through other means -- dictatorial authority, for example -- the play is not a comedy, Langer maintains.

"Tragedy is the image of Fate, as comedy is of Fortune," Langer writes.⁶² "If Isabella then is pure and perfect, we will not then laugh at her. She must have an Achilles Heel; so must the Duke. The real antagonist in comedy ... is the 'World,'" she claims.⁶³

Samuel Johnson has an unadorned view of the differences

between comedy and tragedy. Tragedy for him ends "unhappily," while comedy ends "happily ... however distressful through its intermediate incidents."⁶⁴ Johnson also contends that Shakespeare intended for his audiences to receive Measure as a comedy. He notes that John Heminge and Henrie Condell, two of Shakespeare's actors in his theatre company, divided Shakespeare's plays into tragedies, comedies and histories. Since these actors, who both acted in the original production of Measure, categorized the play as a comedy, a happy ending was a foregone conclusion, Johnson claims. "[Heminge and Condell] viewed a happy ending as constitute[ing] a comedy," Johnson writes.⁶⁵

Most scholars who deride Measure as a problem play, or who try to recast it as a tragedy, neglect to realize that Elizabethan comedy is not intended to be acted as pure realism. Characters in farcical comedy, which is how I would categorize Measure, are drawn boldly. They pursue basic human wants, particularly the quest for self-fulfillment. "Comedy is not necessarily realistic in technique," writes L.J. Potts in his essay, "The Subject Matter of Comedy." "None of Shakespeare's comedies are: even Measure for Measure. ...Shakespeare was incapable of realism."⁶⁶ Potts bristles at attempts by critics to reread Measure as a morality play. "For the moralist to condemn any comedy because of its subject matter is an error in judgement," he writes. "It is not the business of comedy to inculcate moral judgement."⁶⁷

The Happy Ending

The basic plot construction of many comedies, and indeed Measure, is the story of a hero who wants something, is undermined in his quest, and who finally wins the day. The plot device at the end of a comedy, writes Frye, is to bring the hero and heroine together, which he says causes a "crystallization," a point of comic resolution.⁶⁸ Such a conclusion arguably would be expected by Elizabethan-Jacobean audiences seeing Measure for the first time. Comic resolutions are "recognized all along [by the audience] as the proper and desirable state of affairs," Frye writes. "The obstacles to the hero's desire, then, form the action of the comedy, and the overcoming of them the comic resolution."⁶⁹ Elizabethan audiences "hungered for romance, no matter how extravagant," writes Holzkecht.⁷⁰

The comic resolution involves more than just a happy union between hero and heroine, Frye adds. Characters that block the hero's action, for example, "are more often reconciled or converted than simply repudiated."⁷¹ The pardoning of Angelo by the Duke would fit this convention. Margaret Webster concurs, noting that Elizabethan-Jacobean audiences "expected" to forgive the antagonist in a Shakespeare comedy. Angelo must be "sympathetic" despite his shortcomings, she says. "Here is a man so 'sick unto death' with a fever so terrible that it has left him shriveled to the bone [so] that clean flesh must grow in the healing."⁷²

William Poel, an actor who played Angelo in 1893 and was recognized in his day for restoring Shakespearean texts, agreed the character should not be viewed as a moral reprobate, since he wins the heart of Mariana.⁷³

Frye notes that even the "parasites" in Shakespeare's comedies are included in the "final celebration," which would explain the Duke's pardoning of both Barnadine, a convicted murderer, and the mendacious Lucio. Another example of final repentance and forgiveness is found in the comedy, Two Gentlemen of Verona: Proteus, who has been terribly cruel and false to his dear friend, Valentine, is forgiven by him. Such mercy was viewed by Elizabethan-Jacobean audiences as a proper, optimistic comedic resolution. "The normal response of the audience [to the ending of a comedy] is 'this should be,'" Frye claims.⁷⁴ This is not a moral but a social judgement, he contends. Audiences should not find Angelo's vices villainous, but absurd.

The endings of Shakespeare's comedies are constructed so as to give the impression of happily ever after. With tragedy we wait for the inevitable tragic ending, whereas with comedy "something gets born" at the end: the perception of continuing happiness, writes Frye. Such a perception creates an affirmative feeling of life hereafter. Frye also contends that it's not important that happy endings impress us as true, so long as they impress us as desirable.⁷⁵

The conclusion of Measure emphasizes the middle ground as

the path society must take. Strict legal oversight of morals is too extreme a ground, as is absolute licentiousness. Any "bitterness" which the play might induce us to feel is "absorbed and qualitatively defined by the fact that the play keeps us laughing," Martz writes. ⁷⁶

An interesting structural element in many of Shakespeare's comedies is the introduction of an "absurd, cruel or irrational law," which the action of the comedy then "breaks or evades," Frye asserts.⁷⁷ Indeed, such a plot device -- the enforcement of Viennese laws banning pre-marital sex and prostitution -- is utilized in Measure. The end of the play assumes that law is not the best means by which to curb the sexual appetite that has led to rampant disease and social disintegration. While Shakespeare doesn't directly state that the Duke will repeal the anti-prostitution and pre-marital sex laws he "tests" in the play, we sense that the Duke knows full well the legal system is not the appropriate solution. The Duke realizes that a government of laws and not of men inhibits human nature and is thus an ineffective means of government.⁷⁸

Stock Character Types

Shakespeare's characters in Measure are drawn liberally from classical comedy models, and were intended to be played as such. Frye notes that the Duke represents a traditional comic character type drawn from the classical Greek "eiron" model, "the older man who begins the action of the play by

withdrawing from it, and ends it by returning."⁷⁹ A similar character device is used in other Shakespearean comedies, including A Midsummer Night's Dream and The Tempest. Frye also claims that Angelo derives from the Greek comedy model of "agroikos," the churlish killjoy who tries to ruin the party.

Other characters in the play also have classical character roots. "The stage tricks of ... [the] clown [Pompey] and rogue [Lucio] were pretty well stereotyped in Shakespeare's theatre, some of them dating back to classical comedy or the medieval drama," writes Holzknicht.⁸⁰ Another stock character is the so-called "occupational" type represented by Elbow in Measure, similar to Dogberry in Much Ado About Nothing and Sir Nathaniel in Love's Labor Lost. The melancholic character -- Malvolio in Twelfth Night, Jaques in As You Like It and Angelo in Measure -- also has classical derivations.

The blatant contrast between the play's major and minor characters (or high and low characters) evolved from classical comedy. Martz writes that "the essence of this contrast is that the farcical creatures represent a life of openness, directness and sexual license ... in contrast to the [others'] rigidity."⁸¹

A wealth of other classical comedy conventions utilized frequently by Shakespeare also enrich Measure: mistaken identity/disguise, used in Twelfth Night and The Comedy of Errors; the "bed-trick" and "substitute bride ploy," utilized

in Much Ado About Nothing and All's Well That End's Well; and the convention of having a character engage in sexual relations with the person he or she is "supposed" to bed, although this is unknown to the other character at the time.

Incorrect word usage is another comedy convention drawn upon by Shakespeare for Measure, and was a sure sign to Elizabethan-Jacobean audiences that they were watching a comedy. The constable Elbow's substitution of the word "benefactors" for "malefactors," and "suspected" for "respected" -- as in [my wife] "was ever respected with man, woman, or child" (II, i, 168-169) -- are humorous examples. Malapropism abounds in the Shakespeare comedy canon: Dogberry's language in Much Ado, Dull's in Love's Labor Lost, and Bottom's in A Midsummer Night's Dream, among others.

The use of boy actors in Shakespeare's company also may have served to enhance the comedic effect of the play. By 1590, all English townsmen were accustomed to boys playing women in works of theatre, and in many cases, the actors were quite believable.⁸² However, it's also possible that cross-dressing on the stage may have been a "symbolic means of [stereotyping] female sexual duplicity," writes Eric A. Nicholson.⁸³ Such a satirical sexual stereotype would have resonated humorously for Elizabethans.

Elizabethan-Jacobean audiences not only were prepared for such conventions, they expected them. "The discovery by the English scholar-playwrights, just before Shakespeare was born,

of classical models in Plautus and Terence acquainted the stage with conventions which may have been well-worn, but which have remained surefire to this day," Holzknrecht observes.⁸⁴ The "plots of Latin comedy were the patterened plots of trickery and sex-intrigue, mistaken identity and disguise, comic wrangles and ludicrous entanglements, practical jokes and deceits," all of which to varying degrees occur in Measure. "In short, here was farce and fun which reinforced the native English tendencies toward broad humor."⁸⁵

Elizabethan audiences had begun to absorb the very specific conventions of comedy introduced in the broad farces and satires by the Italianate comedy playwrights, Holzknrecht notes, including such devices as commedia dell'arte stock characters and plot situations. To these stock characters and situations, Shakespeare added direction, ethical refinement, English reserve and, most importantly, an infusion of real life spirit.

However difficult modern audiences may find a convention like the bed-trick, there's "no doubt [it] was an accepted artifice with Elizabethan audiences," Webster writes.⁸⁶ Martz agrees, noting that the action of the bed-trick -- "to foil the villain" -- is a "standard pattern of comedy."⁸⁷ Even the Duke's disguise and eventual unveiling, while "mysterious" in a modern reading of the text was "much more acceptable on the [Elizabethan] stage," Webster adds.⁸⁸

Why should the expectation and realization of comedy conventions on the stage be as important today as it was in Elizabethan times? Laughter is specifically linked to the expectation of the comic, writes Freud in his essay, Jokes and the Comic. It is with the "expectation of laughing" that an audience laughs when the "comic actor come onto the stage," Freud theorized.⁸⁹ If ingrained conventions are not in place -- if the characters or situation are conveyed tragically -- the humor is lost.

Elizabethan audiences expected amusement when they came to the theatre. They were "not interested in moral or sociological problems," Holzknacht contends.⁹⁰ The audience did not want to be surprised by something theatrically nouveau, preferring instead to be given the old dressed up in new clothes. "In character, [the spectators] demanded only people who were not too subtle to recognize and understand, and a hero with whom [they] could sympathize," he adds.⁹¹

Modern Appreciation

How then does one take an Elizabethan-Jacobean appreciation of Measure as a comedy into the 20th Century? Critics generally agree that a recurring theme of sexuality underlies the play. By examining each of the main character's sexual desires, and how they act on them, we may preserve the play as a comedy with modern consequences. In short, the sexual psychology of the main characters reveals that each betrays certain sexual peccadilloes, including Isabella!

Rather than accept the play as a parable on mercy akin to The Merchant of Venice, Measure may instead be viewed as a comedic and quasi-satirical documentation of repressed sexuality and the role authoritarian power exerts on the individual's sexual psyche. The three main characters exhibit a fear of sex and are unable to act out their sexual impulses. Their closeted desires and sexual repression contrasts comically with the rampant sexuality exhibited by the play's minor characters, each of whom pursues sex openly and guiltlessly. "We are more in love in the end with the disreputable than with the reputable characters," writes Harold C. Goddard, because they openly embrace their sexuality and have no pretensions about their lust.⁹²

To deliver a more modern comic ending then, we must reevaluate and relinquish long-accepted characterizations of the Duke and Isabella as enlightened ruler and chaste virgin, respectively. While many critics pre-1970 seem wedded to these idealized characterizations, the characters' interplay in this guise in Act V denies a modern appreciation. G. Wilson Knight's 1949 characterization of Isabella as "sainted purity" and the Duke as "psychologically sound and enlightened ruler,"⁹³ which worked in performances in his era, falls short in modern times.

A more modern interpretation of the Duke and Isabella would involve a psychological examination of the perverse sexuality of each. The range of critical interpretations of

the Duke's psychology already run the gamut, with perhaps the most interesting being that of Carolyn E. Brown, who sees the Duke as a closeted sadomasochist. Her linguistic examination of the Duke reveals his "fascination with beatings."⁹⁴ "His language is filled with allusions to pain. ... He speaks of laws graphically as straps, as 'bits and curbs' that should 'bite,' and seems to savor 'infliction,' 'strikes,' and 'gall[ing]'" (I, iii, 36)". She further contends that the Duke's leniency in the past was an "attempt to deny his latent sadistic tendencies." The Duke "secretly relishes pain" and has a "secret attraction to abuse," Brown reasons.⁹⁵ His beating images are of "authority or father figures being tormented by inferior figures."⁹⁶ She also notes the Duke's verbal portrayal of Vienna as a place where the "baby beats the nurse" (I, iii, 30).

Brown derides critical interpretations of the Duke's bed-trick as altruistic. She sees it instead as his attempt to derive vicarious sexual satisfaction. "We question why a chaste man, never touched by the 'dribbling dart of love' (I, iii, 2), settles on a sexually charged scheme like the bed-trick to disentangle plot complications." Brown contends that the Duke's mysterious motivations may lie "below the level of [his] consciousness."⁹⁷

Others have commented on the Duke's frequently bizarre machinations and peculiar psychological makeup. Bloom contends that the Duke's motivations "must remain inscrutable."⁹⁸

Goddard claims that the Duke seems "fond of experimenting on human beings and inquiring into their inner workings as a vivisector is of cutting up guinea pigs," bringing to mind the manipulations of both Malvolio and Jaques.⁹⁹ The Duke's appointment of Angelo as sexual policeman seems "less political and social than psychological," Goddard writes, ultimately calling the Duke "as introspective as Hamlet."¹⁰⁰ Riefer comments on the Duke's lack of credibility, since he makes decisions "strictly according to his own desires without considering the responses of those he is attempting to manipulate."¹⁰¹ She is perplexed by the Duke's abdication of power to Angelo. It seems a ploy to "find out what people will say about him when he's gone,"¹⁰² Riefer writes. We should feel apprehensive about the Duke's power to warp the experiences of the other characters in the play, she contends. Interestingly, the Duke says he does not like to "stage" himself to his people, always a tipoff in Shakespeare of someone missing the proverbial boat.

I am gripped, theatrically, by Brown's interpretation of the Duke as sexually disturbed, especially in an interpretative context that would recognize and present Isabella's repressed sexuality as well. I would not go as far as to present the Duke as a Marquis de Sade in black leather and chains, a Petruchio-like whip in hand, awaiting his and others' beatings. Nor would I present an Isabella who pants and gyrates each time she is touched on the elbow. But I do

believe that a comic resolution delivering three sexually repressed characters -- Angelo, the Duke and Isabella -- into marriage in Act V packs more comic punch than a power-entranced Duke overwhelming the virtue of a saintly and chaste Isabella.

The bounty of criticism on the Duke's erratic behavior and repressed sexuality indicates there is indeed something "off" about him that needs a cure. That cure, I believe, is Isabella. In her presumed chastity the Duke perceives the same sexual desire he feels in himself. The linking up of the Duke (disguised as a Friar) and Isabella (a novice nun) makes perfect and quite comedic sense. A fake friar and would-be nun -- aroused by sexual passions they have not heretofore felt -- is potent farce. Perhaps that is even what Shakespeare intended. Indeed, a nun's "most personal relationship [in Elizabethan times] was with her ... spiritual director."¹⁰³

Adding to the comedy is the fact that the Duke is inept at playing the friar. He eschews "staging" himself in front of people, he says in I, i, 68, and asks Friar Thomas in I, iii, 46, to "instruct" him in how to play the role. Rather than be God, as some Christian moralists contend, the Duke is trying to play God. However, his bizarre machinations create such enormous plot complications that we strongly sense his miserable failure. And that is funny.

Nevertheless, to achieve more equality between the sexes at the play's conclusion Isabella's powerlessness also must be

rectified. Isabella's language and what others say about her indicate she is as sexually repressed as the Duke and equally curious about her sexual nature. Goddard comments on the duplicity in Isabella's language, claiming it indicates there is both "beast" and "saint" in Isabella.¹⁰⁴ Baines claims her language is "sexually suggestive."¹⁰⁵ Others agree. "No Elizabethan-Jacobean audience, turned to the bawdy farcical, would ever be in doubt [about Isabella's sexual provocativeness]," writes Martz. Her language indicates that Isabella "has sex very much on her ... unconscious mind."¹⁰⁶

Certainly Isabella's brother is aware of her sexual powers. In beseeching Lucio to exhort his sister's help in getting him out of jail, Claudio commends her "prone and speechless dialect/ Such as move men; Beside, she hath prosperous art/ When she will play with reason and discourse./ And well she can persuade." (I, iii, 187-190) Words like "prone" and "play" are obvious sexual references. Moreover, to "move" a man in Elizabethan times was to bring him to erection.¹⁰⁷

Elizabethan-Jacobean audiences also would not fail to pick up the sexual connotation when Isabella says she is at "war 'twixt will and will not." (II.ii.32-33) "Her words reveal her at war between sexual willingness and sexual unwillingness," Martz writes.¹⁰⁸

Audience recognition of Isabella's sexual inquisitiveness

and uncertainty sets up a comic formula that informs the humor of all later scenes involving her. When Lucio, in the first scene between Angelo and Isabella, reacts to her success in softening up the newly-appointed Deputy, he says, "Ay, touch him: there's the vein," (II.ii.70), vein being a sexual pun on phallus. In the same scene Lucio also counsels, "He will relent; He's coming: I perceiv't," there being little question that he is commenting on Angelo's visible tumescence.

Other sexual double entendres pepper the play. When Isabella says to Angelo, "Hark how I shall bribe you" (II.ii.146), Angelo's uncertainty over her meaning should be hilarious, given the context of her previous lines. In Isabella's next scene with Angelo, her first line is "I am come to know your pleasure." (II.iv.31) Building upon the previous scene, this line does much to inform Angelo's convictions about Isabella's sexual motivations. And it helps to provide mitigating circumstances for Angelo's planned sexual extortion, an important consideration to the happy ending.

Isabella's sexual awareness, arousal, repression and ultimate activation stand in contrast to her purported chastity. For the feminist critics, Isabella's chastity is her only power. If Isabella becomes a living, breathing animal driven by natural desires, she has submitted herself to male authority, they contend. The convent "is the only form of autonomy left for women in a world where sexuality means

submission to men and degradation in that submission," writes Baines.¹⁰⁹ Isabella, she claims, retreats to the convent to escape "total subjugation under the laws of the patriarch or father, signified by the phallus."¹¹⁰ But Isabella's first line in the play, to the Mother Superior of the Order of St. Clare, strongly indicates her doubt about the convent and her purported vocation. "Have you nuns no farther privileges?" (I, iv, 1), she asks upon observing the strict conditions of the nunnery. The implication is that the nunnery is stricter than she ever imagined.¹¹¹ When the Mother Superior replies, "Are these not large enough?" Isabella backpedals, saying what she was really looking for was a "more strict restraint" on "the sisterhood." (I, iv, 4-5). With her first lines in the play, Shakespeare establishes that Isabella is alarmed by the austerity of the convent.

"[Isabella] has a radically weak sense of how lonely she is and how much she longs to fly not away from but toward intimacy of relationship and love," writes Martz.¹¹² And Patrick Swinden argues that Isabella's search for her sexual self is absurdly funny, not a case of a disenfranchised woman: "The main point about her is neither her frigidity nor her inhumanity but her ridiculousness."¹¹³

From a psychological perspective, Isabella retreats to the convent to escape her sexual desires and not patriarchal authority, as so many feminist critics contend. It's counter-intuitive to imagine that Isabella is escaping patriarchy: her

father is dead, after all, and she is a member of the upper class. She's got money and is in control of her economic well-being; it's her passions that are out of control. Her "seeming" desire for self-punishment is a result of her inability to comprehend or act upon her sexual desires, something with which Freud would agree: "When an instinctual trend undergoes repression, its libidinal elements are turned into symptoms, and its aggressive components into a sense of guilt [and] self-punishment," Freud writes.¹¹⁴ Certainly such self-punishment is evident in Isabella's lines equating sex with "keen whips" worn as "rubies" (II.iv.101).

Isabella's beauty is another convention that would preclude Elizabethan-Jacobean audiences from immediately identifying her as a paradigm of chastity and devotion.¹¹⁵ When Lucio first encounters Isabella in the convent, but thinks she is another nun, he is struck by her physical endowments. "Hail, virgin -- if you be, as those cheek-roses/ Proclaim you are no less!" (I, iv, 15-16), Lucio gushes. The implication is clear: No one as beautiful as Isabella could possibly be a nun.

Like the Duke, Isabella does not know herself. Linguistic imagery in the play seems to back up this theory. In the convent, she is told she cannot talk with a man unless veiled and in the company of the prioress. Such veiling serves a metaphorical purpose: Isabella, as well as Angelo and the Duke, have hidden their sexual selves behind cloaks of "false-

seeming." Other linguistic imagery sends a similar message: Isabella's sexual encounter is to take place behind a walled garden, gates are locked and must be opened, the Duke is cloaked in the Friar's robes, Mariana is veiled when she accuses Angelo, and so on. The unveiling of the character's true selves by the removal of their "disguises" mirrors their sexual self-revelations.

Brown correctly views Isabella as a "complement" to the Duke and Angelo, a "triumvirate of protagonists who seem sterling on the surface but who harbor deep inside some of the most prurient desires."¹¹⁶ She contrasts Isabella's masochism with the Duke's sadism. "Isabella seems attracted to sexual subjugation and casts an erotic tenor to an image of flagellation, envisioning Death beating her with 'keen whips' that leave peculiarly appealing 'ruby' strip[es] (II, ii, 101-104)."¹¹⁷ Martz also sees a complement between the two, asserting that their conspiracy against Angelo constitutes a type of courtship. "Isabella's connivance with the Duke may be superficially interpreted as two relatively healthy comic lovers entrapping a comic villain [Angelo]."¹¹⁸

Isabella, as well as the Duke and Angelo, exhibit split personalities, a conflict that is inherently funny. Like characters in all farces, they are struggling between a character's public image and his or her private desires. As Martz writes, "man is a creature of profound dualism, a creature whose very existence is a tug of war between free

will and psychic determinism," i.e. between animal sexuality and a conscious decision to suppress sexual feelings.¹¹⁹

Knight also notes the sex vs. public image conflict. "The mainspring of the action is of course the sexual instinct. ...No other subject [other than sex] provides...so rigid a distinction between the civilized and natural qualities of man, ... a boundary between the foully bestial and the ideally divine."¹²⁰ The Duke, he adds, is conducting an experiment "to see if extreme ascetic righteousness can stand the test of power."¹²¹ He learns that it can't; more importantly, he learns that he can't stand the test either.

Several critics are perturbed over Isabella's small role in Acts III-V, and use this fact to bolster their contentions that her rectitude indicates her gradual loss of autonomy. Isabella is offstage from III.i until a brief scene in IV.i, during which the details of the bed-trick are set up, a substantial interval of 275 lines. She is then offstage through to IV.iii, an interval of 319 lines. Martz writes, however, that this prolonged absence is not unusual in Shakespeare. "This is Shakespeare's way of telling us that she is emotionally at her low point" and will erupt in Act V (her dramatic high point), when she becomes "virtually free of fear and hence whole as a person."¹²² The fact that Isabella at least appears in every act of the play is "a signal ... of her typical or standard identity as a comic heroine," he claims.¹²³

Perhaps Isabella, too, is fully aware of the power that her chastity wields but is strongly conflicted by her sexual attraction to the Friar/Duke. Bloom points to Isabella's "passional life" as a "deferred torment."¹²⁴ She has given in to the Friar's request to dupe Angelo because in his guise as priest, he seems to reflect the same chastity to which Isabella "plans" to adhere. This allegiance progresses from priest-nun to brother-sister until at play's end, the sexual sparks inflame them.

Several critics are convinced that the pair will marry. Norman Nathan writes that the two at the end of the play "love each other as they love virtue. ...The play, though clearly not a love story, deals with many types of love between a man and a woman, the highest type being exemplified by the coming marriage of the Duke and Isabella."¹²⁵

A more interesting possibility is for us to sense strongly that the Duke and Isabella are meant for each other, which preserves the ambiguous ending. If we are left with the feeling that Isabella not only is the gatekeeper admitting or blocking the Duke's realized sexuality, but also sense that she is reckoning with her own sexual attraction to him, we restore comic balance.

In such an interpretation, the major characters at the end of the play reflect many of the same desires as the minor characters, as do we all. "The vices of the two ends of 'society' turn out under examination to be much alike," writes

Goddard.¹²⁶ The play would then aspire to the status of a satirical commentary on man's sexual nature as it is related to power. Angelo's vices represent for us the abuse of sexuality through power. He is guilty of trying to use his power to seduce Isabella, but she is guilty knowing that her chastity and sexually provocative language would serve to arouse him. Her complicity propels her to beg the Duke for his mercy, and he is set free. The play's resolution is comic in that everyone's duplicities are revealed, defused and forgiven. And for those critics who insist there is a moral to Measure, it is this: the play acts as a mirror to reveal the duplicities inherent in the audience's own sexual politics.

NOTES

1. Thomas Middleton Raysor, ed., Coleridge's Shakespearean Quarterly (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1930), p. 39.
2. R. W. Chambers, The Jacobean Shakespeare and Measure for Measure (London: The Proceedings of the British Academy vol. 23, 1937), p. 47.
3. Chambers, p. 47.
4. Ernest Schanzer, The Problem Plays of Shakespeare: A Study of "Julius Caesar," "Measure for Measure," "Antony and Cleopatra" (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 6. Schanzer adds that audiences and readers are baffled by "problem" plays. They are unable to morally divine what it is they are experiencing and, thus, cannot respond to the play with assurance, he explains.
5. Northrop Frye, The Myth of Deliverance: Reflections on Shakespeare's Problem Comedies (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1983), p. 32.
6. Ronald R. MacDonald, "'Measure for Measure': The Flesh Made Word," Studies in English Literature 1500-1900, vol. 30 (Spring '90), p. 266.

7. Linda Bamber, Comic Women, Tragic Men (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1982), p. 151.
8. Leo Salingar, Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 2.
9. Natalie Zemon Davis and Arlette Farge, eds. A History of Women (London: Belknap Press, 1993), p. 158.
10. Davis and Farge, p. 458.
11. Davis and Farge, p. 458.
12. Barbara A. Baines, "Assaying the Power of Chastity in 'Measure for Measure,'" Studies in English Literature 1500-1900, vol. 30 (Spring '90), p. 286.
13. Salingar, p. 171.
14. MacDonald, p. 268.
15. Robert N. Watson, "False Immortality in 'Measure for Measure': Comic Means, Tragic Ends," Shakespeare Quarterly, vol. 41 (Winter '90), p. 412.
16. Watson, p. 411 and 145.
17. Macdonald, p. 266.
18. Cynthia Lewis, "'Dark Deeds Darkly Answered': Duke Vincentio and Judgment in 'Measure for Measure,'" Shakespeare Quarterly, vol. 34 (Summer '84), p. 271.
19. Harold Bloom, introduction, Modern Critical Interpretations, 'Measure for Measure,' ed. by Harold Bloom (New Haven: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987), p. 1.
20. Feminist literary criticism is an outgrowth of the women's movement in general. Its roots extend to Virginia Woolf, but the field did not truly bud until Simone de Beauvoir's publication of her book The Second Sex in 1949. In 1970, with the publication of Kate Millet's Sexual Politics, feminist literary criticism blossomed as a mode of literary analysis in academic and literary scholarship.
21. Feminist literary critics are characterized by their concern for the impact of gender upon writing and reading; how men write about women; how women read both men's and women's writing; and how feminine writing and creativity differ from masculine writing and creativity. Feminist literary criticism often is a critique of patriarchal culture, exposing male prejudices against women in male-written texts. The assumption is that since men in a

patriarchal society are in control, male writers create female characters from a purely masculine perspective. While male characters reflect the male "Self" in male literary works, women are the "Other," characters defined by male needs and fantasies and in subordination to men. To quote Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex, (New York: Bantam, 1961), p. xvi: "Humanity is male and man defines woman not as herself but as relative to him ... She is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, the Absolute -- she is the Other." To define female characters in literary texts in female terms, feminist critics have developed a theory of the text that is specifically gender-based. Such spadework has produced some theoretically fascinating analyses and a new way of reading. The feminist criticism of Measure, however, largely refuses to acknowledge the inherent comedy in the work. Isabella's silence in Act V, for these critics, reveals her disempowerment by both the Duke and Shakespeare.

22. Marcia Riefer, "'Instruments of Some More Mightier Member': The Constriction of Female Power in 'Measure for Measure,'" Modern Critical Interpretations, Measure for Measure, ed. Harold Bloom (New Haven: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987), p. 131-132.

23. Susan Carlson, "Fond Fathers and Sweet Sisters: Alternative Sexualities in 'Measure for Measure,'" Essays in Literature, vol. 16 (Spring '89), p. 14.

24. Carlson, p. 15.

25. Riefer, p. 135.

26. Riefer, p. 135.

27. MacDonald, p. 268.

28. Richard P. Wheeler, Shakespeare's Development and the Problem Comedies: Turn and Counter-Turn, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), p. 98, 100, 121-37.

29. Carlson, p. 23.

30. Madelon Gholke Sprengnether, "'I Wooed Thee with my Sword': Shakespeare's Tragic Paradigms," Othello by William Shakespeare (New York: Signet Classic-Penguin Books, 1986), p. 251.

31. Karl J. Holzknecht, The Backgrounds of Shakespeare's Plays (New York: American Book Co., 1950), p. 277. The author adds that Shakespeare's female characters "know that ... men will not be perfect 'till God [make] them of some other metal than earth.' ... They know perfectly that 'men are April when they woo, December when they wed' and that 'with a good leg and a good foot ... and money in his purse a man can win any woman in the world -- 'if a' could get her good will.' Above all, they know their own minds and

hearts, long before the young men."

32. Bamber, p. 2.

33. Bamber, p. 40. Bamber elaborates on page 28: "The [female characters] invite us to suspend participation in the everyday social drama of class, power, money and status. In Rosalind's forest, for example, democratic primitivism challenges our usual insistence on hierarchy and degree; in Illyria romance and revelry put us all on the same social footing."

34. Bamber, p. 28. "In comedy we owe our holiday to such forces as the tendency of the feminine to revel, whereas to the successful reassertion of masculine power we owe our everyday order," the author explains. Bamber points out that Shakespeare's comedies always end in a return to everyday life. "The optimistic reading of Shakespearean comedy says that everyday life is clarified and enriched by our holiday from it," whereas with a pessimistic reading, "the temporary subversion of the social order has revealed how much that order excludes."

35. Bamber, p. 30. Bamber elaborates: "As an irresistible version of the Other she successfully competes for our favor with the (masculine) representatives of the social Self."

36. Bamber, p. 31.

37. M.C. Bradbrook, "Authority, Truth and Justice in 'Measure for Measure,'" Modern Critical Interpretations, Measure for Measure, ed. Harold Bloom (New Haven: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987), p 7.

38. G. Wilson Knight, commentary. Measure for Measure, by William Shakespeare (New York: Signet Classic-Penguin Books, 1988), p. 166.

39. Knight, p. 158-172.

40. Bradbrook, p. 8. Some critics contend the play's ending was conceived to pay homage King James I and his decision to grant clemency to Sir Walter Raleigh, a convicted traitor. Craig A. Bernthal in "Staging Justice: James I and the Trial Scenes of 'Measure for Measure,'" Shakespeare Quarterly, 253., posits that Shakespeare's intent with Measure was to present a piece of "political theater" expressing his own views on political authority, justice and mercy. Bernthal notes that Raleigh's pardon bears a "striking ... similarity" to "episodes" in the play.

41. A. P. Rossiter, Modern Critical Interpretations, "Measure for Measure", ed. Harold Bloom (New Haven: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987), p. 53.

42. David H. Richter, ed. The Critical Tradition (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), p. 234-235. Johnson adds that Shakespeare "makes no just distribution of good or evil, [carrying his characters] indifferently through right and wrong and, at the close, dismisses them without further care, [leaving] their examples to operate by chance."

43. David Lloyd Stevenson, The Achievement of Shakespeare's "Measure for Measure" (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1966), p. 109.

44. William J. Martz, The Place of 'Measure for Measure' in Shakespeare's Universe of Comedy (Lawrence, Kansas: Coronado Press, 1982), p. 27.

45. L. C. Knights, The Ambiguity of "Measure for Measure" Scrutiny, 10 (1942), p. 157. On the same page Knights writes that "the object of the pedantic moralist is to find out the bad in everything: [Shakespeare wanted] to show that 'there is some soul of goodness in things evil.'" Knights calls the play's theme "judge not, that ye be not judged ... for what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again," he quotes from Matthew (7:1-2). He adds further that Shakespeare "taught what he learned from (nature)."

46. Robert Willoughby Corrigan, Comedy: Meaning and Form (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Co., 1965), p. 145.

47. Davis and Farge, p. 181.

48. Davis and Farge, p. 323.

49. Davis and Farge, p. 135.

50. Davis and Farge, p. 258.

51. Davis and Farge, p. 280. Pasquier, for example, in his essays of 1556, is quoted on page 277 writing that "all desiring is to be mutual and reciprocal."

52. Davis and Farge, p. 29. Elizabethans considered economic imperatives to be essential in choosing a marriage partner: "Economic considerations [were] the main determinant in the choice of a [woman's] partner."

53. Northrop Frye, A Natural Perspective (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965), p. 8.

54. Bamber, p. 124.

55. Bamber, p. 125.

56. Bamber, p. 125. She adds on page 4: "In post structuralist criticism, too frequently the author disappears, and the contradictions of the text are its glory."

57. Corrigan, p. 15.

58. Fry, p. 16. The author adds, "The difference between tragedy and comedy is the difference between experience and intuition." In other words, with experience we strive against the conditions of life; with intuition we trust our arduous state as human beings because we know just how ridiculous life and existence are.

59. Corrigan, p. 124. Langer adds that comedy "is an image of human vitality holding its own in the world amid the surprises of unplanned coincidence."

60. Corrigan, p. 123. Langer claims that comic poets create an "illusion of life that contains a future beset by chance and beyond human control, ... fraught with dangers and opportunities."

61. Corrigan, p. 123.

62. Corrigan, p. 126.

63. Corrigan, p. 139. Langer adds that there is "no permanent defeat or permanent human triumph in comedy; that's the domain of tragedy."

64. R.D. Stock, Samuel Johnson and Neoclassical Dramatic Theory: The Literary Content of the 'Preface to Shakespeare' (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), p. 11.

65. Stock, p. 13.

66. Corrigan, p. 200.

67. Potts, p. 207. Potts adds on the same page that the "business" of comedy "is to satisfy a healthy human desire; the desire to understand the behavior of men and women towards one another in social life, and to judge them according to their own pretensions and standards."

68. Corrigan, p. 142.

69. Corrigan, p. 142. Frye adds on the same page that the comic resolution is "an act of communion with the audience" and is "in order."

70. Holzknrecht, p. 180.

71. Corrigan, p. 143.

72. Margaret Webster, Shakespeare Without Tears (London: Macmillan, 1978), p. 250. Webster explains that the "artificial device of the happy ending plot [opens] the way" for the audience to feel sympathy for Angelo.

73. S. Nagarajan, "Measure for Measure on Stage and Screen," Measure for Measure (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), p. 222.

74. Corrigan, p. 145. Frye adds that with a comic resolution, the playwright is seeking to "include as many people as possible in its final society."

75. Corrigan, p. 148.

76. Martz, p. 25.

77. Corrigan, p. 144. Frye expounds further, noting that "the action of comedy moves from law to liberty."

78. Corrigan, p. 147. Frye adds on the same page: "The humor of comedy is usually someone with a good deal of social prestige and power, who is able to force much of the play's society in line with his obsession. Thus the humor is intimately connected with the theme of the absurd or irrational law that the action of comedy moves toward breaking." Frye also claims that critical portrayals of the Duke's machinations in Act V as mysterious are not indications that the play is headed toward tragedy. He argues that the character of the successful hero is so often left undeveloped at the end of Shakespeare's comedies because his "real life begins at the end of the play. ... We have to believe him to be potentially a more interesting character than he appears to be." In addition, his administration of mercy in the face of legal justice draws upon the Bible and ultimately makes him a good ruler, despite his earlier shortcomings. Frye adds that the "society" and the end of a comedy -- represented by the characters and the audience -- represent a "pragmatically free society."

79. Corrigan, p. 151.

80. Holzknicht, p. 277.

81. Martz, p. 38. Martz adds on page 27 that the "two formal characteristics of Shakespearean comedy which define Measure for Measure and which are everywhere in Shakespearean comedy of the 1590's are farce and romantic love."

82. Gerald Eades Bentley, The Profession of Player in Shakespeare's Time (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1884), p. 59.

83. Davis and Farge, p. 305. Nicholson adds on page 296, "The fact that for much of the (Elizabethan-Jacobean) period these audacious [female] characters were played by young male actors not only

complicated but reinforced the theater's links with transgressive sexuality: homoeroticism and sexual ambiguity."

84. Holzkecht, p. 270.

85. Holzkecht, p. 270.

86. Webster, p. 249.

87. Martz, p. 100.

88. Webster, p. 249.

89. Corrigan, p. 260. Freud adds on page 255 that a "person appears comic to us [because of] the pleasurable sense of ... superiority ... we feel in relation to him." Our laughter expresses our discovery of our superiority over the person we are laughing at, their situations, expressions and most importantly, their dismay as they cope with a life that takes unexpected turns continually, Freud explained.

90. Holzkecht, p. 178.

91. Holzkecht, p. 179. Shakespeare was not interested in turning his plays into mere ethical or social propositions, Holzkecht adds. Quoting from T.S. Eliot in Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca, (Shakespeare Association Lecture, 1927), Holzkecht writes that Shakespeare "was occupied with turning human actions into poetry."

92. Harold C. Goddard, "Power in 'Measure for Measure,'" Modern Critical Interpretations, Measure for Measure, ed. Harold Bloom (New Haven: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987), p. 39.

93. Knight, p. 158.

94. Carolyn E. Brown, "'Measure for Measure': Duke Vincentio's 'Crabbed' Desires," Literature and Psychology, vol. 35 (1989), p. 76.

95. Brown, p. 77.

96. Brown, p. 78.

97. Brown, p. 66.

98. Bloom, p. 1.

99. Goddard, p. 25.

100. Goddard, p. 25.

101. Riefer, p. 134.
102. Riefer, p. 134.
103. Davis and Farge, p. 153.
104. Goddard, p. 30.
105. Baines, p. 291.
106. Martz, p. 55.
107. Martz, p. 53.
108. Martz, p. 53.
109. Baines, p. 288-291.
110. Baines, p. 287.
111. The St. Clare nun's habit was gray wool girded with knotted cord. The nuns were veiled, slept on the floor or earth, and abstinence and silence were strictly observed.
112. Martz, p. 50-51. Martz calls Isabella "a self-blinded intellectual."
113. Patrick Swinden, An Introduction to Shakespeare's Comedies (London: Macmillan, 1973), p. 144.
114. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, 24 vols., ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-1974), XXI, p. 115, 119. Freud theorized that nearly "every neurosis conceals a quota of unconscious sense of guilt, which in turn fortifies the symptoms by making use of them as a punishment."
115. Davis and Farge, p. 89. "Beauty was a gift [in Elizabethan-Jacobean] times, an identifying characteristic as objective as wealth or education." It was the "formal concomitant" of other tokens of good fortune such as wealth, rank and moral purity."
116. Brown, p. 84.
117. Brown, p. 84.
118. Martz, p. 66.
119. Martz. p. 118. Martz adds on page 31 that Vienna "is Shakespeare's blatant comic metaphor for the unmanageability of sex in human affairs."
120. Knight, p. 158.

121. Knight, p. 158.

122. Martz, p. 65.

123. Martz, p. 51.

124. Bloom, p. 1-2.

125. Norman Nathan, "The Marriage of Duke Vincentio and Isabella,"
Shakespeare Quarterly, 7 (1956), p. 45.

126. Goddard, p. 41.