Reconstructing the Morality Play and Redeeming the Polity in William Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*

Krystal Marsh
Independent Scholar

In the beginning of William Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, Vienna is morally corrupt. The Duke has the responsibility of guiding his subjects into making righteous choices by combining spiritual with secular authority. He makes his way through most of the play in disguise as a friar, meddling with the characters' lives and potential afterlives in order to return Viennese subjects to a way of life governed more fully by moral standards. His intentions are never to cruelly punish, though some citizens of Vienna—Lucio for one—may disagree. As head of state, it is his duty to provide fair judgment while also being merciful. The Duke says in the beginning of the play,

> I love the people,
> But do not like to stage me to their eyes.
> Though it do well, I do not relish well
> Their loud applause and aves vehement;
> Nor do I think the man of safe discretion
> That does affect it. (1.1.67-72)[1]

In this statement, the Duke is acting as both an ecclesiastical ruler and a temporal ruler. He, like God, loves all of his subjects, but he does not desire praise for being a ruler, which allows him to be a man of sound judgment. The Duke as duke is essentially invisible to most of the characters in the play—oddly, both before and after his disappearance. In disguise as a friar, he is able to add a dimension of private knowledge of his subjects to the public dimension he already possesses. As he learns about each of the characters, either as confessor or confidant, the Duke amasses the raw material for a political program of reform that works

from the inside out: from moral character to social behavior. This combination of the sacred and secular reforms Vienna at the end of the play, effectively healing the political and moral offenses of the citizens: old wrongs are righted, the law is restored, and the city is reconciled with itself and its leader, the Duke. Through his reformation of these issues, the Duke creates a harmonious polity, the most prominent target of his reformation being his temporary replacement, Angelo. At the end of the play, the Duke has essentially saved the man who is the most corrupt within his city. With the Duke performing the role of the all-seeing ruler and Angelo that of the tempted (or reconciled) Everyman, the structure of *Measure for Measure* operates much like that of a medieval morality play.

Contemporary thought on the periodic boundaries (and lack thereof) between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance has been decidedly split, particularly on the subject of the relationship between morality and dramatic subjectivity. While there is little doubt that the drama of the Renaissance is in part generated by the literature of the Middle Ages, the status of early modern dramatic structures used in medieval plays to create morally didactic moments is, in the current critical conversation, ambiguous at best. In *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, James Simpson argues that the early modern subject is a consequence of simplified and centralized government jurisdiction under Henry VII and Henry VIII, who displaced the medieval culture of jurisdictional heterogeneity. Along these lines, Simpson also resists the opinion that the Renaissance/Reformation was liberating for England or for the literature of the time.[2] He suggests that the drama of the early modern period was an extension of medieval dramatic traditions, in which theater was used as an instrument of discipline against characters and spectators alike, not a rejection or reformation of them. Simpson argues, for instance, that the Renaissance "youth plays" demonstrate a close resemblance to the medieval morality play. These plays, which often portray Henry VIII himself as a youth, adapt a comedic structure and use pedagogical techniques to instruct. Simpson remarks on this structure typically used in morality plays, "The instructional comic mode has a tripartite structure, of ideal state, degradation of that ideal state, and restoration through instruction and absorption of moral lesson."[3] For Simpson, then, the earliest early modern plays preserved both the medieval comic structure and the didactic purpose of this structure, yet combined the media of religions and

politics. The chastened protagonist became both a better Christian and better royal subject.[4]

On the other hand, the focal interest of Curtis Perry and John Watkins' compilation, *Shakespeare and the Middle Ages*, is Shakespeare's influence upon the conception and oftentimes "invention" of the Middle Ages.[5] Unlike Simpson's work, Perry and Watkins suggest that early modern drama is as revolutionary as critics have traditionally maintained. These articles suggest that many of Shakespeare's plays offer the foundation of our historical perspective on medievalism, despite many of Shakespeare's facts being incorrect. In the introduction, Perry and Watkins provide a view contrary to one of James Simpson's main arguments: they believe the transformation of medieval to early modern drama is "revolutionary" and actually reinforced by the emergence and strengthening of a centralized monarchy, and not displaced, as Simpson suggests. They argue that drama changed as the monarchy changed, and that this was advantageous to both the literature of the time and the historicity of the Middle Ages. Perry and Watkins go on to say that "authority was typically derived from and anchored in the exemplarity of the past."[6] For Perry and Watkins, the early modern stage does not envision itself as a continuation of the medieval stage. Rather, within the tensely authoritarian political climate, early modern plays reinvented medieval drama (as well as the medieval period as a whole) as a source of their own political and literary legitimation.

In this paper, I will offer a more measured approach. Literature in the Renaissance not only laid the foundation for a better understanding of the past, but also revamped these traditions in the process of commenting on the Middle Ages. I want to argue that the Renaissance is revolutionary, yet at the same time conscious of its debt to native as well as to Classical traditions. The early modern stage, then, reorients dramatic traditions from the Middle Ages and uses them to evolve. This may seem like a fairly obvious point in relation to literature more generally, but it is less so given the surprisingly different religious and political contexts surrounding the medieval morality play and early modern drama, respectively.[7] Early modern playwrights constantly returned to the morality structure in order to explore a variety of problems and questions related to the ethical status of the individual (for example, as in *Doctor Faustus* or even *Women Beware Women*). While medieval traditions present themselves in the Renaissance, the didactic purposes behind these traditions are inherently altered. Critics have been exploring the methods in which *Measure for*

Measure exploits and understands morality for decades. However, the play's "problem play" status has made it difficult to dissect the ethics of how justice is enacted in Vienna. My reading primarily focuses on how the structure of the play aids the restoration of the corrupt city and citizens of Vienna.

In *Measure for Measure*, William Shakespeare repurposes the morality play to function within a largely secular realm. Shakespeare is repurposing the morality play in a polity in which the roles of the state and of the divine are virtually indistinguishable.[8] The form is no longer efficacious exclusively in matters of the sacred. Instead, it has adapted to judicial matters. However, this adaptation (orchestrated by the Duke) and the reformation that it generates do not respond to a correlative desire among his subjects. Instead, reformation is forced upon them. This is a fundamental problem in *Measure for Measure*. Though the Duke may have good intentions, he may also be making the moral issues of Vienna worse by imposing penance on his subjects instead of guiding them towards penance. The morality play format makes sense of the expanded nature of the Duke's authority, though at the end there is still tension among the "saved." Virtue is thrust upon them instead of being developed within them, though it seems as if there is little difference in the end. In a morality play structure, there is little room for grey areas; at the end of the play, all of the characters are on the path to lead virtuous lives. The only mortal experience that matters in their lifetimes is their final act of penance. All of the characters acquire virtue in *Measure for Measure*, from the pious Isabella to the promiscuous Lucio, because of the Duke. This final gesture made by the Duke allows his subjects both to live and die well.

However, contemporary criticism has turned against the interpretation of the Duke as a benevolent ruler concerned with both the salvation of his subjects and the social reform of his city. Many see him rather as a tyrant. Sarah Beckwith, in her article, "Medieval Penance, Reformation, Repentance and *Measure for Measure*," takes a practical approach to understanding the play, arguing that the Duke cannot be both confessor and ruler because it is literally impossible for him to be two people at once. His attempt to be both is, then, deceitful and vindictive. Her argument is centered on the Duke's theatricality throughout the play and on the ways in which his "brutal logic of exposure"[9] diminishes both his credibility as a leader and compassion from the audience. She finds his theatricality especially disturbing as a confessor, asserting that the purely performative nature of his role as a friar eliminates

any sense of regret for breaking the seal of the confessional. His theatricality, Beckwith claims, unmasks his selfishness as a ruler. She also claims that the Duke's primary concern is not to find a way to reconcile politically the sacred and secular responsibilities of a ruler, but rather to use the guise of religion in order to extend his political dominion over his subjects to include the realm of sexual mores and practices, making the Duke even more villainous.

Debora Kuller Shuger, on the other hand, considers the Duke to be a benevolent ruler in her book *Political Theologies in Shakespeare's England: The Sacred and The State in* Measure for Measure. Her final chapter, titled "The King of Souls," focuses on the question of how Christianity is reformed by the Duke into a political praxis. She claims that the Duke has a deep concern for the salvation of his subjects, which leads him to "extend his mercy to those whom common sense would label as castaways,"[10] such as Barnardine and Angelo. Shuger assigns the Duke the title "King of Souls" because, as a temporal ruler, he is focused on the "inner man" of his subjects and how this "inner man" will affect their afterlives. She finds this especially relevant in the case of Barnardine, who refuses execution because he was not ready to repent and die. Shuger explains that the Duke is responsible to God for his subjects' souls, and if Barnardine were executed without repenting, then both Barnardine and the Duke would be damned. She compares the Duke with Angelo, whom she identifies as a Puritan, and discusses the tension between Puritan and Anglican punishment. The Duke's political theology is one modeled on "penance rather than law enforcement,"[11] whereas Angelo favors a harsh penal enforcement of virtue. While Angelo would rather purge Vienna of its sinners, the Duke would rather reform them. The Duke does not merely mediate between the sacred and secular, he is a result of the combination of the sacred and secular.

Beckwith's argument against the Duke is driven by her understanding of the significance of medieval practices of sin reformation and penance. The Duke rejects these traditions, which may suggest that if *Measure for Measure* can be understood to function as a morality play, it does so unsuccessfully because of the Duke. The Duke destroys the possibility of *Measure for Measure* functioning as a morality play because he uses religion primarily as an instrument with which to manipulate his subjects instead of as a resource to mercifully "save" them. If, however, we understand *Measure for Measure* to be operating within two different conceptual realms—the explicitly political as well as the explicitly spiritual—

then Shuger's argument is an excellent point of departure for a discussion that aims to decipher the shape of a "secularized" morality play. Her reading becomes useful in discovering how this temporal ruler, the Duke, expands his jurisdiction to include the spiritual lives of his subjects. If a morality play is meant to teach the audience how to be good Christians, then *Measure for Measure* reorients this tradition in order to teach the audience how to be good subjects and, in turn, good Christians as well.

In early modern England, the relationship between the morality of a ruler and of his subjects was considered to be quite close. The ruler was uniquely identified as the head of the church, as well as the head of the state. Leading a virtuous life is imperative, especially for a ruler, for his subjects will inevitably model the virtues (or, alternatively, the vices) of their leader. *Basilikon Doron*, written by King James I, identifies this as an essential trait within a King. *Basilikon Doron* is written as a letter to instruct "a Prince in all the points of his calling,"[12] and James is particularly interested in the problem of how to promote virtue within his subjects. According to James, it is the King's duty to perform both justice and equity in order to be a good ruler. However, he rejects the notion that a king is the creator of virtue, but believes instead that he is a vessel through which God's virtue can be brought to the people:

> Consider that GOD is the authour of all vertue, hauing imprinted in mens mindes by the very light of nature, the loue of all morall vertues . . . and preasse then to shine as farre before your people, in all vertue and honestie, as in greatnesse of ranke: that the vse thereof in all your actions, may turne, with time, to a naturall habitude in you; and as by their hearing of your Lawes, so by the sight of your person, both their eyes and their ears, may leade and allure them to the loue of vertue, and hatred of vice.[13]

According to James, a king must use his social position to spread the morals and virtues of God. He is truly a representative of Him on earth, and not a model of Him. The laws of rulers, and the execution of these laws, are examples to God that His people are on the path of virtue. James recognizes that he is merely a vessel of the divine, which in turn allows him to combine the offices of both the king and head of the church on earth. If the King uses his authority, the law, to properly bestow virtue upon his subjects, then virtuous behavior in the king will become a "naturall habitude." This passage offers an example from early-seventeenth century political theology that allows us to make sense of some of

the apparently outlandish things the Duke does in Shakespeare's play. *Measure for Measure* seems to be making the same claim for the Duke as James is making for himself. If, according to James, a ruler uses his unique power to spread the love of virtue to save his subjects, he is performing an act of God.

The Duke in *Measure for Measure* rules his subjects in a way that makes it clear he is mindful of crafting them into virtuous people. He is not a middleman (as James claims to be), but the sole source of sacred and secular authority within Vienna. The virtues he attempts to instill within his citizens are rooted within the law, but also transcend the letter of the law, because virtue for the Duke is the result of a conceptual balance between justice and merciful equity. The Duke does not need to prove the virtuousness of his people to any higher being because he is the highest being in the lives of the Viennese, in both temporal and ecclesiastical matters. While the Duke as a ruler is very similar to James, Angelo enforces these rules without mercy. Angelo rules Vienna strictly according to the laws, which in his mind are put in place to maintain virtuousness and order amongst the people. However, in time, he becomes consumed with the power of being a ruler and becomes tyrannical through his unmerciful nature. He lacks the balance between an ecclesiastical ruler and a justice enforcer that the Duke so skillfully manages. Angelo punishes those who commit acts against virtue while also deliberately stripping virtue from characters like Mariana and Isabella, only further enforcing the idea that virtue is a judicial matter, not exclusively an ecclesiastical matter. In the end, Angelo becomes so thoroughly corrupt that only the Duke can save him.

The Duke chooses Angelo specifically to become an interim Duke because of his reputation for strong moral uprightness.[14] He recognizes that he has been a lenient ruler of Vienna, and that with Angelo in charge, the sin and moral transgressions of his citizens may be amended. This, then, gives the Duke ample opportunity to save his citizens, but more importantly, to save Angelo himself, who, we later learn, is the most morally corrupt citizen of Vienna. The Duke is the only character besides Mariana that knows of Angelo's previous sins that have gone unpunished; Angelo is not what he seems to be. The Duke, upon revealing his plan to become a friar, says to Friar John,

> Lord Angelo is precise,
> Stands at a guard with envy, scarce confesses
> That his blood flows, or that his appetite

> Is more to bread than stone. Hence shall we see
> If power change purpose, what our seemers be. (1.3.50-54)

The Duke has put Angelo on the throne not only to monitor the "evil deeds" of his citizens, but to give Angelo a position of authority that will hopefully unleash his own desires (which seem to be consciously suppressed). According to the Duke, Angelo sees himself as something more than human and refuses to recognize his own limitations. This position will encourage Angelo's ideas about his personal superiority, which will in turn ultimately change his purpose as a ruler. The advantages of possessing a stately title will lead him to act carelessly, though he believes it impossible that he will ever be tempted or sin. While the Duke seems nothing more than skeptical of Angelo at this point in the play, we will see later that he has successfully predicted Angelo's corruption.

Angelo's time as a ruler is similar to the pilgrimage God requires of *Everyman* in the morality play Everyman. Initially, during Angelo's time in charge, he enacts justice as the law sees fit. Even though the law is punitive in nature, Angelo firmly believes that he is doing what is expected of him by both Vienna and God. However, there is no balance between justice and mercy in his ruling. In fact, both of these concepts become lost to him as he begins to allow his erotic desires to overtake his judgment. Angelo becomes obsessed with desires of the flesh, which ultimately prevents him from being the level-headed leader he promised the Duke he would be. It is after his first meeting with Isabella that Angelo discovers his sexual desires. He admits to being sexually attracted to Isabella for her virtues and questions whether it is more sinful to be the tempter or the tempted. Angelo, surprised by the newborn desires within him, says after their meeting,

> Most dangerous
> Is that temptation that doth goad us on
> To sin in loving virtue.
>
> . . . .
>
> But this virtuous maid
> Subdues me quite. Ever till now
> When men were fond, I smiled, and wondered how
> (2.2.185-91)

Angelo, in this passage, is beginning to reorient his behavior towards the pursuit of pleasure. He displaces the blame for his passion to Isabella instead of accepting responsibility for his lust. However, as the passage progresses, Angelo begins to recognize himself as an active participant in the pursuit of pleasure. Previous

to this speech, he never understood how men could be so fond of a woman. This lack of understanding brings him to punish Claudio. He only has fondness for the law, and enacts, he says, his pity through justice. After Isabella begs him to "show some pity" (2.2.102), Angelo replies "I show it most of all when I show justice" (2.2.103). Now that Angelo is intoxicated with power, he feels able to freely pursue his desires. Throughout the passage, virtue and sin go hand in hand as Angelo works through what he finds so attractive about Isabella. Angelo's pleasure, and not morality, drives his authority the moment he realizes he has the ability to manipulate Isabella to please him.

Typically in morality plays, the protagonist becomes tempted and pursues his desires until he recognizes his transgressions and repents. Angelo, like the morality play characters Everyman and Mankind, experiences a similar progression in *Measure for Measure*, beginning with his initial temptation, discussed above. Angelo's "pilgrimage" as a ruler, and the penance that is forced upon him by the Duke, secure his salvation. Like Mankind, Angelo begins the play as a pious and obedient character who eventually falls into temptation and is saved by Mercy. They both also share a struggle between flesh and soul that have contrary desires. Neither ever learns how to negotiate these desires, but instead indulges in their passions over their virtue. When describing this tension to Mercy, Mankind says,

> My name ys Mankynde, I have my composycyon
> Of a body and of a soull, of condycyon contrarye.
> Betwyx þem tweyn ys a grett dyvisyon;
> He þat xulde be subjecte, now he hath þe victory.
>
> Thys ys to me a lamentable story;
> To see my flesch of my soull to have governance.[15]

Mankind asks Mercy for spiritual comfort so that he may learn how to prioritize, and suppress, the desires he finds to be so shameful. This tension is described through language that suggests warfare, with Mankind suggesting that both his virtue and passion are victorious some moments and failures at others. Mankind, like Angelo, does not allow himself to be guided by passion until temptation becomes too apparent to ignore. The tension between passion and virtue is precisely what forces Angelo to forfeit his moral authority in order to explore the inclinations of his desires.

In *Mankind*, as in *Measure for Measure*, temptation subdues virtue when characters begin to rely too fully on themselves as sources of moral authority. The morality play as a form is

concerned consistently with restoring its protagonist to a more fully communal framework for moral behavior, generally through the actions of God or a God-like character. In the beginning of *Everyman*, for example, God says of the human race,

> Every man liveth so after his own pleasure,
> And yet of their life they be nothing sure.
> . . . .
>
> They be so cumbered with worldly riches,
> That needs on them I must do justice,
> On every man living, without fear.[16]

God is frustrated with the greed and materialism he recognizes within humankind. They live for worldly pleasures, and these perpetual desires are encouraged by the fact that they are unable to see beyond the horizons of their own lives; God's chief complaint is that "every man liveth so after his own pleasure." This focus on personal satisfaction blinds them to the larger responsibilities they have to God's law. According to God, justice is the means by which he—and by extension, any ruler—can extend and command virtue within his people. God requires that Everyman go on a pilgrimage, which is essentially God enacting justice for Everyman's sins; Everyman performs penance, granting him salvation. For God, then, enacting justice entails enacting mercy. By reminding Everyman of the authority of God's law, God simultaneously introduces the framework through which Everyman can be reconciled fully, both to God and to the church. The Duke plays a role similar to that of God in *Everyman*. Though it is true that the Duke both enables and reacts against Angelo's temptation, it is more important that this temptation allow Angelo to move toward a form of legal and spiritual reconciliation (which, of course, the Duke has stage-managed). These must occur simultaneously in Vienna, as Angelo's example reveals that the law itself is insufficient as an instrument of moral discipline.

Initially, of course, this is not the case; before Angelo ever threatens Isabella, he is a strict enforcer, and believer, of the law. He is not aware that he is influenced by desire or sin, and his strict, puritanical view of the world allows him to be an objective leader. In fact, he imagines himself to be a cipher for the law, which he implements literally throughout Vienna. Angelo says when speaking to Escalus,

> What's open made to justice,
> That justice seizes. 'Tis very pregnant.

> The jewel that we find, we stoop and take't
> Because we see it, but what we do not see
> We tread upon and never think of it. (2.1.22-26)

To Angelo, justice is a duty that the law must provide the state. Rulers must continually seize opportunities to make the state a better one, which ultimately means punishing the citizens as they break the law. He also mentions that should he sin against the state, he expects to be tried according to the law, claiming himself to be no different from the rest of Vienna: "When I that censure him do so offend, / Let mine own judgement pattern out my death, / And nothing come in partial" (2.1.29-31). Early on, then, the law serves for Angelo as a comprehensive measuring stick with which to judge his own behavior as well as that of his fellow citizens. Law creates a moral and social baseline according to which all action should be judged; it is, in a sense, Angelo's god.

Yet as Angelo demonstrates following the arousal of his desire for Isabella, there is nothing intrinsically linking the institution of the law with virtue. He proves that the law is capable of being manipulated. He once felt himself responsible to uphold ethical and moral principles for Vienna, but now, he is in a position where he can maneuver these principles to satisfy his lust. He says to Isabella, "By the affection that now guides me the most / I'll prove a tyrant to [Claudio]. As for you, / Say what you can, my false o'erweighs your true" (2.4.168-70). In this speech, he makes it clear that he no longer believes that there is a close relationship between the law and virtue. Instead, he allows himself to be overtaken with desire to the point that he sees himself as essentially above the same law he is charged with enforcing. He recognizes that what he is asking of Isabella is against the law; however, he believes his virtuous reputation will prove to be an impenetrable cover. Angelo is willing to use his reputation and his power in order to further his own lustful desires, and in doing so turns inward from the one social mechanism that he recognized as something that linked him with other Viennese citizens. The law can no longer serve as an infallible instrument of moral discipline because Angelo has subverted it for immoral purposes. After this, what he and the play both need is a character who is capable of refiguring the law along specifically moral lines.

The Duke, then, begins this project in a controversial way. He appears to extend his public into private jurisdiction by disguising himself as a friar and, more importantly, by undertaking the confessional duties of a friar. Though he does mislead his subjects

as a physical presence, he does not mislead them in guidance or in leadership. He visits both Claudio and Juliet to help them repent their sins, which have landed them in trouble with the law. While aiding in Juliet's repentance, the Duke says, "But lest you do repent / As that the sin hath brought you to this shame – / Which sorrow is always toward ourselves, not heaven, / Showing we would not spare heaven as we love it, / But as we stand in fear " (2.3.32-36). This passage, unlike his future consultation with Claudio, is entirely spiritual. The Duke makes sure to remind Juliet to express sorrow towards heaven, and not just herself, as repentance is about acknowledging that there is a greater spiritual authority. When he asks her, "Repent you, fair one, of the sin you carry?" (2.3.19), the Duke is using his role as confessor to guide her towards recognizing her responsibility as a Christian. Once she is a better Christian, she can, in turn, become a better citizen of Vienna. The Duke, in his role as confessor with Juliet, combines temporal and ecclesiastical offices insofar as his role as confessor enables him to reconcile his subjects with a larger community of belief. Once this moral reform is accomplished, social reform immediately follows.

As pragmatically effective as this may be, modern readers and critics frequently argue that the Duke's assumption of ecclesiastical jurisdiction here is itself an ethical problem.[17] Yet within sixteenth-century political thought in England particularly, there are arguments to be made for the Duke's actions not only as a right, but as a duty. *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Richard Hooker suggests that all subjection is reminiscent of God's institution, from the power parents have over children, to the power a husband has over a wife, to the power a King holds over his citizens. Hooker writes, "On all sides therefore it is confessed that to the King belongeth power of maintaining laws made for the Church regiment and of causing them to be observed. But the principality of power in making them which is the thing that we attribute unto Kings, this both the one sort and the other doth withstand."[18] Without the King, then, the laws of the Church would never be enforced nor followed. This power also gives him the authority to reinterpret the law as he sees fit, for he is the principal component in maintaining his citizens' virtue. Hooker goes on to say that "every human law should be held a deadly sin,"[19] essentially advancing secular law to the realm of sacred law, which means that judgment, mercy, and punishment are all integral within the King's law. In Juliet's confession scene in *Measure for Measure*, then, the Duke is both a spiritual and political confessor.

It is also important to note that the Duke's efforts to reform the moral lives of his subjects are not solely religious in nature. For example, the Duke's Christian language shifts once he acts as a confessor to Juliet's betrothed, Claudio. Here, he transforms from a solidly Christian character into a Stoic, essentially using two different strategies, though his role as a confessor remains. In these confessions, he is methodically using strategies of the sacred and philosophical to heal his temporal rule, since laws themselves do not seem to be enough to contain his subjects. During his consultation with Claudio, he pleasantly encourages Claudio to his impending death. The Duke says,

> 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. A breath thou art,
> Servile to all the skyey influences
> That dost this habitation were thou keep'st
> Hourly afflict. Merely thou art death's fool,
> For him thou labour'st by thy flight to shun,
> And yet runn'st toward him still. (3.1.5-13)

In this passage, the Duke is using both political and philosophical strategies to gauge the depth of repentance of people who are both sinners and criminals. While the Duke consulted Juliet on the merciful side of repentance, the Duke here is trying to get Claudio to accept the justice of his sentence and not to value his earthly life. Claudio accepts his fate with a calm resolve. Reformed Vienna will work according to a balance of both justice and mercy. With this, the Duke is collapsing distinctions between Christianity and Stoicism because, within the framework of his role as the political head of state, the spiritual, philosophical, and political are merged. The Duke recognizes that sin and crime are closely related categories, and that by using both Christianity and philosophy to help guide his subjects, he will be able to achieve a more fully secularized form of repentance.[20]

In the final scene of the play, the Duke brings together the effects of this repentance as he reconciles the citizens of Vienna with each other and with himself. Here, again, social reform is enabled by moral reform, and not the other way around. The character who exemplifies this idea most clearly is Isabella. Though wronged by Angelo's cruelty, she pleads for the Duke to be merciful to Angelo in her last spoken lines. This plea is significant because Angelo never asks for mercy, but only admits his own guilt: "Let my trial be mine own confession, / Immediate sentence

then, and sequent death, / Is all the grace I beg" (5.1.364-66). Isabella, however, makes the case that Angelo should be granted mercy because he was ultimately prevented from committing the crime he attempted to commit:

> My brother had but justice,
> In that he did the thing for which he died.
> For Angelo,
> His act did not o'ertake his bad intent,
> And must be busied but as an intent
> That perished by the way. Thoughts are no subjects,
> Intents but merely thoughts. (5.1.440-46)

Though Isabella never actually committed any wrongdoing during the play, she is still expected to prove her virtue and good nature in this last scene, like every other character. In this passage, she establishes her understanding of justice and mercy, which pleases the Duke and subsequently saves Angelo. Not only does Isabella argue for the reorientation of law according to a principle of moral charity, but she also serves to instruct Angelo in a lesson he has not yet learned. As he has done throughout the play, Angelo attempts to set the terms of his fate himself in this scene. Isabella's plea on his behalf reminds him that the nature of the authorities to which all subjects owe allegiance is not one-dimensional. Submitting oneself to a religion or to the law entails looking outward rather than inward, and trusting the justice and mercy of others.

Isabella's merciful reconciliation (between Angelo and herself and between Angelo and the state), then, becomes the pattern according to which the Duke pronounces all of his remaining rulings. Again, Isabella urges the Duke to recalibrate the law along more merciful lines, and the effect of this in the end is to generate even more merciful forms of punishment. Angelo is married to Mariana; Lucio is also married; and Barnadine is pardoned. Even Claudio, Isabella's brother, is reconciled with his sister: "If he be like your brother, for his sake / Is he pardoned; and for your lovely sake / Give me your hand, and say you will be mine. / He is my brother too" (5.1.484-87). These reconciliations inspire the Duke to propose to Isabella who is, then, reconciled with the state as well as the divine. The Duke reconciles society by mercifully employing the law. As Angelo's example demonstrates, the problem with the law in Vienna is that it can be used as an instrument of moral corruption. In order to reform the law, the Duke is forced to begin at the heart of the problem, namely, with morality itself.

Notes

1. All Shakespeare quotations are from William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: Norton & Company, 2008). Further citations of the play will be included parenthetically in the body of the paper.

2. James Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

3. Ibid., 542.

4. Simpson's view is similar to those expressed in many recent theater histories. See for example John Cox and David Scott Kastan, Introduction, in *A New History of Early English Drama*, ed. John Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

5. Curtis Perry and John Watkins, eds., *Shakespeare and the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

6. This is a prominent opinion among literary critics, especially as regards the nature of the individual. For two of the most influential assertions of this claim, see Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of the Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (New York: Methuen, 1985), and Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

7. The standard account of this development is still David Bevington, *From Mankind to Marlowe: The Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1965).

8. The morality play elements of *Measure for Measure* have begun to attract critical attention recently. For one example, see Robert B. Pierce, "Being a Moral Agent in Shakespeare's Vienna," *Philosophy and Literature* 33 (2009): 267-79.

9. Sarah Beckwith, "Medieval Penance, Reformation Repentance and *Measure for Measure*," in *Reading the Medieval in Early Modern England*, ed. Gordon McMullan and David Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 199.

10. Debora Kuller Shuger, *Political Theologies in Shakespeare's England: The Sacred and The State in* Measure for Measure (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 132.

11. Ibid., 133.

12. King James I, *Basilikon Doron,* in *King James VI and I: Political Writings*, ed. Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 2.

13. Ibid., 49.

14. See Martha Widmayer, "'To Sin in Loving Virtue': Angelo of *Measure for Measure*," *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* 49 (2007): 155-80; esp. 156-57.

15. All quotations from *Mankind* are taken from *Medieval Drama: An Anthology*, ed. Greg Walker (Malden: Blackwell Publishers), 194-99.

16. All quotations from *Everyman* are taken from *Medieval English Literature*, ed. J.B. Trapp (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 40-62.

17. See Beckwith, "Medieval Penance, Reformation Repentance, and *Measure for Measure*."

18. Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, ed. A. S. McGrade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 199.

19. Ibid., 191.

20. For a reading of the play that suggests that the law in the end remains the province of justice alone, see Jeremy Tambling, "Law and Will in *Measure for Measure*," *Essays in Criticism* 59 (2009): 189-210.