EVERYMAN

MEASURE FOR MEASURE

William Shakespeare

Edited by John F. Andrews
former editor of the *Shakespeare Quarterly*
Foreword by Tim Pigott-Smith

The Everyman Shakespeare is the most authoritative, up-to-date paperback edition of the plays and poems.

Uniquely among existing editions it provides:

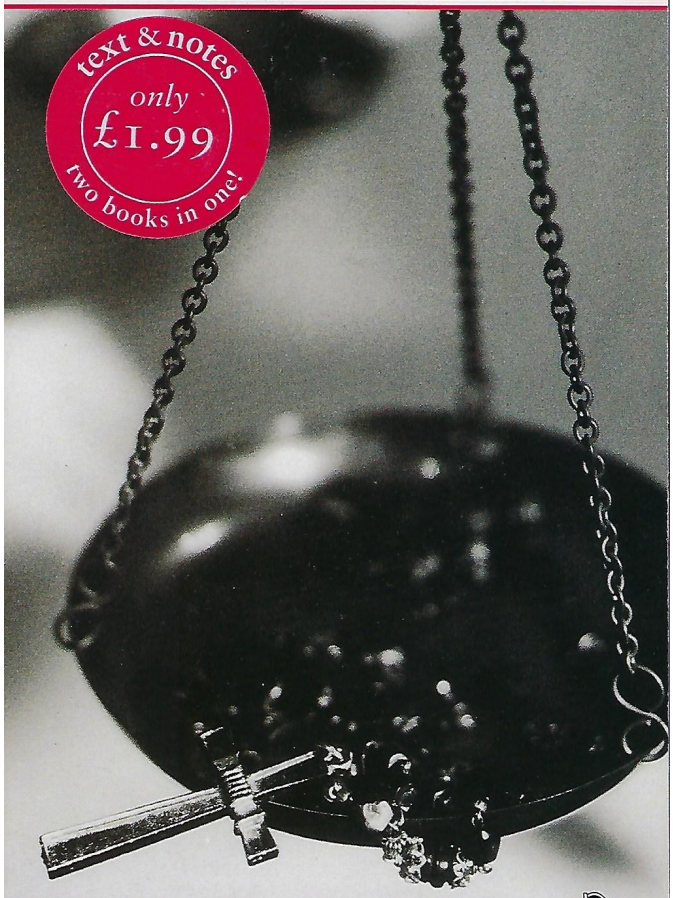
- face-to-face text and notes
- a chronology of Shakespeare's life and times
- a rich selection of critical and theatrical responses to the play over the centuries
- text derived from the earliest printings, often preserving puns and wordplay otherwise lost
- foreword by an actor or theatre director describing the play in performance
- up-to-date commentary on the structure, atmosphere and content of the play and on its sources and influences

Cover photograph: David Slater
Cover design: The Tango Design Consultancy

ISBN 0-460-87454-3

UK £3.99
USA $3.95
CAN $6.50

MEASURE FOR MEASURE



THE EVERYMAN SHAKESPEARE

First published in Everyman by J. M. Dent 1994
Published by permission of GuildAmerica Books, an imprint of Doubleday Book and Music Clubs, Inc.

Photoset by Deltatype Ltd, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire
Printed in Great Britain by
The Guernsey Press Co. Ltd, Guernsey, C.I.
for
J. M. Dent
Orion Publishing Group
Orion House, 5 Upper St Martin's Lane
London WC2H 9EA
and
Charles E. Tuttle Co., Inc.
28 South Main Street
Rutland, Vermont, 05701 – USA

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data is available upon request

ISBN 0 460 87454 3

CONTENTS

FOREWORD *by Tim Pigott-Smith*

In Act III Isabella asks her brother to sacrifice his life to save her virginity. In Act IV Angelo makes love to Mariana instead of Isabella and does not notice he has the wrong woman in his bed. These are two of the events in this unusual play which have created difficulties of understanding, and for many years it has been routinely catalogued as a problem play. It is not!

It seems to me quite logical for a young nun, beginning her life of exclusive devotion as a bride of Christ, to regard her own hymen as more important than the life of her brother. Indeed, if you do not take on board the extremism of this stance – and we live in a world of much more dangerous fanaticisms than Isabella's – you will miss an essential ingredient of the play. Isabella's unsympathetic belief is absolutely central to her character; my view is that Shakespeare goes on to suggest to her, and us, that it is 'beyond measure'.

The play *M. Butterfly* is based on the true story of a French diplomat who enjoyed a long and successful sexual relationship with a woman, not discovering for many years that 'she' was a man. Clearly, Monsieur, like Angelo, was not a man for leaving the light on! I have always imagined that, consumed by lust, and trembling with guilt, Angelo was thinking less of the lady than of himself. Shakespeare is pursuing his theme: behaviour that is uncontrolled, beyond measure.

Shakespeare is not easy to read. No great writer is; you have to work at them. I would expect to read a great play at least four or five times before I began to feel at all confident about the author's intentions. Actors spend hours debating the nuances and meanings within one line. These meanings can also shift as your perspective on the play develops, and as you yourself change. If

you can see a performance of the play you are working on, it helps. That said, of the dozen or so times I have seen *Measure for Measure*, I have only ever seen the whole play work satisfactorily on one occasion. Bits of it nearly always come off, but it is a hard play to realize fully. The cheapest, and sometimes the best, seat in the theatre is in your own imagination; always imagine the play in action as you read.

When I have achieved an overview, I try to establish clearly in my mind the differing narratives, and then see how they relate to the theme. First then, the main narrative threads.

Story One – the Duke. The play begins with a man seeking refuge from responsibility, and creating a chance to observe the dispensation of power. He is obliged to return in secret when things go dangerously wrong, and falls in love – with a nun! This complicates the *dénouement* (literally 'unknotting') that follows his return as the Duke in person. He resumes control, hands out justice, and asks Isabella for her hand in marriage. Her response is the big debating point of any production.

Story Two – the Deputy. When the Duke leaves, he has knowingly established a situation which will expose the person who has to take over the reins of power: Angelo is the man. Shakespeare demonstrates him to be of cold temperament, guided by the letter and not the spirit of the law he invokes. Wonderful irony that it is the shining purity of the nun who inspires in poor Angelo unsuspecting depths of carnal lust, and leads him into a lawlessness he condemns brutally in others.

Story Three – the Nun. Torn from the sanctuary of the Convent, and the security of newly spoken vows, Isabella is thrown into a maelstrom of danger and passion: the justice who could help her (Angelo) tries to seduce her. The friar who comes to advise her (the Duke in disguise) falls in love with her. She has to choose between her virginity and her brother. The closing moments of the play offer her a profound choice of life, either as a nun or as a wife. Shakespeare does not tell us her response: hence the debate.

Story Four – Lucio. This rakish character is the link between the

world of the court and the world of the brothel. He is a parasite, a fast double-talker who will say whatever is needed to survive the moment. He is a creep who tries to ingratiate himself, is found out, and receives pretty short shrift when the Duke finally doles out justice.

Story Five – the Low Life. There is a rich array of characters whose bawdy comedy and irreverence reflect the coming to terms with lust and life that are being debated through the main story.

I think Shakespeare often gives you a bald idea of his theme early on. In this play he does so in the first line: 'Of government, the properties to unfold . . .' He looks at the regulation of the state, at individual self-government, and then goes on to examine the question of how to control the darker sides of human nature. And he does so in classic Shakespearean style. Act I is expositional; Acts II, III, and IV explore the intricacies of character exposed by the story; Act V resolves.

The Duke learns that you cannot escape responsibility: he discovers that leaders must lead. His proper resumption of power at the close of the play, and the verdicts he delivers, are essential to the regulated continuance of his society.

Angelo learns that repression is no answer; demons cannot be ignored, you must come to terms with them. Angelo is let off lightly for his sins, and given the bonus of a devoted, loving wife. Love is what he needs to balance his personality out: in time the good in him will function fruitfully.

The real villain of the piece – whom Shakespeare does not like at all – is Lucio. He is entertaining, but he is deceptive. You never know where you are with a man like this, and through the Duke Shakespeare is harsh on him. There will always be people in any society who require punishment. Shakespeare does not *pursue* the debate about social discipline, but he is in no doubt as to the need for it.

There is something refreshingly honest about the pimps and bawds. They know they live at the sharp end, and they survive as best they can, providing people with what they want, and doing their best not to get caught for it. Pompey says he is a bawd, and come what may he's sticking to his vocation – people want sex,

and if he doesn't provide it someone else will. Barnardine says that he will not die today because he is not ready. Fortunately, there is a real criminal conveniently on hand to enable justice by having his head chopped off.

Finally, Isabella. What a remarkable journey she travels through the play. Her early speeches about authority are dazzlingly pure; her pleading with her brother is agonizing in its blind simplicity. Her denunciation of Angelo is powerful and passionate, and her calm plea for his life is a deeply moving moment, which shows how massively she has developed from the pure but limited innocent of Act I.

I am sure that the reason Shakespeare does not mention the question of her marriage is that after we have witnessed Isabella plead for the life of the man who has so grossly wronged her it is a foregone conclusion: this woman has changed beyond recognition. She has learnt to make allowances for human frailty. For her to continue life as a nun would be a denial of all the lessons of the play, a negative conclusion to its healing momentum.

The most satisfying solution I have seen to the ending of the play left only the Duke and Isabella on stage. Their eyes met; then the Duke moved slowly, hopefully away. Isabella stood alone in the simple black nun's robes that she had worn throughout. She then removed her cowl, and beautiful long tresses of golden hair tumbled down around her shoulders. The impact of this visual change stopped my breath. After a long moment of stillness, she followed the Duke. The implication was that she *would* marry the Duke, but it was immaterial; she was renouncing her vocation and was entering, instead, the real world of human complexity, to be more than a nun, to be a woman. The staging stated eloquently Isabella's preparedness to come to terms – as we, the audience, do in our daily lives – with responsibility, power, lust, spiritual need, hypocrisy, and crime: some of the darknesses presented in the play. This positive conclusion supported a message that is common in Shakespeare – if human beings are to live in harmony with themselves, and each other, extremism of any kind is dangerous, balance is essential. An eye for an eye; measure for measure.

TIM PIGOTT-SMITH

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION TO *Measure for Measure*

> The say best Men are moulded out of Faults,
> And for the most, become much more the better
> For being a little bad. (V.i.432–34)

So pleads Mariana in a speech that penetrates to the heart of *Measure for Measure*. Her sentiments are specific to the occasion that elicits them, of course, but they apply with equal pertinence to other aspects of a drama about the kinds of 'Profanation' that 'good Christians ought to have' (II.i.54–57).

Like *All's Well That Ends Well*, its predecessor and companion-piece in the Shakespearean canon, *Measure for Measure* pivots on what the heroine of the earlier play calls a 'Sinful Fact' – an illicit assignation that enables a spurned maiden to effect a 'Repair i'th' Dark' (IV.i.42) and thereby secure as her husband a man so debased as to seem beyond reclamation. In the process, by means of a paradox that illustrates the New Testament concept of Grace, the action of the tragicomedy transfigures a 'Wicked Meaning' into a shadowy 'Deed' (*All's Well That Ends Well*, III.vii.44–48) that proves not only absolvable – if not entirely justifiable – but redemptive.

Deriving from a period (1603–4) when Shakespeare was devoting most of his efforts to tragedy, *Measure for Measure* is frequently labelled a 'black comedy' or a 'problem play'. Its tone is less festive than the holiday mood we relish in earlier titles like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *As You Like It*. In places, indeed, its atmosphere is so grim that we sense closer affinities with the sombre settings of *Hamlet* and *Troilus and Cressida*, *Othello* and *King Lear*, four works that appear to have bracketed *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure* in Shakespeare's career as a dramatist.

As we perceive what happens in the council rooms, brothels, and prison cells of the Vienna portrayed in *Measure for Measure*, we're continually reminded that human nature is so frail as to render personal transgressions and societal discords all but inevitable. At the same time, however, and in a way that anticipates the 'Wonder' so prevalent in Shakespeare's final Romances, we're given intimations of a 'Powre Divine' (V.i.362) that looks sympathetically upon our flaws and attends to even the most egregious of them with a 'Physic / That's Bitter to Sweet End' (IV.vi.7–8).

In this play the self-designated agent of Heaven's restorative therapy is a duke, Vincentio, who relinquishes his secular office for a season and appoints as his deputy the 'Prenzie, Angelo' (III.i.92). Lord Angelo, we soon learn, is 'A Man of Stricture and firm Abstinence' (I.iv.12), and the ruler who commissions him expects the young nobleman to implement policies that will address the licentiousness that has become rampant through the Duke's own 'permissive Pass' (I.iv.38). To keep abreast of what transpires as a consequence, Vincentio goes undercover and dons the habit of a 'meddling Friar' (V.i.127). From this perspective he sees things he would not have been in a position to observe under normal conditions. He also hears things that would otherwise have escaped his notice, among them the slanders of a loose-tongued libertine who refers to Vienna's absent head of state as 'the old fantastical Duke of Dark Corners' (IV.iii.161–62).

Because of the 'Craft' he eventually deploys against the 'Vice' his own leniency has helped foster (III.i.579), Vincentio has impressed many of today's critics and directors as a manipulative Machiavellian, a shady character with more than a trace of the seedy deviousness that Lucio ascribes to the truant Duke. Regardless of what present-day readers may be disposed to think about Vincentio's *modus operandi*, however, he is a figure whose role in the plot would assuredly have pleased the most influential of the tragicomedy's original audiences.

The first performance of the play that can be dated with certainty occurred at the court of King James I on 26 December

1604, and it is reasonable to infer that the monarch himself was probably on hand to see the work 'His Majesty's Servants' were presenting as royal entertainment. *Measure for Measure* echoes some of the new king's own writings on the principles of good government, among them his views on the need for a ruler to exercise measure (temperance) in the administration of justice. It is thus likely that Shakespeare's regal patron would have seen himself as the principal model for a 'Sword of Heaven' (III.i.563) who balances justice with mercy, and whose severest punishment is reserved for a scandalmonger who epitomizes the kind of 'unreverent speaker' that James is reported to have found particularly irritating.

As he divests himself of all the trappings of imperial dignity, Vincentio recalls 'the Mirror of all Christian Kings', as Shakespeare's Chorus had depicted England's 'Warlike Harry' in *Henry V*, when the army's commander in chief disguises himself as an ordinary soldier and mingles with his unsuspecting subordinates on the eve of the battle of Agincourt. Meanwhile, as he secludes himself and his purposes from those who oversee the city in his stead, the Duke resembles the *Deus absconditus*, the unfathomable hidden God, whose mysteries would later inspire the reflections of Blaise Pascal. It would be going too far, no doubt, to suggest that Vincentio's descent into 'Beggary' (III.i.383) is designed to echo the way Christ's Incarnation is described in Philippians 2:5–8. But there can be no question that in his various guises as 'Father', 'Shepherd', 'dread Lord', and 'Grace', Vienna's head of state is intended to keep us aware that in Renaissance England a monarch's subjects were enjoined to regard him or her as God's anointed surrogate.

Shakespeare's earliest audiences would not have been surprised, then, to see the Duke of *Measure for Measure* don the persona of another minister of Heaven's will. Nor would they have been shocked by his resort to a 'Deceit' (III.i.270) with biblical precedent (see Genesis 38 for a divinely assisted ruse with analogies to the bed-tricks in both *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well That Ends Well*), especially when that undertaking brings

As we perceive what happens in the council rooms, brothels, and prison cells of the Vienna portrayed in *Measure for Measure*, we're continually reminded that human nature is so frail as to render personal transgressions and societal discords all but inevitable. At the same time, however, and in a way that anticipates the 'Wonder' so prevalent in Shakespeare's final Romances, we're given intimations of a 'Powre Divine' (V.i.362) that looks sympathetically upon our flaws and attends to even the most egregious of them with a 'Physic / That's Bitter to Sweet End' (IV.vi.7–8).

In this play the self-designated agent of Heaven's restorative therapy is a duke, Vincentio, who relinquishes his secular office for a season and appoints as his deputy the 'Prenzie, Angelo' (III.i.92). Lord Angelo, we soon learn, is 'A Man of Stricture and firm Abstinence' (I.iv.12), and the ruler who commissions him expects the young nobleman to implement policies that will address the licentiousness that has become rampant through the Duke's own 'permissive Pass' (I.iv.38). To keep abreast of what transpires as a consequence, Vincentio goes undercover and dons the habit of a 'meddling Friar' (V.i.127). From this perspective he sees things he would not have been in a position to observe under normal conditions. He also hears things that would otherwise have escaped his notice, among them the slanders of a loose-tongued libertine who refers to Vienna's absent head of state as 'the old fantastical Duke of Dark Corners' (IV.iii.161–62).

Because of the 'Craft' he eventually deploys against the 'Vice' his own leniency has helped foster (III.i.579), Vincentio has impressed many of today's critics and directors as a manipulative Machiavellian, a shady character with more than a trace of the seedy deviousness that Lucio ascribes to the truant Duke. Regardless of what present-day readers may be disposed to think about Vincentio's *modus operandi*, however, he is a figure whose role in the plot would assuredly have pleased the most influential of the tragicomedy's original audiences.

The first performance of the play that can be dated with certainty occurred at the court of King James I on 26 December

1604, and it is reasonable to infer that the monarch himself was probably on hand to see the work 'His Majesty's Servants' were presenting as royal entertainment. *Measure for Measure* echoes some of the new king's own writings on the principles of good government, among them his views on the need for a ruler to exercise measure (temperance) in the administration of justice. It is thus likely that Shakespeare's regal patron would have seen himself as the principal model for a 'Sword of Heaven' (III.i.563) who balances justice with mercy, and whose severest punishment is reserved for a scandalmonger who epitomizes the kind of 'unreverent speaker' that James is reported to have found particularly irritating.

As he divests himself of all the trappings of imperial dignity, Vincentio recalls 'the Mirror of all Christian Kings', as Shakespeare's Chorus had depicted England's 'Warlike Harry' in *Henry V*, when the army's commander in chief disguises himself as an ordinary soldier and mingles with his unsuspecting subordinates on the eve of the battle of Agincourt. Meanwhile, as he secludes himself and his purposes from those who oversee the city in his stead, the Duke resembles the *Deus absconditus*, the unfathomable hidden God, whose mysteries would later inspire the reflections of Blaise Pascal. It would be going too far, no doubt, to suggest that Vincentio's descent into 'Beggary' (III.i.383) is designed to echo the way Christ's Incarnation is described in Philippians 2:5–8. But there can be no question that in his various guises as 'Father', 'Shepherd', 'dread Lord', and 'Grace', Vienna's head of state is intended to keep us aware that in Renaissance England a monarch's subjects were enjoined to regard him or her as God's anointed surrogate.

Shakespeare's earliest audiences would not have been surprised, then, to see the Duke of *Measure for Measure* don the persona of another minister of Heaven's will. Nor would they have been shocked by his resort to a 'Deceit' (III.i.270) with biblical precedent (see Genesis 38 for a divinely assisted ruse with analogies to the bed-tricks in both *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well That Ends Well*), especially when that undertaking brings

about a 'Consummation' that can be construed as both devout and 'devoutly to be wished' (*Hamlet*, III.i.60–61). If we take Vincentio at his own estimate, he functions as an exemplar of Providence who subjects other characters to a siege of testing to determine what they are made of, to teach them something about their own limitations, and in time to bring each of them to a crisis where he or she is called upon to display a spirit of charity – a manifestation of humility, penitence, forgiveness, or love – that was either lacking or deficient at the outset.

The Duke's labours commence with Angelo, a 'Substitute' (III.i.191) so straitlaced in his own life that he can be depended upon to bring the same rigour to his enforcement of the laws of Vienna. And so he does: notwithstanding the demurrals of Escalus, a more experienced, equitable, and humane justice, Angelo sentences to death a man whose only crime is to have slept with his bride before the public consecration of their marriage vows. When Angelo's colleague observes that Claudio's offence is little more than a technicality, the sort of 'Fault' that anyone with 'Affections' and 'Blood' might have succumbed to, the Deputy replies, ' 'Tis one thing to be tempted, Escalus, / Another thing to fall' (II.i.8–18). Similarly, when Claudio's sister asks the Deputy to spare a remorseful fellow sinner, Angelo assures Isabella that 'It is the Law, not I, condemn your Brother' (II.ii.81). Genuinely believing himself to be without guilt, hypocrisy, or arrogance, Angelo maintains that by executing 'strict Statutes' (I.iv.19) with unstinting exactitude he is merely assessing the behaviour of Vienna's other citizens by the same high standards he requires of, and adheres to, himself.

But suddenly Angelo feels 'Motions of the Sense' (I.v.60) that are new to him. Words meant in all innocence evoke thoughts and feelings he recognizes to be anything but innocent. Before the end of his first conversation with Isabella, he realizes something he had not previously imagined: that he is *not* 'a man whose Blood / Is very Snow-broth' (I.v.58–59). No, Angelo is hooked by the same 'Affections' that touch other mortals, and by the time Claudio's advocate arrives for her second visit the Deputy is

beginning to sound like the tormented Claudius of *Hamlet*'s Prayer Scene. 'Heaven hath my empty Words,' Angelo laments, 'Whilst my Invention, hearing not my Tongue, / Anchors on Isabel' (II.iv.2–4).

Like the Apostle Paul, Angelo discovers to his dismay that sin, 'that it might appear sin', has wrought mortality in him 'by that which is good' (Romans 7:13). The zeal with which he has prosecuted his duties proves ineffectual against the stirrings of the flesh, and in due course the Deputy violates the same law that he has brought to bear upon Claudio. Upon the Duke's reappearance at the conclusion of the play, that situation precipitates an *ad hoc* court session in which stern Justice demands 'An Angelo for Claudio, Death for Death' (V.i.402).

As it happens, through the prior manoeuvrings of the 'Friar', the requirements of Vienna's legal system turn out to be less grievous than the penalty the ensnared Deputy assumes he deserves. What Angelo has earlier interpreted as a fall from Grace (IV.iv.34–35) emerges as a fall *into* Grace, a *felix culpa* ('happy fault' or fortunate fall), and one that leaves the pharisaical young lord shaken but both wiser and better than the naive puritan of the play's opening moments.

But this can be so only because of a parallel pilgrimage by Isabella. When we meet her in Act I, Claudio's sister seems remarkably similar to the icy Deputy. Like Angelo, she desires 'a more strict Restraint' (I.v.4). And in her first interview with the Deputy, she insists upon Mercy with just as much rigidity as Angelo insists upon Justice. We are surely meant to commend Isabella's admonition that 'all the Souls that were were Forfeit once; / And he that might the Vantage best have took / Found out the Remedy' (II.ii.74–76). At the same time, however, we are almost certainly to be alarmed by the steely conviction with which a novice aspiring to be a nun can later pronounce that 'More than our Brother is our Chastity' (II.iv.187).

By the climax of the drama Isabella is afforded an opportunity to be absolute for chastity in much the same way that Claudio has been instructed to 'Be absolute for Death' (III.i.4). Her final trial

places her in an agonizing plight in which Mariana begs her to pray for the life of a self-confessed tyrant who has not only committed a worse crime than Isabella's brother but has reneged on his pledge to release the condemned Claudio in recompense for the lewd ransom the Deputy has extorted. Hearing Mariana's plea to Isabella, the Duke exclaims, 'Should she kneel down in Mercy of this Fact, / Her Brother's Ghost his paved Bed would break / And take her hence in Horror' (V.i.424–26).

After one of the most suspenseful pauses in all of Shakespeare, Isabella makes a choice that might appear to be a reiteration of her earlier refusal to act as her brother's keeper. The difference is that now 'the Case is alter'd' (*3 Henry VI*, IV.iii.31), and this time the sister who is put in 'the Top of Judgement' responds with the kind of compassion she'd earlier credited with the capacity to transform an unbending judge into a 'Man new made' (II.ii.76–80). Her reward, supposedly through 'an Accident that Heaven provides' (IV.iii.82), is to regain what she had presumed lost. By declining the course her ruler and spiritual mentor appears to be urging upon her, she metamorphoses a potential revenge tragedy into a comedy of forgiveness and reconciliation, and one that resonates with the deepest chords of rebirth and resurrection.

Shakespeare drew upon multiple sources for *Measure for Measure*. Of these perhaps the most important was a familiar passage from the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus says, 'Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again' (Matthew 7:1–2). The playwright also alluded to several parables from the Gospels. And in his presentation of the dilemma generated by Isabella's exchanges with Angelo, he dramatized Paul's observation that 'the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would' (Galatians 5:17).

Behind Angelo's proposition to Isabella lay a number of narratives about corrupt magistrates, among them (a) a novella

that appeared in a popular Italian collection, the *Hecatommithi* (1565), by Giraldi Cinthio, (b) a play on the theme by the same author (*Epitia*, published posthumously in 1583), and two English renderings of the tale, (c) a drama (*The Right Excellent and Famous History of Promos and Cassandra*, 1578) and (d) a prose discourse (included in the *Heptameron of Civil Discourses*, 1582), by George Whetstone. Shakespeare probably consulted all of these sources, and in each of them he would have found that the woman who corresponds to Isabella reluctantly accepts the bargain proffered by the magistrate who corresponds to Angelo. The playwright would also have noted that in every case the magistrate cheats the woman he has seduced and orders her brother's execution to proceed without delay.

In the earliest of Cinthio's treatments of the story, the character who corresponds to Claudio is actually beheaded; but in Cinthio's *Epitia* and in Whetstone's two versions of *Promos and Cassandra*, the sentenced convict is secretly spared by the prison officer who corresponds to the Provost in Shakespeare's play. In all four redactions of the fable, when the betrayed heroine appeals to a higher authority, the ruler who holds jurisdiction over the wicked magistrate orders him to marry her and then be put to death. Once the wedding has taken place, however, despite the injustice the magistrate has done her and her brother, the abused sister implores the ruler to pardon him. After much persuasion the ruler relents and does so, and the heroine joyfully claims her now repentant husband as the man with whom she will live happily ever after.

Only in Shakespeare is the Isabella character a neophyte in preparation for holy orders. And only in *Measure for Measure* is there a role of the type that Mariana discharges. Shakespeare probably adapted her part and the device of the bed-substitution from the same sources – Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* (1348–58) and William Painter's *Palace of Pleasure* (1566) – that the playwright had turned to when he wrote *All's Well That Ends Well*.