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Political Theater in the Problem Play: Duke Vincentio and *Measure for Measure*

*I don’t need the good / just need you to think I did it…*

*Life became dangerous / the day we all became famous.*

 Jon Bellion, “The Internet”

*Hence shall we see, / If power changes purpose, what our seemers be.*

 *Measure for Measure*, 1.3.57-58

Duke Vincentio is the central problem of the problem play *Measure for Measure*. Both the Duke and the play *appear* ultimately positive, in that the Duke appears to right the injustices invoked during Angelo’s rule to bring about resolution in the form of pardons and marriages, as is characteristic of Shakespeare’s comedies. Yet, a compilation of questionable motives and moral contradictions imply darker undercurrents that induce a sense of unease. It is not surprising, then, that *Measure for Measure* is classified as a tragicomedy, meaning, in some cases, “a work which is mainly tragic in character but has a happy ending” (“tragicomedy,” n1). Much of the play is colored by serious issues of the death penalty, rape, and justice, but the potential for tragedy collapses into traditionally comic resolution. Shakespeare makes particularly strong use of the element of disguise through the Duke as a “disguised ruler,” a popular convention at the time; however, rather than follow the classic romantic purpose of the disguise, he subverts the convention by giving the Duke an arguably darker, more ambiguous intention. These intentions are made puzzlingly ambiguous when the Duke’s constant defense of his actions and character fail to explain the contradictions in his actions that are revealed upon closer examination. Though he has the most lines of any character, much of what one can conclude about the Duke comes indirectly, through critical analysis of his unreliable narration, his ethical contradictions, and through comparisons to Angelo and Isabella rather than from direct interpretation from the surface value of his claims.

 Through elaborate manipulations under guise of the Friar and the climactic reveals of trial scene, Duke Vincentio turns governance into a spectacle. Interestingly, parallels are drawn to a series of incidents around the time *Measure for Measure* was first performed, in which King James I of England gives last minute pardons to prisoners about to be executed for their involvement in a treasonous plot against him (Bernthal). These mysterious shows of apparently spontaneous mercy are, in fact, components of ruling strategies meant to maintain control by building a sequence of anxiety and release in the public. While long-standing arguments that the Duke is meant to represent James have been more recently dismissed as unsubstantiated by Shakespeare scholars such as Kevin Quarmby, the symmetries in the trial scenes provide a compounding effect on our understanding of the power of spectacle, both in fiction and history. By bringing political theater to the actual theater, Shakespeare subjects the use of spectacle in governance to criticism and further asks the audience to consider the limitations of mortal judgment and power. For, while Duke Vincentio may play at being the omnipotent divine or the master playwright, he exposes his own human flaws and limitations in the process.

# The Disguised Ruler

*Measure for Measure* was reportedly performed by the King’s Men in December of 1604 during the Christmas royal entertainments, though it is unlikely that it would have “received its debut at a private performance before the king,” according to Quarmby (105). The disguised ruler was frequently used in plays of the 1590s, so its use in *Measure for Measure* should not be considered noteworthy by merit of existence alone. However, a distinction immediately arises in the Duke’s dismissal of Friar Thomas’s assumption that his purpose is to pursue a love interest, as was its historic convention: “No, holy father, throw away that thought. / Believe not that the dribbling dart of love / Can pierce a complete bosom” (1.3.1-3). The very first line of the scene distinguishes this disguised ruler play from those “convoluted romance narratives that finally resolve themselves in self-enlightenment and a safe return to power” (Quarmby 107). Shakespeare establishes that the Duke’s disguise serves a different, “more grave and wrinkled” purpose: namely, to spy on Lord Angelo while he does the Duke’s dirty work (1.3.5).

The Duke lists several justifications for seeking the disguise of a Friar, but as I will later posit, there are also hidden motivations which the Duke may not even fully acknowledge to himself. Firstly, his main purpose is to return Vienna from its current lawlessness to a state of order. He compares the unenforced laws to empty threats of disciplining children: “In time the rod / More mocked than feared…And liberty plucks justice by the nose” (1.3.27-30). His means, however, are less justifiable than his end. While he recognizes that he has encouraged this expansive sexual “liberty” through lax legal enforcement, he refuses to take responsibility of directly amending his judgment, insisting that it would be his “tyranny to strike and gall them / For what I bid them do” (1.3.39-40). Friar Thomas points out an obvious distinction that is absent in the Duke’s portrayal, that in the Duke “more dreadful would have *seemed* / Than in Lord Angelo” (1.3.35-36, my emphasis). Intentionally leaving Angelo to enact punishment under the laws, which he can predict given Angelo’s notoriety as “precise,” does not change the nature of the tyranny, only the appearance (1.3.54). Craig Bernthal, a Professor of English at California State University, argues that the Duke “has placed him in a position of power for that very reason, has a good idea of what will happen when Angelo becomes ruler” (257). The Duke candidly admits to this scheme while still seeming to find himself free from guilt:

I have on Angelo imposed the office,

Who may in th’ ambush of **my name** strike home,

And yet **my nature** never in the fight

To do in ***slander***. (1.3.44-47, emphasis added)

The Duke uses Angelo to execute the laws in his “name” only, believing his “nature” to be protected from slander. Here, I interpret “name” as meaning his title as head of state, which he forfeits temporarily when he transfers power. The language the Duke uses during this transfer of power contradicts this idea, rather purporting that Angelo will wholly represent him, including his “mortality and mercy,” as he instructs Angelo to “in our remove be thou at full ourself,” (1.1.46-47). His own words contradict his logic, suggesting that Vincentio is not absolved of responsibility for tyranny under Angelo’s rule.

The Duke gives an even weaker justification for his disguise in referencing his long-standing preference for the “life removed,” which, while consistent with his character thus far, hardly supports his claim that his actions are for the good of the people of Vienna. He also expresses doubt in Angelo: “Hence we shall see / When power changes purpose, what our seemers be” (1.3.57). His expressed desire to test and spy on Angelo, whom he has put in this position despite Angelo’s protests, immediately adds a more sinister connotation to this iteration of the disguised ruler. It indicates intent to manipulate subjects through his disguise and calls into question the purity of the Duke’s other intentions and overall character. The Duke tries and fails inspire trust. By subverting a traditionally innocent role, Shakespeare encourages suspicion of the Duke’s character and foreshadows the appearance of further dark undertones.

In struggling to define the Duke, one must also realize that part of the struggle lies in the fact that he has not yet discovered himself, as is evident in his multitude of contradictions. He claims his actions are for the betterment of society and his people, but as I have already begun to demonstrate, his motives are far from selfless. He also claims he is not susceptible to nor interested in love (“Believe not that the dribbling dart of love / Can pierce a complete bosom”), but then proposes to Isabel in Act 5, whom I might also note is many years his junior and has openly voiced her intentions to become a nun of the strictest order, the colloquially-named “Poor Clares.” Furthermore, he repeatedly claims he does not like attention, in his conversation with Friar Thomas and earlier in his conversation with Escalus and Angelo: “I love the people / But do not like to stage me to their eyes” (1.1.73-74). Yet, upon his return, he actively requests to be welcomed with abundant pomp and circumstance. The Duke claims to be uninterested in selfish motives, love, and attention, and yet acts in the interest of all three.

From these three matters alone, the Duke demonstrates an inconsistency between what he purports to believe and the morals that must truly inform his actions. The inability to know oneself inevitably gives rise to doubt in one’s ability to know and govern others; for a ruler, self-knowledge is thus even more significant. According to Kenji Yoshino, “the link between governing the self and governing the state is as old as Plato, and recurs throughout the Shakespearean corpus. Self-knowledge in the plays is always a necessary, though never a sufficient, prerequisite of good governance” (692). Hence, a demonstrated lack of Vincentio’s self-knowledge by necessity implies an indisposition for governance. This will be especially concerning as his attempt to increase control becomes more apparent.

# King James I and Spectacle in Government

The Duke’s strategies of governance and control are similarly employed, notably, by King James I. Though the idea that the Duke was meant as a representation of James is tantalizing in its ripe potential for political commentary, from flattery of the New King to underlying criticism, much of the evidence used to equate the two is insufficient or unreliable. Quarmby dismisses the hope of historically-supported similarities between the two, dedicating the greater part of a chapter to explaining how “our recognition of this seeming caricature stems not from contemporary reaction to the nation’s new monarch, but from later political commentators desiring to assassinate the character of an already discredited Scottish king” (111). Despite much of the historical reporting done on King James being tainted by Whig bias, some aspects of his accession and rule can be surmised situationally and prove relevant to *Measure for Measure* and further understanding of political theater.

 The people of England were undoubtedly anxious about the regime change and the unknowns it would bring. Elizabeth’s long rule and refusal to name a successor combined with James’ Scottish background spawned nervous anticipation among the populace. However, in some ways, the uncertainty of succession followed by the release of a ruler being named made King James’ accession “the more welcome, pamphlets proclaimed, because after so much anxiety, it had proved an entirely peaceful affair,” according to historian Judith Richards (520). This instance is just the first way in which I will present anxiety as a catalyst in establishing control and popularity.

 For the pamphlets to claim it had been an *entirely* peaceful affair is to gloss over the bloodshed intended by those in uncovered treason plots, which are known as the “Main and Bye Plots.” The trials, executions, and last-minute pardons parallel Act 5 of *Measure for Measure*. After grossly executing two of the plotters, arguably to establish fear of the law, and an unconvincing trial and conviction of Sir Walter Raleigh, public outcry against the current trends of the justice system emerged (Bernthal). In response, James secretly planned an elaborate sequence of pardons. He sends a messenger to delay the execution of the first plotter, who barely arrives in time to prevent it, but rather than pardon him at that time, he instead “postpones” each execution in turn by pronouncing a change in order or claiming that they need a couple more hours to prepare themselves for death. Finally, he brings them back out all at once to be grandly pardoned by merit of the king’s mercy. Greenblatt quotes Dudley Carlton, who, upon observing the whole spectacle, described how they were brought “together on the stage as use is at the end of the play,” bewildered to see each other alive after being kept in the dark to all proceedings but their own (136). Like the end of a play, James was greeted by applause, the “hues and cries” spreading all the way into town (Bernthal 253).

Surely, one might wonder why the people so easily forgot and forgave James for changing something that was in his power to prevent all along, for the injustices of Raleigh’s trial and the previous cruel executions. Yet, “even the recognition of injustice can be turned to the benefit of those in power,” for it was the king who *appeared* merciful in countering the courts and the laws (Bernthal 258). Note that there was no recognition of any fault on James’ own part, just as the Duke does not publicly take responsibility for his culpability during his spectacular trial and pardon scene. By unveiling himself in time to serve justice, or what he believes to be justice, Richard A. Levin argues that “the Duke has made Angelo seem the source of all evil, and himself the source of all goodness” (268). James and Vincentio intentionally invoke anxiety to heighten the positive response when it is subsequently released and to gain power and control over their people. Both rulers draw out uncertainty and grief in their subjects, waiting to pardon the convicts until the last minute, as the Duke pulls the hood off Claudio to reveal he lives. The Duke even states his intention to keep Isabella “ignorant of her good / to make her heavenly comforts of despair / when it is least expected” (4.3.117-19). James allowed two men to be publicly drawn and quartered to induce fear of the law, just as Vincentio uses Angelo to this end, “for the ruling elite believed that a measure of insecurity and fear was a necessary, healthy element in the shaping of proper loyalties, and Elizabethan and Jacobean institutions deliberately evoked this insecurity” (Greenblatt 135-36). Greenblatt states that the practice of inducing what he calls “salutary anxiety” was not accidental; rather, it was institutionalized by the government. Being institutionalized implies it was effective, or perceived to be effective, but does not necessarily speak to the morality of the practice.

Interestingly, this is the same tactic employed by the church and Shakespeare himself. Indeed, the “manipulation of anxiety…is brought to a kind of perfection by Shakespeare,” and accounts for part of his plays’ immense popularity (Greenblatt 134). I would even argue that this theatrical technique would naturally be most exaggerated by the contrast of a tragicomedy such as *Measure for Measure*. Yet, it is one thing to manipulate the emotions of an audience at a theater, where they have arguably desired to subject themselves to the manufacture of emotions, and quite another thing for a ruler to and manipulate the emotions of the public. The ruler thus becomes the “emblem of the playwright,” and “represses” dissent at its “source” through salutary anxiety, impeding the ability of citizens to think critically about their government (Greenblatt 138). Perhaps it should not be surprising, then, that the church also encouraged salutary anxiety, for the fear of Hell is “the necessary precondition of the reassurance of salvation” and confidence in the righteousness of God, who is meant to be omniscient and omnipotent; beyond questioning; his word, law (Greenblatt 137). Is the purpose of political theater then to give a ruler God-like power? I will argue in the next section that this is, indeed, the Duke’s goal, and that Shakespeare demonstrates the danger of this approach to ruling through the Duke’s faults and failures and the unique perspective on political theater offered by public theater.

# The Duke Through the Lens of Character Comparison

What is not readily obvious about the Duke’s character from studying the Duke alone can be revealed through parallels in other characters. Though Angelo seems to be the strict counterpart to the Duke’s laxity, Carolyn Brown, professor of Shakespeare at UCSC, effectively makes the argument that Vincentio is similar not only to Angelo, but also to Isabella, in their shared desire to live as saints (188) All three struggle to accept the flaws and weaknesses that exist within them as exist within all mortals, “harbor[ing] an undeniably sexual nature beneath the saintly surface,” as described by Brown (188). As a safeguard from the potential weaknesses to which they secretly suspect they may be susceptible, the Duke, Angelo, and Isabella, respectively, seek to live a “life removed,” a life of “study and fast,” and with the most “strict restraint” of celibacy (1.3.9, 1.4.65, 1.4.4). They seek to escape nature; thus, they are in a constant state of war with themselves.

Angelo falls to temptation most dramatically, which is unsurprising to those insightful readers who from his name recall “the most favored angel Lucifer, who falls from grace” (Yoshino 686). Even without this connection, Angelo is introduced in the light of the Duke’s suspicion. Shocked by his temptation, Angelo, “denying that he has such weaknesses, embraces evil” (Levin 258). How Isabella and the Duke’s perfect morals are disparaged is more subtly visible in their orchestration of the “bed-trick,” encouraging Marianna to have sex while under a marriage precontract. For this same act, which Isabella herself calls sinful, Claudio is sentenced to death. Isabella also goes to convince Angelo to pardon Claudio, after being told that she will achieve this through the power of feminine persuasion; thus, she goes with the intention to tempt him with sexual desire. It initially seems as if Isabella, at least, is aware of her own moral limitations by her dismissal of Lucio’s mocking comment that she is “a thing enskied and sainted” (1.4.36). Yet, like the other characters, she fails to accept what Marianna succinctly, if inaccurately in the case of Angelo’s intentions, describes as “being a little bad,” instead insisting on the complete restraint of the convent (5.1.505). Similarly, the Duke seeks the protection from his own weaknesses in his choice of disguise as a friar, a counterpart to Isabella’s attraction to the idea of entering the sisterhood. Though he is perhaps the most successful at thus veiling of his sexuality under the bland, concealing uniform (as in *Figure 1*) and symbolic piousness of a friar, the erotic subtexts are consequently most disturbing in the Duke for their emergence from beneath a sacred, religious disguise. Unlike Isabella and Angelo, however, Duke Vincentio is less concerned with being saintly than with *seeming* saintly. I am not claiming that Isabella and Angelo do not care about their appearances, but as a public figure, the Duke is especially concerned with his reputation, as it directly relates to his power and control. He is much more willing to accept, on some level, *being* a tyrant, than he is willing to accept *seeming* like a tyrant. The Duke uses the disguise of a friar to make himself immune to human flaws, both in deception of himself and the rest of Vienna. Ironically, by being overly defensive of his own purity, the Duke reveals his faults. “Leave me awhile with the maid: my mind promises with my habit no loss shall touch her by my company,” the Duke assures the Provost, unprompted, that he has no sexual intentions toward Isabella (3.1.198-200). Not only does he offer his apparent status as a friar as proof, but he feels compelled to vindicate his nature of question, too. Quarmby notes the Duke’s “defensiveness” when he originally requests the friar outfit from Friar Thomas and notes that “even as he claims his authority, the Duke demurs from revealing all about the secret subterfuge that enabled Angelo to act as corrupt law-enforcer in his absence” (107, 111). The Duke’s defensiveness throughout the play only calls his charade into clearer focus; attempting to hide his humanity from himself and his people only further reveals it. “Neither [Vincentio nor Isabella] fully accepts his or her humanity. This, in Shakespeare as in life, is folly” (Yoshino 693). Such folly leaves room for and, ironically, intolerance for, criticism and rumors.

Figure 1 - Duke Vincentio as Friar at Lowell Davies Festival Theatre

 Perhaps the most revealing indicator of the Duke’s insecurity is his reaction to Lucio’s criticism, who, with more truth than he realizes, calls him “the old fantastical Duke of dark corners,” among other things (4.3.159). The Duke’s egregious response of sentencing him to death for his slander, while conversely pardoning the murderer Bernardine, shows the extreme fragility of the Duke’s image. “Though Lucio is guilty of a multitude of sins, the Duke chooses a humiliating punishment because Lucio has breached his prince’s psychological defenses” (Levin 269). On the premise that the punishment is meant to be proportional to the crime, the Duke has signaled that he estimates criticism to be a worse offense than murder.

# The Potent Danger of Omnipotence

The Duke is simultaneously afraid of power – and the scrutiny that comes with it – and desires to have more. While this appears to be a contradiction, it proves a surprisingly functional model through which to explain the Duke’s actions, and more importantly, motives. As the Duke’s greatest insecurity is judgment on his character, his greatest desire is not to be questioned. More effective than living reclusively, which does little to quell rumors, engaging in political theater gives him the power to repress criticism at its source. He more fears people criticizing his abuse of power than he fears abuse of power itself; thus, he turns to inducing salutary anxiety.

Salutary is defined as “calculated to bring about a more satisfactory condition, or to remedy some evil; beneficial” (“salutary, a1”). It raises the question: for whom is this so-called “salutary anxiety” beneficial? Certainly, for the governing bodies that engage in the calculating, it augments their control of the populace based on a manufactured sense of both fear and gratitude. For the public, it can be viewed as unnecessary stress. Levin questions the negative effects of salutary anxiety, wondering: “the Duke also pardons Claudio; but having let that young man suffer inordinately, should he not, instead, beg a pardon of him?” (268). Given that the Duke indirectly causes and then intentionally amplifies Claudio’s suffering, there is arguably more justice to be found in a role reversal: the Duke then becomes, interestingly, the criminal begging for pardon.

 Though the Duke’s intentions are ostensibly selfish, one could argue that his political theater also benefits the public by creating societal stability. The audience exchanges being emotionally manipulated for entertainment; similarly, might a subject exchange being emotionally manipulated for lawful society? Do subjects implicitly agree to this social contract? Placing political theater on the stage, as Shakespeare does with *Measure for Measure,* gives the audience the perspective to examine a phenomenon that they are otherwise too entwined in to criticize. As Greenblatt explains, the secondhand, highly-visible salutary anxiety of the theater is uniquely vulnerable:

Even as it is evoked with extraordinary technical skill, salutary anxiety is emptied out in the service of theatrical pleasure. This emptying out through representation enables Shakespeare at once to identify the playwright with the mastery of salutary anxiety and to subject that mastery to complex ironic scrutiny. If Shakespeare in Measure for Measure seems to represent the protagonist's task as inflicting anxiety for ideological purposes, he also clearly calls that task into question. (138)

Shakespeare reveals the use of salutary anxiety in a way that allows it to be criticized. He also sets up the Duke as a flawed and untrustworthy character. The fact that the Duke seeks to avoid judgment by appearing as a saint is reason alone to be suspect; it indicates the desire to be treated as divine. When Angelo announces his perception that the Duke “like power divine / hath looked upon my passes,” it invokes the image of God’s judgment (5.1.416-17).

In Stefan Lochner’s “Last Judgment,” the throng of the simultaneously reverent and fearful public is reminiscent of the effects of salutary anxiety. The people kneel in prayer to God, who sits elevated above them, to pardon their sins, just as Isabella and Marianna kneel to beg the Duke to pardon Angelo for his sins.

Figure 2- Stefan Lochner, Last Judgment, c. 1435. Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne

 As stated earlier, God alone is truly considered beyond questioning. Given the Duke’s attachment to a saintly reputation, revealed through similar attachments by Angelo and Isabella and particularly emphasized by his costume, together with his desire for immunity to criticism, it should not be too amazing to imagine that he seeks status akin to that reserved for the divine. He does not have the humility to accept that his fundamental mortality inhibits his ability to be divine, or even to appear divine; for, in attempting at apparent divinity, he exposes his own fragility. As a mortal, he can only “partially and superficially” control specific scenarios; in the case of King James, his decision to issue pardons was forced by public dissent, so his control of the situation only extended as far as to make himself out as the hero (Greenblatt 136). If the ruler “seems to manipulate the anxieties of others, he inevitably discloses his own fears,” which, in the cases of Vincentio and James, is the fear of public irreverence and blame (Greenblatt 137). By going to such extreme lengths to earn popular support, the rulers contradict their own claim to naturally endowed power.

 Shakespeare demonstrates the danger in the Duke’s flawed, yet relatively uncriticized, judgment. After all the deceit and spectacle, it is questionable whether anything has truly changed in Vienna. The Duke’s purpose by instating Angelo to rule was to establish moral order, but there no evidence of this having occurred, for no one is ever held accountable for anything, even murder. The audience is left with an increasing mistrust in the Duke and the law. Furthermore, as Bernthal concisely explains, “the moral order which the duke seeks to establish is undercut at every turn by the duke’s actions in attempting to bring it about” (264). Not only does the Duke fail to improve the moral state of the public, he consistently contradicts moral values in his own example, and further confuses marriage laws by reaffirming that Claudio has committed a crime (or else he could not be mercifully pardoned) but claiming that Angelo and Marianna have simply reinforced their marriage agreement. He attempts to resolve conflict – and crime – through imposing four marriages, of which three will likely be unhappy; Marianna will wed Angelo, who has shown past disregard for her benefit and outright stated his aversity to marrying her; Lucio will marry the mother of his child, a bawd, which he compares in disagreeableness to “pressing to death, whipping, and hanging” (5.1.596-7); Isabella, if she accepts his proposal, will marry Vincentio, relinquishing her intended future as a nun to marry a much older, emotionally manipulative statesman with a God-complex (not to imply that he is the only one with faults). Contemporary literary scholar Andrew Gurr purports the play to be “a learning process for the sexually alert characters, in which every expectation is collapsed into the central commitment of marriage,” though based on the Duke’s attempt at resolution, I would argue he has not learned much, as he displays continued sexual naivety in propagating the concept of marriage as an end-all solution (93). Notably, Isabella is silent, and she is not alone in her silence; as Bernthal observes, “what we do not get is a hearty thank-you to the Duke from all concerned” (264). Significantly, this defies expectations how the release from salutary anxiety is generally greeted, indicating that the Duke has not effectively executed the spectacle. Clearly, the playwright has not succeeded in writing a good play if it is not greeted by applause.

 Underwhelming gratitude is partly connected to the creation of space for criticism previously discussed. The spell is arguably broken by some characters’ resistance to being enchanted, for “there is nothing that shatters the reality of game more than the refusal to play” (Bernthal 263). Lucio is persistent in his humor at the Duke’s expense, even in the response to threats of death, or worse: marriage. However, it is Bernardine who epitomizes this refusal to participate in the spectacle in his utter disregard for the law and disinclination to be terrorizes by the threat of punishment. “I have been drinking hard all night, and I will have more time to prepare me, or they shall beat out my brains with billets. I will not consent to die this day, that’s certain,” he insists, “I swear I will not die today by any man’s persuasion” (4.3.56-59, 63-64). I would like to draw attention to the words “consent” and “persuasion” in particular, “consent” implying agency in the matter, and resistance against “persuasion” implying that agency over one’s susceptibility to the salutary anxiety produced by ardent political theater. The key to resistance is first identification of the game, and second, the conscious refusal to play.

 I do not intend to claim that all judgment and law should be resisted just because the judge is flawed. As Yoshino reasons: “Unlike God, humans cannot see everything. So purveyors of human justice admit, as they must, that the guilty can sometimes try the guilty. But this does not mean human beings who judge each other are necessarily compromised, so long as they are willing to submit to the same laws when they are caught” (692). The distinction here is that the Duke does want to be considered as an omniscient entity, and therefore is unwilling to take responsibility for his faults and submit to his own laws. In fact, Angelo and Marianna cannot be found guilty under the law for sex before marriage, or the Duke would be implicated as well. I am also not claiming that mortals cannot judge and punish or pardon mercifully, merely that mortals cannot judge or pardon with absolute, unquestionable authority. Note that the righteousness of pardon must also be subject to criticism, for, as is illustrated by the lawlessness of Viennese society, too much mercy can be as harmful as too little. The resistance demonstrated by Bernardine and Lucio represents the necessary and possible balance between control and productive criticism.

 Accordingly, human behavior as judge and subject can both be informed by *Measure for Measure.* Rulers and judges must learn realistic means of self-governance through understanding and accepting their own humanity before they can seek to justly govern others. Subjects, in turn, have the responsibility to be aware of political theater and its repressive effects on critical thinking. The human experience is a messy, imperfect one, and so then too must human systems of justice be messy and imperfect. The role of the individual as well as the greater role of the society is not to become the divine, in reality or in appearance, but to seek excellence within the context of inherent human limitation.

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