

Spectator Seduction: *Measure for Measure*

Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,
As, to be hated, needs but to be seen;
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.

Alexander Pope, "An Essay on Man"



I

The magisterial achievement of *Measure for Measure* is also its nemesis: it evinces disgust. By mirroring virulent desires in its characters, it mediates similar desires to the off-stage spectators (audiences and readers).¹ Often, as soon as critics note the intolerance displayed by certain of the play's characters, the critics themselves become intolerant.² This critical intolerance signals the influential role played by "desire": a category by which I refer to motivational impulses in humans, including forces of repulsion as well as attraction. Not only does desire include erotic, binding emotions such as love, pity, and affection, but also violent, alienating emotions such as fear, disdain, and hate. While the play portrays sexual desire, it privileges intolerance as a dominant form of desire that is both represented in its action and reproduced by its performance. At times, characters and critics alike attempt to eliminate a surplus of desire through the selection of a victim, animate or inanimate. Far from purging spectators of desire according to the Aristotelian ideal, therefore, the play contaminates them with fear and, more often, pitilessness.

One especially useful framework for analyzing this affective power of *Measure* is provided by René Girard's work on *mimesis*. While Girard's hypothesis, which extends far beyond the concerns of this article, has been expounded in relation to Shakespeare, it has not been applied at length to *Measure*, nor has it found a fully favorable reception among Shakespeare scholars. In his review of Girard's *A Theater of Envy: William Shakespeare* (1991), Robert Adams (*New York Review*, July 16, 1992 51-52) finds it both "an old-fashioned book" and a book with "a fresh slant" and "a fresh angle"—appropriate metaphors for the theme of mimetic, triangular relationships. However, according to Adams, the book pays "relatively little attention" to *Measure for Measure* (among other

neglected plays), it gives little attention to critical commentaries, and it hurts itself methodologically by resorting to a “two-play-two-audience” theory.³

Picking up Adams’ gauntlet, I would like to adapt certain Girardian insights and apply them to *Measure* in a manner that answers Adams’ objections. My argument neither neglects the play’s critical commentaries nor relies upon a dual-audience theory. Whether or not my use of Girard satisfies Adams’ reservations, the theory of mimetic desire fits the play better than any psychological theory yet applied. It is at once broad enough to account for responses of dramatic characters *and* human spectators, yet specific enough to remain faithful to the thematic fields of the play itself. Girard’s conception of monstrous doubling (i.e., that subjects who define themselves in opposition to each other increasingly resemble each other in the most negative ways) provides a rationale for the irrational behavior of the characters. Furthermore, the theory links closely the play’s title (taken from Christ’s Sermon on the Mount) to the play’s action. It helps us understand how and why the play redefines judgment as desire and justice as forgiveness.

Because Girard’s work is often misunderstood, the theory as I adapt it merits some introduction.⁴ Following the third book of *Things Hidden from the Foundation of the World*, Girard’s magnum opus, I refer to the study of intersubjective mental conflicts as “interindividual psychology.”⁵ The major premise of interindividual psychology is that human desires result from human relationships instead of the reverse. Desire thus understood is model-oriented, and its mode of communication is imitational (or mimetic). This approach runs contrary to object-oriented theories, such as Freudianism (which privileges the mother as an object of desire). According to this model-oriented theory, both objects of desire and types of desire are determined by the subject’s relationships within his or her society. Therefore, in the drama of human life, objects and types of desire shift constantly within the web of social relations. For obvious reasons such a psychological perspective lends itself readily to the analysis of drama, a genre formulated to represent the flux of human conflict. Because interindividual psychology assumes that external, relational conflicts precede and structure inner, psychical conflicts, it provides the basis for a character analysis that explicitly focuses on visible, audible events, rather than on invisible, postulated instinctual entities.

The primary paradigm of mimetic desire describes the bonds among the *model*, *disciple*, and *object*. The individual who exhibits a desire functions as a *model* who, for whatever reason, impresses the *disciple* as imitable. The disciple who unknowingly imitates that desire attempts to appropriate either the same *object* as the model (which turns the model into a rival) or the same sort of object (which makes the disciple a double of the model in certain respects). If we ask how the disciple recognizes a desire as such in the first place, Charles Peirce's categories prove useful. The signs that make a model's desire evident may be nondiscursive, either through an *index*, such as a woman's pregnancy which attests to a man's (previous) desire for her, or through an *icon*, such as a nun's habit which suggests that the church has laid claim to that woman. Or the evidence may be discursive, through *full symbolicity*, such as Angelo's statement of desire, "Plainly conceive, I love you" (2.4.140).⁶ In these examples the man, the church, and Angelo function as models. Generally the mediation utilizes both modes of communication, discursive and non-discursive, and most often the disciples remain ignorant of the sources of their desires.

Desire creates conflict. On one hand, mediated desire masks its source, convincing the disciple that his or her desire is original and necessary, an authentic extension of the "inner self" or, in Renaissance terms, "soul." On the other hand, the desire, being borrowed, leads the disciple into the path of the model. Upon colliding, the two subjects perceive each other as rivals. Violence follows. In the interval during which the model becomes a rival, the type of desire motivating the disciple alters. What began as a desire for a given object becomes a desire for reprisal. This stage of violent interaction marks the movement from "acquisitive mimesis" to "conflictive mimesis."⁷ According to this schema, conflictive mimesis occurs when the importance of gaining the object is superseded by the importance of supplanting the model-obstacle.

However, in *Measure's* array of sexual propositions, the disciple and the object are often identical. No sooner is an acquisitive intention expressed than conflict occurs. Thus appropriative desires carry their own violence, however subtle it may appear. For example, Isabella (rightly) interprets Angelo's "I love you" as a form of extortion that entails rape. Therefore, she opposes and alters the desire rather than endorsing it—but this reaction does not free her from Angelo's influence as a model. An unwilling

“disciple” in Isabella’s situation fiercely struggles to escape the model yet reciprocates the model’s gestures and words until the two relate as enemy twins. In such situations, the emotional intensity easily escalates, misunderstandings abound, and each rival feels the injustices of the other impinging upon his or her own course of desire.

This self-blinding reciprocity pervades the play and its spectators’ reactions. While it is a form of conflictive mimesis, it constitutes a specific type of imitation that involves a developed moral consciousness—as is hinted by the play’s title. Only creatures who have obtained a definition of “righteousness” can be swept away by self-righteousness. In the Judeo-Christian tradition this consciousness is traceable to the Jewish reception of the Law and gains fairly clear articulation during David’s reign. By way of parable, Nathan rebukes David for adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband. David, however, fails to recognize himself as the greedy shepherd. Instead, he condemns the shepherd, saying he should die. Nathan then unveils the allegory, telling David, “You are the man!” Judging another, David actually judges himself, and soon regrets his failure to show mercy (2 Samuel 11-12). The psychological implications of inadvertently judging oneself further unfold in the Sermon on the Mount: “Ivdge not, that ye be not iudged. For with what iudgement ye iudge, ye shal be iudged, and with what measure ye mette, it shal be measured to you againe” (Matt. 7.1-2, Geneva version). The violence or mercy one directs to others inescapably affects one’s self.

Building on this perspective, my argument interprets “judgment” as a kind of desire that distorts reality and at the same time reveals itself through ethical statements. Judgment is the imitative moment during which one character distances and/or differentiates him- or herself from another.⁸ The moment is imitative because it would not occur apart from another character, and it distorts reality by exaggerating existing differences or creating imaginary ones. As the protagonist judges (differentiates) with increasing passion, he or she inevitably perceives the rival as a sort of monster yet at the same time begins to speak and act like the rival. This doubling, this hallucinatory self-righteousness, is the punishment that Christ’s injunction threatens. By using the passive voice (“ye shal be iudged” and “it shal be measured to you againe”), the sermon refuses to designate an external agency of judgment. It insinuates that judgment, measurement, punishment, *and* reward are all self-reflexive. Because these

judgments structure relationships according to binary oppositions, they lend themselves to formulaic, antithetical expressions, the *locus classicus* of which belongs to the Pharisee in Christ's parable: "I thanke thee that I am not as other men" (Luke 18.11). In English, the future tense and the subjunctive voice better intimate an unrealized intention of moral superiority. Thus, for my purposes, echoes of the Pharisee's statement, such as "I'll never be like that person" or "I would never do *that*," adequately capture the psychological implications, and such echoes can be heard throughout *Measure*.

Because judgments are overdifferentiating, exclusionary evaluations, they constitute a form of negative desire, a desire by which one seeks to distance him- or herself from an object (and its model). Judgment persuades the subject that he or she is above or beyond the transgression or personality type being judged. The actual act of passing judgment assures the subject that he or she is establishing that distance. Ironically, the subject who passes judgment becomes absorbed with the other. Thus the subject will experience erratic behavior and emotions but will not identify them with their source precisely because the subject has (over)differentiated him- or herself from that source. Through its dialogue, *Measure* tersely mocks this act of overdifferentiation. What is said of Lucio and a Gentleman applies to all: "[T]here went but a pair of shears between" the characters, although they cannot see their similarities (1.2.27). When Abhorson complains that Pompey "will discredit our mystery," the Provost replies: "Go to, sir, you weigh equally: a feather will turn the scale" (4.2.26-29). Such is the fate of most of the characters. At the moment they articulate their unlikeness to other characters, they are most similar: a feather will turn the scale.

Outside of purely comic situations, this overdifferentiation ultimately leads toward victimization. The victim, in this context, deflects attention from the disparity between what the victimizer claims to be and what the victimizer is. Of course, the victim can be either the rival or a third party. Only forgiveness can arrest a situation of escalating rivalry and eventual victimage. Put differently, forgiveness turns even deadly serious situations toward comic ends. An act of forgiveness breaks the bond of reciprocity by focusing on similarities between the rivals and halting the desire for differentiation. True to the etymology of the word (αφιημι) translated "forgiveness" from the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6.12, 14-15), forgiveness requires the offended individual to *untie* or *release* the enemy.

Otherwise, the two remain tied together through reciprocity. Overriding all differences, forgiveness alone admits the mutual need for mercy. This need for mercy is mutual, not because all moral offenses are equally destructive or equally malicious—nor even because both parties are offenders—but because the refusal to offer mercy subjects the offended party to an unwanted model who will continue to mediate unwanted desires, mostly for revenge. All offenses must be forgivable in order to break the chain of reciprocity.

To stress the seductive dynamic of judgment that structures the play, I conclude this theoretical sketch by remarking on the conventional readings of *Measure* as they have privileged external agencies of judgment over internal ones. Although the title of this play, *Measure for Measure*, is often remarked upon, the judicial and theological dimensions generally obscure the psychological.⁹ The mention of the Sermon on the Mount and its injunction for listeners to “Judge not” conjures up images either of a divine judge enforcing his laws or of an earthly vicar enforcing them with divine authority. In both cases, that of the juridical state and that of the vindictive god, transcendental powers intervene in human affairs to establish justice. According to my reading, *Measure* ultimately supplants such agencies of justice, as well as the conception of justice as a fair distribution of punishment. Even in the final act of the play, when the Duke is perceived as a “power divine,” he refuses to mete out punishment according to the crime. Nothing in his actions execute such “justice,” just as nothing in the Biblical injunction insists on an external judge. The “measure” he applies to Angelo is one of mercy, whereas the reciprocal “measure” demanded by Angelo (and many critics, including Johnson and Coleridge¹⁰) is a death for a death. The lack of severity in the Duke, therefore, shifts the focus from external judgment to internal, interindividual judgment.

If the above assumptions are correct, *Measure for Measure* assigns the source of judgment and vindictiveness to humans, not to institutions or to a divine power. The immanence of reciprocal, human relationships precludes the need of a transcendental power. Instead of a divine judge who threatens judgment, human relationships enforce the threat. Thus, the reciprocity of judgment that governs *Measure’s* characters (and spectators) can be accounted for in strictly psychological terms. This human proclivity toward judgment and against forgiveness is registered in a failure among critics to understand

“measure for measure” as a neutral descriptor, one which is as accurate in describing merciful, loving transactions as in describing vilifying, vindictive ones. These critics, who insist on poetic justice, understand “measure for measure” only in its punitive sense. For example, Charlotte Lennox writes, “Thus it should have been, according to the Duke’s own Judgment to have made it *Measure for Measure*; but when *Angelo* was pardoned, and restored to Favour, how then was it *Measure for Measure*?”¹¹ Similarly, William Lawrence writes, “The title ‘Measure for Measure’ is, however, contradicted by the final decisions of the Duke, who concludes that mercy should temper justice, and that the strict letter of the law should not be enforced.”¹² Finally, Jocelyn Powell considers “measure” as applicable to only “the judicial deputy, who metes out measure for measure.”¹³ As I hope to show, the play offers a broader concept of “measure for measure,” one by which characters are punished *or* rewarded according to their own standards.

II

More clearly than any other characters in the play, Angelo and Isabella discover themselves to be puppets of desire. They mediate “righteous” indignation to spectators. With less prominence, Claudio functions as a model-rival to these two characters, although he himself is conspicuously susceptible to models. While both Angelo and Isabella exhibit the full effects of passing judgment, Isabella’s role makes the progression from judgment to doubling more perceptible. In addition, two of her speeches comment on the theme of mimetic bondage. While I do not examine the comic characters in this article, many of them, particularly Lucio, undergo mimetic oscillations similar to their graver counterparts. In contrast to these reluctant disciples, the Duke, who avoids unwanted models, is minimally imprisoned in psychological judgment. He functions rather to turn our attention to the play’s spectators and their desires.

Angelo’s response to Vienna’s antifornication statute marks the undoing of a personality that thrives on overdifferentiating responses.¹⁴ What appears as a legal judgment unveils the reciprocity of a moral judgment. The statute Angelo enforces eventually governs him, unleashing forces that transform him from life-long frigidity to newly awakened concupiscence. This degeneration reveals the

underlying moral logic of the play. In his first soliloquy (2.2.162-187), he remarks that his chastity, up to meeting Isabella, has come easily. He has not been pretending sexual purity:

Never could the strumpet
 With all her double vigour, art and nature,
 Once stir my temper: but this virtuous maid
 Subdues me quite. Ever till now
 When men were fond, I smil'd, and wonder'd how. (2.2.183-87)

Shakespeare carefully registers this change in Angelo as shocking not only to himself but also to other characters. Claudio is taken by surprise. Hearing about Angelo's sexual extortion of Isabella, Claudio exclaims, "The precise Angelo!" (3.1.93) The Duke, also, is surprised: "but that frailty hath examples for his falling, I should wonder" (3.1.185-86). Finally, Lucio's explanation of Angelo's birth reinforces the unlikelihood of an outbreak of passion: "Some report, a sea-maid spawned him. Some, that he was begot between two stock fishes. But it is certain that when he makes water, his urine is congealed ice; that I know to be true. And he is a motion ungenerative; that's infallible" (3.2.104-08). This polyphony of voices, each surprised by Angelo's fall, warrants our attention. Intentionally, it seems, we are asked to ask, "How is it that now, for the first time in his life, Angelo feels passion for a woman?"

Whereas the psychoanalytic answer would focus on the object of that (hitherto repressed) passion, interindividual psychology looks at Angelo's circumstances and discovers a significant model. Before Isabella, Claudio is. Although Shakespeare allows Angelo to claim he is merely carrying out his duty to enforce the law that "hath slept" (2.2.91), the play indicates how tendentious is the selection of Claudio. Vienna is teeming with sexual transgressions. The contrast between Claudio and the play's innumerable candidates for arrest raises the question of Angelo's motivation. If, as I propose to argue, Angelo is attracted to Claudio as a model and entrapped by Claudio as an obstacle, what traits in Claudio attract Angelo, and which traits entrap him? Angelo sees Claudio's sensuality, which provides the basis for Angelo's overdifferentiating judgment (which takes the guise of a legal judgment). Angelo fails to see that Claudio's sensuality will become his own. Angelo also fails to see his likeness to Claudio, a likeness that makes Claudio an imitable master of enduring commitment to

one's fiancée. Finally, he fails to see that whether he imitates "enduring commitment" or brute sensuality, his stoicism will hinder either course he chooses, causing him to find victims.

On the surface, Angelo judges Claudio because of their dissimilarities. Claudio, like a rat, pursues lechery, whereas Angelo, until meeting Isabella, would smile "when men were fond" and wonder "how?" The confidence with which Angelo arrests Claudio depends upon a difference whose importance Angelo overestimates: he has never slept with a woman. His mental act of overdifferentiation might be expressed thus: "I would never be like Claudio—without self-control, wanton, carnal." At one point in the dialogue, Angelo says something suspiciously similar. Refusing Isabella's request for mercy, Angelo says, "I will not do't" (2.2.51). Do what? Pardon? Fornicate? For Angelo, the two are inextricably bound. To refuse pardon (in light of Angelo's motivations) locks him into a trajectory that points toward extortion, fornication, slander, and intended murder. Thus the original difference between Angelo and Claudio necessarily disappears.

In spite of their initial differences, a similarity unites these male characters. Both men have been engaged to a dowerless woman. They, of course, wear their discontent with a difference: a slanderous breaking off for Angelo, a premature consummation for Claudio. But it is this similarity that sustains Angelo's overdifferentiating reaction. The past celibacy that permits Angelo to distance himself from Claudio is inseparable from the broken engagement that attests to Angelo's bad faith. Consequently, his moral grounds for sentencing Claudio argue at the same time for Claudio's pardon. Worse, his judgment of Claudio eventually foregrounds Claudio's relatively superior treatment of his fiancée. Whereas Claudio's "sin" mediates sensuality to Angelo, Claudio's fidelity mediates a desire for a lost integrity to Angelo. When we recall that Angelo is a character who takes "pride" in his "gravity" (2.4.9-10), a character who must have the endorsements of others in order to (mimetically) value his own piety, we can see the propensity for rivalry between him and Claudio.

Thus, while the arrest of Claudio gives Angelo immediate moral and political distinction ("'tis surely for a name" [1.2.160]), it subjects Angelo to a disturbing desire and a scandalous rival. Contaminated by Claudio's concupiscence, Angelo experiences a desire he has never known. Because Angelo has concealed his failure with Mariana by fashioning himself as a stoic, he cannot imitate

Claudio. Unable to follow Claudio's steps without relinquishing his gravity, Angelo cannot get beyond the rival-obstacle in his path. Where the path toward acquisitive mimesis is blocked, the way of conflictive mimesis remains open. Angelo's authorization to put Claudio to death is perfectly convenient, because in one legal action, he can memorialize Claudio's moral lapse and at the same time eliminate a living rival. These motivations of course are unrecognized by Angelo, which is why, later, his passion towards Isabella mystifies him.

Although Claudio is Angelo's model of desire, the moral backlash in Angelo's life need not be sexual. He could simply become colder and still be chained reciprocally to Claudio. But Shakespeare makes the mirroring explicit by making Angelo hot. The smallest trickle of desire will reduce his difference/distance from Claudio. Physiologically the passion in Angelo is simply awakened. Structurally the passion is re-created, passion for passion, because he has judged or condemned a man for yielding to his passions. Angelo's judgment supplies the form (which is imitation); Claudio's predicament supplies the content (which is fornication). Both as a model of conjugal love and as an object of differentiation, Claudio becomes the basis for Angelo's life. No matter the particulars of Isabella's beauty, purity, personality, or dress, Angelo is already destined to experience unwanted desire when he meets this character who reminds him of Claudio.

Arriving soon after Angelo's legal and moral judgment against Claudio, Isabella unintentionally precipitates his fall in two ways. First, she provides an object for the desire he has unknowingly borrowed from Claudio. Second, she reinforces Angelo's slavery through a second mimetic triangle. She has what Angelo wants: gravity. Apparently, she possesses it in a purer form, one that does not require public recognition, one that allows her to seek a life of seclusion in the convent. Therefore, not only is Isabella an object of desire to precise Angelo, but she also is a model of desire to the fallen Angelo who still desires his reputation. Being both object of a lascivious desire and model of an austere desire endows Isabella with extraordinary influence upon Angelo. While he wants to satisfy his carnal yearnings, he cannot do so without encountering Isabella's gravity. He must have her unlawfully in order to sever her beauty from her integrity. As with Angelo's rivalry with Claudio, so is the case with Isabella: if he cannot possess what she possesses, he can at least lower her as a rival, robbing her of her

virtue. The act of fornication, then, satisfies both Angelo's acquisitive mimesis toward Isabella as object and conflictive mimesis toward her as rival. The more she protests, the more intent he will be on destroying her. Words avail nothing. Whether she commends the mercy with which Claudio would treat Angelo if their positions were reversed (2.2.64-66), or more directly commands Angelo, "Go to your bosom, / Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know / That's like my brother's fault" (2.2.137-39), it is too late. The doubling has been completed. Engrossed by Claudio as model-obstacle and mesmerized by Isabella as rival-object, Angelo's "sense breeds with" her words (2.2.143). He will "raze the sanctuary / And pitch our evils there" (2.2.171-72).

The play would be interesting, but not nearly so alarming if Angelo were the only victim of his own judgment. No sooner does Isabella diagnose Angelo's error as one of overdifferentiation, than she falls into the same trap. Critics often explain Isabella's likeness to Angelo in terms of the two saints' relatively fixed characterological and religious traits. Although such similarities are at moments striking, these essentialist comparisons stultify the drama. Interindividual psychology offers a less reductive explanation that is anticipated thematically in the play. Whatever Isabella supposedly shared in common with Angelo prior to their first meeting is nothing compared to the dynamic imitation that follows their second meeting. Early in that interview when Angelo is unmoved by her pleas, she judges him:

I would to heaven I had your potency,
And you were Isabel! Should it then be thus?
No; I would tell what 'twere to be a judge,
And what a prisoner. (2.2.67-70)

She would never be as he . . . never as ruthless and inflexible. Formulaically, she binds herself to Angelo with the consequence that she will imitate his violent intentions, finding herself entangled in conflictive mimesis, not only with Angelo but also with Claudio who himself desires her body, though differently.

This mimetic entanglement accounts for both her anger and her eroticized language. Angelo's alarming proposition that she copulate with him in exchange for her brother's pardon causes her to

seek Claudio's support in the rapidly altering situation. The ensuing scene is overcharged with conflictive mimesis. In turning toward Claudio, she yields to her mimetic dependency upon another for approval, and thus opens the door wide for the expression of unwanted desires. Looking to Claudio to authenticate her decision, she soon imitates Angelo's style, controlling the dialogue with Claudio, just as Angelo controlled the dialogues with her.

Initially, she assures Claudio of her desire to see him set free, though not at the cost of her virginity:

O, were it but my life,
I'd throw it down for your [Claudio's] deliverance
As frankly as a pin. (3.1.103-105)

At the outset, Claudio agrees that she should not consider Angelo's proposition. However, as Claudio begins to consider the uncertainty of his existence after death, he alters his tack, and begins to reconsider Angelo's proposition. Within moments he recognizes Angelo as an ally. This "model" of virtue in Vienna—"he being so wise" (3.1.112)—becomes for Claudio a model of desire. Angelo's desire for Isabella's cooperation is appropriated by Claudio, so much so that Claudio's speech echoes Angelo's. Whereas Angelo earlier said, "Might there not be a charity in sin / To save a brother's life" (2.4.63-64), Claudio pleads, "What sin you do to save a brother's life, / Nature dispenses with the deed so far / That it becomes a virtue" (3.1.133-35).

When Claudio aligns himself with Angelo, Isabella undergoes two radical changes. First, she sees Claudio no longer as her brother, the offspring of her father, but as Angelo's double, someone of his stock and quality. Second, and even more significant, she reacts to Claudio as mercilessly as Angelo had reacted to her. Even her speech replicates Angelo's. She says to her brother,

Take my defiance,
Die, perish! Might but my bending down
Reprieve thee from thy fate, it should proceed.
I'll pray a thousand prayers for thy death;
No word to save thee. (3.1.142-146)

Just as Angelo has claimed he would condemn his own brother to death, so Isabella does condemn her brother, refusing even to bend down to save him. She echoes Angelo's "You but waste your words" with her line, "I'll pray . . . no word to save thee." Thus she is transformed. Her renunciation of any effort to save Claudio, even if it requires only "bending down" (3.1.143), contrasts darkly with her earlier appeals for mercy and her willingness to throw her life down "as frankly as a pin." The plot provides a sympathetic context in which we might place Isabella's change, but the dialogue indicates that she has become, in addition to a Catholic novice and a victim of sexual harassment, an imitator of Angelo.

Isabella and Angelo are doubles in their rigid judgment against Claudio, and, similarly, she becomes split within herself in her response to fornication. Regarding acts of fornication she remains inflexible as we have seen ("Take my defiance, / Die, perish"), yet she inadvertently intimates erotic interests—although these have been distorted in some psychoanalytic critiques.¹⁵ Only in the heat of conflictive mimesis does she use eroticized language, such as "Hark, how I'll bribe you" (2.2.146). By the second interview her intimations become even more detailed:

Th'impression of keen whips I'd wear as rubies,
And strip myself to death as to a bed
That longing have been sick for, ere I'd yield
My body up to shame. (2.4.101-04)

As many commentators note, she casts her repulsion in terms which psychoanalytic theory readily accepts as deferred desire.¹⁶ Rather than attributing the sexual metaphor chiefly to her own resources of libidinous desire, however, the mimetic hypothesis traces it to Angelo, from whom she unwittingly borrows it. The difference, according to my argument, is the difference between the play depicting a bestiality that is only masked by morals or revealing a rationality that is easily demoted to the level of the nearest model.

In spite of Isabella's captivity to Angelo, two of her speeches thematize the dynamics of mimetic desire. During their second interview, Angelo states, "Nay, women are frail too" (2.4.123). While he intends this statement to deflect her accusations of his likeness to Claudio, she takes it as a cue to expostulate on the vulnerability of women to bad (male) models. She theorizes how women, being

constructed through relationships mediated by men, depend on external, mimetic examples to establish their identity. Women are

. . . as the glasses where they view themselves,
Which are as easy broke as they make forms.
Women?—Help, heaven! Men their creation mar
In profiting by them. Nay, call us ten times frail;
For we are soft as our complexions are,
And credulous to false prints. (2.4.124-29)

Within her admission that women are “soft” she tucks another accusation, that men deliberately abuse this frailty. Her claim that men mar their source as divine creations by “profiting” from women has as its subtext the successive failures of three central male models in her life (a dead father, weak brother, and corrupt magistrate). All have been removed or corrupted. She can think only of heaven as a means to deliver her from the mediation of false prints. On a more generalized level, this speech is as applicable to men as to women. It describes the human susceptibility to mimetic desire. An individual’s character is “as easy broke” through conflictive mimesis, as an individual’s emotions “make forms” for desire through acquisitive mimesis.¹⁷ Because the models of desire are themselves contingent, being disciples of other models, almost every major character in the play turns out to be “credulous to false prints.” As Shakespeare represents the situation, the more a character denies his or her susceptibility, the greater the damage occurs. Acquisitive and conflictive mimesis have monstrous effects, especially upon the “proud”—another name for those who imagine themselves to be beyond mimesis.

This generalized interpretation of women’s frailty is borne out by an earlier speech. During their first interview, Isabella sums up the mimicry of desire as it confounds the proud. On this occasion “man,” not “women” is the specified subject:

But man, proud man,
Dress’d in a little brief authority,
Most ignorant of what he’s most assur’d—
His glassy essence—like an angry ape

Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven

As makes the angels weep. (2.2.118-123)

Paraphrased, the first lines might state that those who think themselves least susceptible to the influence of others prolong this illusion under the guise of political power. Their blindness increases according to their misplaced self-confidence, a confidence that is necessarily misplaced because their nature is mimetic. What better phrase to sum up the mimetic nature of humans than “glassy essence”? The enduring quality of this species is its mirror-like, reflective, protean propensity. It leads to duplicitous, reciprocal, and sporadic character traits that *Measure* portrays.

The Duke serves the playwright as an antidote to these “fantastic tricks” of monstrous doubling. He is not, however, completely immune to judgment. He judges others for their need to marry. His lines, “Believe not that the dribbling dart of love / Can pierce a complete bosom” (1.3.2-3), might be paraphrased, “I will never marry like these. I will only enforce marriages.” Like Angelo, who seeks to put fornicators to death, the Duke seeks to put them together. Concerning the Duke’s own marriage proposal, critics frequently comment that it appears to be a Shakespearean afterthought. With more accuracy we might imagine that Shakespeare designed the proposal as an unavoidable ducal afterthought.¹⁸ In spite of this small instance of reciprocity, the Duke exhibits little of the mimetic oscillation and slavery to desire that the other main characters do. His detachment sets him apart from the violence adhered to by most of the characters and by many spectators who grow impatient with his pacifism. He resists the procedure of finding a victim for Vienna’s “sacred” institutions, both secular and religious. He is unable to kill anyone, even after inclining himself toward violence by appointing Angelo in his place. The play’s one sacrificial death suggests his repulsion toward violence. If all the victims of the world were like Ragozine—already dead—the Girardian thesis would be irrelevant.

By scripting much of *Measure*’s action, the Duke remains above most of the mimetic contamination in Vienna. This insular position makes him incredible by comparison to the other, struggling characters. While he remains one of the characters within his own drama, he transcends them by plotting their courses according to his craft, maintaining a concern for the whole and not just the part. Having

initiated a crisis of degree both through his neglect of Viennese law and through his temporary absence, he must intervene in the affairs of Vienna without becoming trapped in reciprocal relations. He therefore attempts to stage corrective desires in order to achieve what Stephen Greenblatt calls “salutary anxiety.”¹⁹ Lucio’s description of him as “the old fantastical duke of dark corners” (4.3.156) aptly describes the marginalized, histrionic role he fills. Not his political power, but his dramaturgy protects him from the implacable throes of mimetic desire into which Angelo, Claudio, and Isabella fall.

The playwright within the play—the Duke—is endowed with a moral impunity that seems unfair. His function is well defined by Cynthia Lewis, who asserts that “the Duke’s efforts to bring ‘dark deeds’ to light can easily awaken our own private feelings of guilt and our own sense of vulnerability to sudden, unexpected castigation.”²⁰ Like my reading, Lewis’ insists upon the interpenetration of literary figures with spectator psyches. “Unexpected castigation” relates most directly to parental anger, often paternal wrath. According to Lewis’ scenario, our judgments against fathers (and other authority figures) color our perceptions of the Duke, recreating him as a much more malicious figure than he is. From Lewis’ point of view, by opposing ourselves to the Duke, we become little Angelos:

But if we allow our impression of the Duke to be conditioned too much by these subjective fears and—out of self-protection and under the mask of anger—project these fears back onto the Duke, then we will miss the experience in which Shakespeare invites us to participate, with the Duke, as he becomes a vital part of Vienna’s body politic. And having done so, we will remain nervous, suspicious, and repressed, as does Angelo, who, in dreadful and guilty anticipation of Vincentio’s return, hastily transfers his own “distraction” onto the Duke: “pray heaven his wisdom be not tainted!” (IV.iv.4-5)²¹

If our reactions to the Duke lock us into moral judgment of him instead of into participating in civic judgment with him, we become that much more petty—that much more like the Duke we create. In this function, the figure of the Duke turns our attention from the representations of desire on stage to the overshadowing reproduction of desires among spectators.

III

Perhaps of all Shakespeare's plays, *Measure for Measure* causes spectators, both present and past, male and female, to side most intensely with or against its characters. Most spectators have a vested interest in desires that are clustered around activities that begin life (sexuality), degenerate life (compromise and lying), renew life (forgiveness), and end life (death). Moreover, these desires are presented vividly through the characters' dialogue and soliloquies. Except for the Duke, these characters are not staging desire, but instead are desperately struggling with desires, often against their wills and beyond their understanding. This lack of theatricality in the play makes the incarnation of its themes within its characters more insistent. The characters' struggles become ours.²²

According to my thesis, the verbal and behavioral doubling that occurs among the characters is mirrored by the emotional doubling that occurs between the characters and *Measure's* spectators. Unfortunately, the most compelling evidence for "live" doubling is seldom documented, remaining available primarily to those who have led open discussions of the play among students.²³ The most available source of evidence is the commentary of literary critics, who, especially through their unresisted asides, supply the most durable evidence of the play's effects. A secondary source, studies of live productions, offers only limited help because most productions use cut texts and deploy "modern" significance by suggesting parallels to contemporary social and political concerns. These production studies tell us as much about the "spin" of a particular production as about the Shakespearean text.

Throughout approximately two centuries of recorded responses to the play, every generation is sharply divided among itself. Although every critical period uniquely uncovers aspects of the play, including dramatic, textual, religious, political, and psychological ones, historical boundaries do not define or delimit the judgments that the play evokes. A brief survey of critical antipathy directed toward Angelo, Isabella, and the Duke will sufficiently document the influence of conflictive mimesis in spectator responses.²⁴ The commentary on Isabella is the most interesting and detailed because although she is not an obvious villain as is Angelo, she is often perceived as one. The way to read these responses is, of course, to note moments when the critic resembles the object of criticism. The pervasive

emotional tones are those of intolerance, repulsion, and condescension—the very responses censured in the characters.

While many critics realize Angelo is no model of virtue, those who are worth quoting imply that Angelo is categorically worse than they. For example, Charlotte Lennox (1753) claims that by Shakespeare's treatment of "the vicious and hypocritical *Angelo*," the playwright "shews Vice not only pardoned, but left in Tranquility." She recommends that Shakespeare should have treated his source plot quite differently, so that Angelo, "deprived of his Dignity, in Disgrace with his Prince, and the Object of Universal Contempt and Hatred, to compleat his Miseries, he should feel all his former Violence of Passion . . . renewed, and falling into an Excess of Grief . . . stab himself in Despair." Samuel Johnson (1765) similarly believes "every reader feels some indignation when he finds [Angelo] spared," and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1800) concurs that "Our feelings of justice are grossly wounded in Angelo's escape." William Hazlitt (1817) writes, "Mariana is also in love with Angelo, whom we hate." Early in the twentieth century, Agnes Mackenzie (1924) finds Mariana as well as Angelo reprehensible: "But it is to be hoped they had no children." According to Una Ellis-Fermor (1936), Angelo's "impudence leaves the beholder breathless." Wilbur Dunkel (1962) finds him, "So despicable . . . that only Mariana could forgive him."²⁵

Isabella evokes the strongest and most significant denunciations. One of the earliest and most quoted detractors of Isabella is Lennox who claims that Isabella "is a mere Vixen in her Virtue . . . [whose] coarse and unwomanly Reflexions on the Virtue of her Mother [and] exulting Cruelty to the dying Youth, are the Manners of an affected Prude . . ." Denouncing Isabella, Richard White (1854) manages to stereotype and malign a number of women: "Such is Shakespeare's marvellously truthful portraiture of a type which, sad to say, does exist among womankind. . . . *Isabella* is a woman with too much brain or too little heart [who] becomes unfeminine, repulsive, monstrous." Continuing into our century, we hear Brander Matthews (1913) labeling her "deficient both in feeling and in intelligence." Arthur Quiller-Couch (1922), one of her severest critics, first detaches himself from comment. He admits "the critics can make nothing of her" and urges that we let "the opinions of two of her own sex" assist our assessment. He chooses two detractors, Mrs. Jameson (Isabella is "less attractive

and more imposing" than Portia) and Charlotte Lennox (whom I have quoted above). Then, unable to leave the matter in these women's words, he begins to rail: "Still, it has to be admitted that [Isabella] is something rancid in her chastity; and, on top of this, not by any means such a saint as she looks. To put it nakedly, she is all for saving her own soul, and she saves it by turning, of a sudden, into a bare procuress." He continues, authoritatively, "she is chaste, even fiercely chaste, for herself, without quite knowing what chastity means." Finally, he concludes his imaginary relationship with her thus: "In effect, Isabella disappoints."²⁶

Another critic, Jacqueline Rose, has already commented on G. Wilson Knight's (1930) reactions to Isabella.²⁷ She remarks how in G. Wilson Knight's essay, Isabella quickly moves from being considered "more saintly than Angelo" to being a "fiend." Knight's appreciation of the play and of (at times) the character Isabella is belied in his commentary by emotional oscillations similar to those undergone by characters in the play. In addition to Rose's citations, we read in Knight that "She is cold. . . . Isabella's self-centred saintliness is thrown . . . into strong contrast with Lucio's manly anxiety for his friend" and that "It is significant that [Isabella] readily involves Mariana in illicit love: it is always her own, and only her own, chastity that assumes, in her heart, universal importance."

Unlike Knight's ambivalent estimate, Ellis-Fermor's assessment is univocally harsh, maintaining that the character of Isabella, "seals our impression of a world-order ineradicably corrupted and given over to evil." Weak as Claudio is, "his self-indulgence cannot stand comparison with hers, with the pitiless, unimaginative, self-absorbed virtue which sustains her." According to H. B. Charlton (1949), "she makes herself unattractive," speaking at times as a "self-possessed hussy." E. C. Pettet (1949) cannot understand how "such a shallow, cold-blooded creature as Isabella, aware only of an abstract and formal virtue" could "utter lines like those [2.2.114-22 'Merciful heaven...angels weep'], so warm, pitiful and extensive in vision." Bertrand Evans (1960) speaks of Isabella's "snow-broth," "outraged inhumanity," and "frozen humanity." An interesting take, impassioned yet methodically distanced, is presented by Patrick Swinden (1973), who claims "The main point about her is neither her frigidity nor her inhumanity, but her ridiculousness." Anne Barton (1974), by contrast, finds her frigid: "Beneath the

habit of the nun there is a narrow-minded but passionate girl afflicted with an irrational terror of sex which she has never admitted to herself."²⁸

Following psychoanalytical currents, twentieth-century directors disarm Isabella's threat to their audience's *ethos* by accentuating her sublimation of aggression and eroticism beneath a religious exterior. John Barton's 1970 RSC production was colored by religious skepticism, presenting an Isabella whose "defense of virtue conceals an intense spiritual pride and selfishness." Keith Hack's 1974 RSC Isabella was valuable to Vienna primarily because of "her ability to manipulate male desire." Following a Freudian model of desire more explicitly, Robin Phillips, in his 1975 Stratford Ontario production, portrayed an Isabella who vacillated between an absolute repulsion of sex and an avid, even incestuous, appetite.²⁹

The Duke shares with Isabella the severest condemnation, and often the two are indicted together. According to Lennox, "the Character of the Duke is absurd and ridiculous." Johnson, perhaps recording his response before reading the final lines of the play, writes, "After the pardon of two murderers, Lucio might be treated by the good duke with less harshness; but perhaps the poet intended to show, what is too often seen, *that men easily forgive wrongs which are not committed against themselves.*" White anticipates much of twentieth century criticism: "The Duke, a well-meaning, undecided, feeble-minded, contemplative man, needed somebody to act for him and govern him." Such reactions continue into recent criticism, including that of Marco Mincoff (1966), who calls the Duke "an excrescence who ruins the play," and that of Marcia Riefer (1984), for whom "The 'savior' in *Measure for Measure* turns out to be a villain as well."³⁰

Stage productions of *Measure* during this century capitalize on representations of the Duke as politically incompetent and, at times, sexually incontinent. In the 1906 Oscar Ashe production, "The character of the Duke is criticized as 'idiotic,' and reviewers complain that 'we cannot like a Duke who deserts his post just to see how a substitute will behave in his place.'" According to Michael Scott, John Barton's 1970 RSC production presented an "impotent ruler" who, according to Bock, was "completely deluded about his power to correct and instruct his subjects." More extreme than Barton's in its "subversion" of the Duke was Keith Hack's 1974 RSC production. The Duke's manipulation was "a

conscious, vicious exercise of absolute power carried out by a sociopathic ruler who is intoxicated by the joys of exploitation." According to Berry, this "demoniac Duke" had, according to Bock, a "delight in sleazy sexuality," which, according to Scott, was evidenced by the Duke "fondling Isabella whilst pretending to comfort her, lustfully encompassing her in the folds of his cloak." According to Berry, a similar emphasis on lechery was achieved in Robin Phillips' 1975 Stratford, Ontario production. The interest in staging a sexually deviant Duke imitates, of course, Lucio's slander in the play, and it reciprocates the Duke's notorious employment of Angelo to uncover promiscuity in Venice.³¹

IV

As I argued in the introduction, *Measure* succeeds exactly where it fails: it catches spectators in a web of partisan character judgments. Referring to all drama, but particularly to *Measure for Measure*, Harriett Hawkins writes, "there are certain moments in the drama when most members of any audience—Christian or pagan, Elizabethan, modern, or, for that matter, Greek—are virtually forced to join the devil's party, perhaps without knowing it."³² If the devil is another name for the forces of mimetic desire as they shape humanity, then my analysis wholeheartedly supports Hawkins' description. The harsh commentaries on Angelo, Isabella, and the Duke indicate reactions in the critics that are similar to those represented by Angelo when he arraigns Claudio, out of all Vienna. Such reactions are both defensible and precarious. All the above-cited critics mimic on a verbal level the dramatic characters that they oppose. No one is immune from interindividual doubling. Those who enter into character evaluation, no matter their theoretical underpinnings, reveal themselves more deeply than they would like to admit. And of course, not every impassioned mental event is recorded, especially in post-Bradleyan criticism.

Critical engagement with fictitious characters is a specter that refuses to die, in spite of our post-modernist condition.³³ For example, Harold Bloom describes two comic characters as "the obsessive slanderer" and "the dissolute." The Duke, Claudio, and Isabella, according to Bloom, "descend even lower in our esteem."³⁴ As Bloom's language suggests, the verbal constructions in a play stimulate emotional—even personal—reactions within readers. This phenomenal response evidences the potency

of the human imagination to construct coherent, animated wholes from clusters of signs, whether the signs are purely linguistic (as in literature) or both linguistic and non-linguistic (as in one's neighbor). Every play elicits the kind of moral judgments that I cited from *Measure's* critical commentaries. This universality only urges that literature adequately represents something which affects us much the same way as do our social interactions. However, the power of conflictive mimesis envelopes productions of *Measure for Measure* as it does few of Shakespeare's other plays.³⁵

The most common label attached to the faults of Angelo, Isabella, the Duke, and, to a lesser extent, Claudio is "hypocrisy." And hypocrisy results directly from reciprocity, from individuals trying to be one thing while their judgments bind them to being another. In this hypocritical (i.e., both duplicitous and sub-critical) fashion, spectators vehemently reject the characters they have passed judgment upon. What I have called judgment leads to what Girard calls sacrifice. The ultimate result of reductive, judgmental responses is the expulsion of one or more elements of the society or text—depending on the situation.³⁶ This expulsion convinces its agents that they are justified in their activities. Benign or malignant, imaginary or politically acted out, this act of expulsion is something few of us would take pride in: a scapegoating.

Often the term is applied to literary activities. Characters, texts, interpretations, and interpreters are scapegoated for a critic's convenience. Speaking of those who address structural problems with characterological solutions, E. M. Tillyard writes, "some earlier critics felt justified in making the Isabella of the first half of the play the scapegoat of the play's imperfections."³⁷ Alfred Harbage sees the process in many of Shakespeare's plays, writing that the "fierce disputes . . . mean that the plays, purposely laden with moral stimulus, have achieved their purpose of inducing moral excitement."³⁸ The fierce disputes that seem to begin and stop in critical quarters register desires and judgments which potentially depict and/or determine the condition of the critics.

Carolyn Brown's criticism of *Measure* provides one of the clearest examples of critical scapegoating. She explicitly argues that both Angelo and Claudio are Isabella's victims.³⁹ Arguing like a defense lawyer in a rape case, Brown asserts that Isabella "slyly provokes her partner [Angelo] to assault her." Then "she begins a concentrated 'seduction of the aggressor,' Rudolph Loewenstein's description of a

masochistic ploy that attracts the aggressor to the victim—often in a sexual way.” Finally, “Angelo is sabotaged into bringing his sadism out of hiding and proposing the rape that Isabella unconsciously provokes.” When Brown turns her attention to Isabella’s victimization of Claudio, she claims that Isabella “subjects Claudio to more heartless, ruthless taunting than she did her first victim.” Isabella’s “depictions of brutal onslaughts and the writhing of victims betray the intense, almost over-powering attraction of her sadomasochistic longings.” Her ultimate goal is to “sabotage [Claudio] into proposing rape.” Brown thus succeeds in transferring the guilt from Angelo to Isabella in a manner worthy of Hawkins’ “devil’s party.” The signifier is victim for Brown, in a way she does not comment upon.⁴⁰

If the play invites or encourages scapegoating, it also demystifies it—or at least it invites interpretations that do. In an article that is more penetrating than most Christian-allegorical interpretations of *Measure*, Carole Diffey explains why Angelo’s pardon both infuriates and satisfies (often the same) spectators. Among other reasons, it infuriates because it opposes our “desire not for justice but for revenge.” It satisfies, because “we know Angelo almost in the same way that we know ourselves.” Not only Angelo, but almost every character in the play foregrounds our self-contradictory ethics, so that the play,

foreshadows the notion of justice that we are beginning to arrive at today and which is making us wary, even in our criminal courts, of the idea of judging others, increasingly conscious of our ignorance of factors that ought to be taken into account, and doubtful of the efficacy of punishment, as in the cases of Lucio and Barnadine [*sic*], to reform or even to deter, without that recognition of his fault on the part of the offender which renders it superfluous, as it is finally rendered for Angelo.

According to Diffey, the play neither affirms our overdifferentiating, judgmental tendencies, nor does it relinquish morality to a “kind of universal forgiveness which, eliminating moral distinctions rather than accentuating them, would plunge us into the moral vacuum of Lear’s ‘None does offend, none, I say, none’ (IV.vi.170).” Instead, it has the potential for “awakening the sensibility of the culprit until he is capable of judging himself.”⁴¹ To Diffey’s vision of this play, I would add that the themes of reciprocity and mercy so consciously hammered out in five acts invite the spectator to admit that he or she is “the culprit,” or at least is capable of becoming one.

In *Measure for Measure*, therefore, desire is put on display directly and violently. *Measure*, a masterpiece of mediated desire, could never have been Shakespeare's most popular play because it does something to spectators that they are reluctant to admit: it *scandalizes* them. The scandal of mimetic desire is not one person's offense, but the invariable complicity of offenses that result from attempts to rid a society or a play of offense. On an imaginary plane, the play provides for spectators one or another character that functions as a scandal, as that which, according to Hamerton-Kelly, "has the sense of a hindrance that one needs to keep desire alive. The scandal is the model/obstacle or the victim that desire cannot live with and cannot live without."⁴² Such has been the reception of *Measure for Measure*. Not only the characters, but the play itself has maintained an uneasy but indispensable place in the re-evaluations of Shakespeare's canon. While *Measure's* increased popularity over the last three decades owes much to its topicality of women and their bodies, it also owes much to our culture's sensitivity to the victim. Our understanding of our complicity in the things we hate is increasing, making our interpretations of *Measure* not necessarily deeper, but more circumspect. Through the play, we are able to see the dangers of overdifferentiation and still respond viscerally to what we define as its detestable elements. In the end, however, the playwright, like the Duke, smooths our complicity over with an ending more comic than tragic. Like some critics, we may sigh a breath of relief that the play is a comedy, however strange. Or like other critics, we may remain unconvinced by the fifth act, concluding that the play's dramatic potential is unfortunately undermined by this puzzling shift. In either case, our attention remains fixed on the generic form, rather than on the form of mimesis to which we were exposed. All the while, forgetting what we felt, we also forget to be thankful it was *just* a play.

Notes

¹ Whenever permissible, I use “spectators” to include both audiences and readers. The sort of reactions of interest to this article result from both dramatic productions of *Measure* and from imagined productions. From the eighteenth century to the present, both scholarly responses and audience responses echo each other in concerns about the ambiguous moral standing of the characters, particularly Isabella and the Duke.

² Several essays take up the topic of the play as a critical mirror, among which are Willard H. Durham, “*Measure for Measure* as Measure for Critics,” *Essays in Criticism: University of California Publications in English* 1 (1929): 111-132; A. J. Franklin, “Changing Critical Attitude toward *Measure for Measure*,” *Journal of English Studies* 3 (1980): 13-18; and Jonathan R. Price, “*Measure for Measure* and the Critics,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 20 (1969): 179-204. My essay follows in this vein, although instead of emphasizing the play’s power to elicit reactions consistent with critical trends, as they do, mine stresses the play’s power to generate within critics (and by extension, live audiences) similar desires and attitudes as those represented in the play. Generally the effects of the play motivate analysis of the play, rather than analysis of the audience. Critics frequently focus on specific arguments about characters instead of focusing on the character of their arguments, which is that they are deeply troubled by the play to the extent that their reactions are not only cognitive but emotional.

³ The two-play-two-audience theory contends that a playwright encodes his play with a double message: a simple message directed toward the simpletons of the audience, and an ironic, more sophisticated message directed toward the sages. This duplicitous structure allows the playwright to please simultaneously both the uncritical masses and the more thoughtful members of an audience. In recent exchanges, the controversy over the two-audience theory overlaps with the contention that a production and a reading of Shakespeare yield significantly different experiences. Harry Berger Jr.’s article, “Text Against Performance in Shakespeare: The Example of *Macbeth*,” *Genre* 2-3 (1982): 49-79, elaborates ways in which a *text* creates ironies to which characters remain oblivious. Richard Levin

responds to Berger in "The New Refutations of Shakespeare," *Modern Philology: A Journal Devoted to Research in Medieval and Modern Literature* 2 (1985): 123-141.

⁴ The most notable (but by no means the only) misreading of Girard occurs in Hayden White's review of *Violence and the Sacred*, published as "Ethnological 'Lie' and Mythical 'Truth,'" (*diacritics* 8 [1978]: 1-9). At one point, White writes, "Take, for example, the case of Nazi Germany. Here surely is a society which meets Girard's criteria of healthiness. . . . Is Nazi Germany then to be taken as a model solution for the problems of 'modernity'?" (8). This alleged alliance between Girard's theory and any justification of violence is thoroughly discredited by Girard's *Things Hidden from the Foundation of the World*, published first in France as *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde*—the same year as White's review. For a response to White's interpretation, see Cesáreo Bandera's review of Girard's major works (*Modern Language Notes* [1978]: 1007-14, esp. 1011).

⁵ For the fullest account, see Book III, "Interdividual Psychology," of *Things Hidden from the Foundation of the World*, 281-431. See also Chap. 1 of Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly's *Sacred Violence*, 13-39, and Raymond Schwager's *Must There Be Scapegoats?*, 8-18. See also Jean-Michel Oughourlian's *The Puppet of Desire: The Psychology of Hysteria, Possession, and Hypnosis*. Trans. Eugene Webb. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1991.

⁶ All quotations are from the New Arden *Measure for Measure*, ed. and intro. J. W. Lever (London: Routledge, 1965).

⁷ These terms pervade discussions of mimetic desire. Sometimes "appropriative" is used in place of "acquisitive," and "conflictual" in place of "conflictive."

⁸ I am indebted to John and Paul Sandford's *The Transformation of the Inner Man* (S. Plainfield, New Jersey: Bridge, 1982) for its sensitivity to the psychology of judgment. While my conception of "judgment" does not alter Girard's major contentions about human behavior, it takes them to a more "microscopic" level of analysis.

⁹ For examples of judicial readings, see John W. Dickinson, "Renaissance Equity and *Measure for Measure*" *Shakespeare Quarterly* 13 (1962): 287-97; and Wilbur Dunkel, "Law and Equity in *Measure for Measure*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 13 (1962): 275-85.

For examples of theological readings, see C. J. Sisson, *The Mythical Sorrows of Shakespeare*, Annual Shakespeare Lecture of the British Academy, April 25, 1934; R. W. Chambers, *The Jacobean Shakespeare and "Measure for Measure"*, Annual Shakespeare Lecture of the British Academy, 1937; Roy Battenhouse, "Measure for Measure and Christian Doctrine of the Atonement," *PMLA* 61 (1946), 1029-59; G. Wilson Knight, "Measure for Measure and the Gospels," *The Wheel of Fire*, 1949, 80-106; and Nevill Coghill, "Comic form in *Measure for Measure*," *SS* 8 (1955), 14-27.

¹⁰ According to Johnson, "Angelo's crimes were such as must sufficiently justify punishment, whether its end be to secure the innocent from wrong or to deter guilt by example; and I believe every reader feels some indignation when he finds him spared" (*Samuel Johnson On Shakespeare.*, ed. W.K. Wimsatt, Jr. [New York: Hill and Wang, 1960], 76). Similarly, Coleridge remarks, "the pardon and marriage of Angelo not merely baffles the strong indignant claim of justice (for cruelty, with lust and damnable baseness, cannot be forgiven, because we cannot conceive of them as being *morally* repented of) but it is likewise degrading to the character of woman" (*Coleridge's Writings on Shakespeare*, ed. Terence Hawkes [New York: Penguin, 1959], 249-50).

F. R. Leavis, writing "If we don't see ourselves in Angelo, we have taken the play very imperfectly," rightly diagnoses these symptoms: "One has, then, to point out as inoffensively as possible that the point of the play depends upon Angelo's not being a certified criminal-type, capable of a wickedness that marks him off from you and me: 'Go to your bosom; / Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know / That's like my brother's fault...'" (*The Common Pursuit* [London: Chatto & Windus, 1958], 171-72).

¹¹ Charlotte Lennox, *Shakespear Illustrated*, 1753 (New York: AMS, 1973), 35.

¹² William Witherle Lawrence, *Shakespeare's Problem Comedies*, second ed. (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1960), 121.

¹³ Jocelyn Powell, "Theatrical *Trompe l'oeil* in *Measure for Measure*," *Shakespearian Comedy*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer, *Stratford-Upon-Avon Studies* 14 (London: Edward Arnold, 1972), 184.

¹⁴ This series of differentiating responses begins in the text with his separation from Mariana. The play and contemporary civil laws make clear that the lack of dowry did not necessitate his slanderous means of putting Mariana away (see Lever, liii-liv, and Victoria Hayne, "Performing Social Practice: The Example of *Measure for Measure*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 44.1 [1993]: 1-29, esp. 3-8). Throughout the play he obtains emotional distance by constantly walking out on other characters, including Escalus, Froth and Pompey (2.1.137); Isabella (in both interviews); and, figuratively, the entire city, begging for "Immediate sentence, then, and sequent death" (5.1.371). He prefers distinctive death over communal life.

¹⁵ In an article that contains a useful bibliography on psychoanalytic readings of *Measure*, Carolyn Brown states that Isabella's sexual desire and pain are conflated under the rubric of spiritual discipline and that the "subterranean" sexuality of all the protagonists is aroused "not by affection but by abuse" ("Erotic Religious Flagellation and Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*," *English Literary Renaissance* 16 [1986]: 141). In another article, Brown directs the "unconscious" hypothesis toward Isabella's displaced pleasure: "She choreographs her flagellation scene with the sound of beating. The fantasizer's onomatopoeic words imitate the sounds produced during the whipping. Like these fantasizers, Isabella reiterates the key word 'thunder,' chanting the word as though savoring the sound" ("*Measure for Measure*: Isabella's Beating Fantasies," *American Imago* 43 [1986]: 72). Similarly, Harriet Hawkins asserts, "Moreover, Isabella's fiery refusal to yield to [Angelo] is charged with an erotic power of its own" and raises the question whether "Isabella's initial desire for 'more severe restraints' within the convent suggest[s] that there is something to restrain? Why her emphasis on woman's frailty?" (*The Devil's Party* [Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985], 69, 70). Contrary to this vein of analysis, my argument contends that the froth of eroticized language and imagery in *Measure* is incidental to the core of the protagonists' problems. Their error is not repression that emerges as

sadomasochistic desire but judgment that brings reciprocal effects. The form of the dysfunction (measure for measure) is far more fundamental than the content (sexual desire).

¹⁶On Isabella's eroticized description of death, Lever writes, "Isabella expresses her readiness to die in erotic terms" (lxxxvi). Hawkins shares his opinion ("'The Devil's Party': Virtues and Vices in *Measure for Measure*," *Shakespeare Studies* 31 [1978]: 107). Freud, in "The Dream Work," writes there is not "any doubt that all weapons and tools are used as symbols for the male organ"; thus Isabella's reference to "keen whips." Furthermore he writes, "Since 'bed and board' constitute marriage, the latter often takes the place of the former . . ." (*The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey [New York: Avon, 1965], 391). Isabella's reference to "a bed"—rather than "board"—being more explicit, demonstrates less displacement. Finally, a sense of disgust (Isabella's "That longing have been sick for") is frequently mentioned by Freud as a response to sexual desire, and the redness of "rubies" might suggest the hymen (i.e. cherry) or menstruation.

¹⁷In *Between Men*, Eve Sedgwick adapts interdividual psychology in order to illuminate the asymmetrical patterns of power and sexuality that emerge through her study of male-male relationships in English literature, beginning with Shakespeare. While she seeks to recover the "hidden obliquities" that Girard's transcultural, non-gender specific method does not of itself recognize, she notes that Girard's "transhistorical clarity" has its place (*Between Man: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* [New York: Columbia UP, 1985], 22). In this essay, I clearly follow the scope of Girard's method rather than that of Sedgwick's, particularly because the "sexual" conflicts I find in *Measure for Measure* are always rooted in violence. While the shows of power are expressed according to specific sexual roles, the mechanisms through which the appropriations and expropriations of desire occur are not gender dependent.

¹⁸Similarly, Cynthia Lewis comments: "Judgment in *Measure* is ultimately a collective activity. It is of no small consequence, for instance, that just as Claudio becomes penitent, the Duke turns amorous. By the play's end, in fact, Claudio seems to have had more effect on the Duke's way of life than the

Duke has had on Claudio's" ("Dark Deeds Darkly Answered": Duke Vincentio and Judgment in *Measure for Measure*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 34 [1983]: 286).

¹⁹ Stephen Greenblatt, "Martial Law in the Land of Cockaigne," in *Shakespearean Negotiations* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988), 135.

²⁰ Cynthia Lewis, "'Dark Deeds Darkly Answered,'" 285.

²¹ Lewis, 285.

²² Harriet Hawkins notes this power of *Measure* in contrast to its absence in similar plays: "Where *The Malcontent* and *The Tempest*, for their individual and proper dramatic reasons, subordinate their emotional impact for the sake of and by means of other kinds of effects, the first half of *Measure for Measure* makes a direct assault on the emotions" (*Likenesses of Truth in Elizabethan and Restoration Drama* [Oxford: Oxford UP, 1972], 57). The "emotional impact" sustained by the play compels the spectators to identify with the characters—and not always sympathetically. As a result of assaulting the characters and spectators with a matrix of ethical concerns, Shakespeare achieves an unreflective mediation of desire upon the spectators.

²³ In my classroom the outbursts of emotion have been incredibly vivid and unpredictable. Students of both sexes denounce and defend Isabella, the Duke, and Angelo with such intensity that they sometimes leave their seats. On one occasion, two students turned the matter into a personal issue and had to seek reconciliation with each other at a latter date. On another occasion, one woman issued her verdict, "Isabella makes a shitty martyr," without remembering afterward what she had said (when asked permission for quotation).

²⁴ Claudio, being more a placeholder than an instigator of action in the play, is generally dismissed with little critical reaction. A few remarks deserve mention. Coleridge states "Claudio is detestable" (*Coleridge's Writings on Shakespeare*, ed. Terence Hawkes [New York: Penguin, 1959], 250). U. M. Ellis-Fermor finds him "selfish and self-indulgent" (*The Jacobean Drama* [London: Methuen, 1936], 261). And William Empson (1951) attributes his repulsion to Shakespeare: "This [alteration in plot, reducing Claudio's role] seems good evidence that [Shakespeare] found the behaviour of Claudio

disgusting" ("Sense in *Measure for Measure*," in *The Structure of Complex Words* [Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1967], 280).

²⁵ Lennox, 25-26; Samuel Johnson, *Samuel Johnson On Shakespeare*, ed. W.K. Wimsatt, Jr. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1960), 76; Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Coleridge's Writings on Shakespeare*, ed. Terence Hawkes (New York: Penguin, 1959), 250; William Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, ed. J. H. Lobban (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1915), 233; Agnes Mure Mackenzie, *The Women in Shakespeare's Plays* (London: William Heinemann, 1924), 243; U. M. Ellis-Fermor, *The Jacobean Drama* (London: Methuen, 1936), 261; Wilbur Dunkel, "Law and Equity in *Measure for Measure*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 13 (1962): 284.

²⁶ Lennox, 32-34; Richard Grant White, *Shakespeare's Scholar* (New York: D. Appleton, 1854), 149-50; Brander Matthews, *Shakespeare As a Playwright* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 229; Arthur Quiller-Couch, intro. *Measure for Measure*, by William Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1922), xxvii, xxviii, xxx, xxxii.

²⁷ Jacqueline Rose, "Sexuality in the Reading of Shakespeare: *Hamlet* and *Measure for Measure*," in *Alternative Shakespeares*, ed. John Drakakis (London: Methuen, 1985), 95-118; G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire: Essays in Interpretation of Shakespeare's Sombre Tragedies* (London: Oxford UP, 1930), 101, 102.

²⁸ Ellis-Fermor, 262, 263; H. B. Charlton, *Shakespearean Comedy*, 4th ed. (London: Methuen, 1949), 254; E. C. Pettet, *Shakespeare and the Romance Tradition*, (London: Staples, 1949), 160; Bertrand Evans, *Shakespeare's Comedies* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1960), 196, 197, 207; Patrick Swinden, *An Introduction to Shakespeare's Comedies* (New York: Barnes, 1973), 144; Anne Barton, intro. *Measure for Measure*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin. 1974), 546.

²⁹ Judith L. Bock, "Measure for Measure: The Duke and Isabella On Stage at the RSC, 1950-1987," Ph.D. diss., University of Colorado, 1989), 98, 126; Ralph Berry, "Measure for Measure on the Contemporary Stage," *Humanities Association Review* 28 [1977]: 246.

³⁰ Lennox, 31; Johnson, 76-77; White, 150; Marco Mincoff, "Measure for Measure: A Question of Approach," *Shakespeare Studies* 2 (1966): 149; Marcia Riefer, "'Instruments of Some More Mightier Member': The Constriction of Female Power in *Measure for Measure*," in *William Shakespeare's Measure for Measure*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea, 1987), 133-134. For similar judgments see Quiller-Couch, xxxiii; Harold Goddard, *The Meaning of Shakespeare* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1951), 438; and William Empson, "Sense in *Measure for Measure*," in *The Structure of Complex Words* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1967), 280.

³¹ Bock, 21; Michael Scott, *Renaissance Drama and a Modern Audience* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 62; Bock, 108, 114; Berry, 246; Scott, 65; Berry, 244.

³² Harriett Hawkins, "'The Devil's Party': Virtues and Vices in *Measure for Measure*," *Shakespeare Studies* 31 (1978): 109.

³³ Harriet Hawkins writes:

Modern criticism, which frequently argues that such characters [like Hamlet and Falstaff] have no right to any existence apart from their immediate dramatic context, tends to imply that this phenomenon does not or should not exist. But whether or not it should, it does. The passionate adoration which individual critics accord to their own, private, saintly, or lovable Isabellas, and the equally passionate revulsion which other critics express towards their own smug, vixenish, intolerant, selfish Isabellas, testify to Isabella's after-life in the heavens or hells assigned to her by individual imaginations. (*Likenesses of Truth*, 58)

³⁴ Harold Bloom, ed. and intro., *Modern Critical Interpretations: William Shakespeare's Measure for Measure* (New York: Chelsea, 1987), 1-2, 4.

³⁵ Perhaps *The Merchant of Venice* comes closest to evoking such intensely divided responses, although the ideological concerns of *Merchant* would necessarily outrage spectators, independent of the dramatist's efforts toward that end.

³⁶ Girard writes, "I fully agree that, in the case of plays like *Richard III* or *The Merchant of Venice*, an infinite number of readings is possible, and this infinity is determined by 'the play of the

signifier.' I do not agree that this play is gratuitous, and that it is in the nature of all signifiers as signifiers to produce such infinite play. The literary signifier always becomes a victim. It is a victim of the signified, at least metaphorically, in the sense that its play, its *différence*, or what you will, is almost inevitably sacrificed to the one-sidedness of a single-minded differentiated structure à la Lévi-Strauss" ("To Entrap the Wisest': A Reading of *The Merchant of Venice*," in *Literature and Society*, ed. Edward W. Said [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1981], 119).

³⁷ E.M.W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's Problem Plays* (London: U of Toronto P, 1950), 123. Interestingly, Tillyard has been recognized as a scapegoat himself for his monolithic political stance: "taking Tillyard as their primary scapegoat, making him stand as the representative of almost four hundred years of liberal-humanist critical illusions . . . frees cult-historicists to recuperate the Elizabethan world picture" —Carol Thomas Neely, "Constructing the Subject: Feminist Practice and the New Renaissance Discourses," *ELR* 18 (1988): 12.

³⁸ Alfred Harbage, *As They Liked It: A Study of Shakespeare's Moral Artistry* (Gloucester, Massachusetts: Torchbook, 1961), 16.

³⁹ "Measure for Measure: Isabella's Beating Fantasies," 70-77.

⁴⁰ Similarly, Harry Jaffa (1981) argues extensively that "Isabella has, unknown to herself, seduced Angelo" ("Chastity as a Political Principle: An Interpretation of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*," in *Shakespeare as a Political Thinker*, ed. John Alvis and Thomas G. West [Durham, North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press, 1981], 208). He blames Isabella for Angelo's fall, arguing Angelo no longer trusts the law as a result of Isabella's antinomianism: "In a sense, Angelo is taking a proper revenge upon Isabella: she has destroyed his dignity as a judge; he will do the same to her saintliness. She has put him on a level with fornicators; he will treat her as a prostitute. Here too we find a measure for measure" (211).

If Isabella has victims, they are not sexual but sacrificial victims. As Cynthia Lewis notes, in 3.1.231-33, Isabella thinks both Angelo and Mariana would be better off dead. In Lewis' words, "At

the bottom of [Isabella's] reasoning lies an escapist impulse to ignore human problems" ("Dark Deeds Darkly Answered," 283).

⁴¹ Carole T. Diffey, "The Last Judgment in *Measure for Measure*," *The Durham Univ. Journal* 66 (1974): 236-237.

⁴² Robert Hamerton-Kelly, *Sacred Violence: Paul's Hermeneutic of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 71.