



**A Measure
for A Measure**

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE



An MFA Directing Thesis Production

Measure for Measure

by William Shakespeare

directed by GERRY MACKAY

set design by JANICE CHIU

costume design by CHRISTINE REIMER

lighting design by ERIN HARRIS

sound design by ANDREAS KAHRE

NOVEMBER 13 - 22, 2003

Frederic Wood Theatre



theatre
at UBC

In the interest of promoting our creative work and encouraging theatre studies in our community, Theatre at UBC proudly presents this Companion Guide to *Measure for Measure*

UNMASKING MEASURE FOR MEASURE

by GERRY MACKAY

MFA Candidate

Department of Theatre, Film, and Creative Writing

The main contributing factor to my approach to directing *Measure for Measure* is the analysis of action within the play's structure. What does the play do? An analysis of cause and effect placed the play under the microscope and informed me of the gesture or re-occurring action of character and what period to set it in.

For example, one of the major drives of the Duke is his need for self-discovery, and one of his tactics is 'testing'. He tests Angelo, Isabella, Claudio, and the city of Vienna. Another tactic the Duke uses derives from the fact that he does not

My approach then is to use some features of the early Twentieth Century — Freud and Fairy Tales — in order to illuminate the world of the play for a modern audience

divulge information; he is a game-player dressed up in a disguise, which allows him to be in a position of omnipotence and yet rule with a concealed identity. This ironically allows him to retain the position of power, or rule, that he formally relinquished. By using these tactics the Duke becomes a trigger for one of the major themes in the play: seeming and duality. Characters are at conflict with their emotions; what they appear to be is not what they are. This duality is most dramatically embodied by Angelo, because he gains power via the Duke from his appointment to Deputy, and misuses that position for personal gain.

The action of 'testing' by the Duke, and the fact the play takes place in Vienna led me to Freud. The period of 1899 encompasses a major paradigm shift in our understanding of the subconscious, and marks the publication of Freud's work, *The Interpretation of Dreams*. I am not suggesting that the Duke is Freud, but his action of testing is a reference point around which I could create a setting for the play to unfold. 1899 also represents a shift in power or thinking in that it marks the end of the century with a sense of angst or dread — and also an anticipation of renewal in the New Year. A parallel to this can be suggested, I believe, in Shakespeare's witnessing a shift in power of his own: a shift in rule from Queen Elizabeth I to King James. His dramatic concerns about the testing of a 'new' dispensation of power are implicit in the form of *Measure for Measure*.

Another form of narrative story telling which reached its height in the 1900s was the Fairy Tale. I rediscovered these peculiar, 'dream-like', frightening stories that were read to

children and thought of *Measure for Measure*. The word 'enchantment' comes to mind, because that is what the Duke embodies post Act 3.i.. I am not sure he has the magical powers of Prospero, but events and time move at an accelerated 'magical' speed. My approach then is to use some features of the early Twentieth Century — Freud and Fairy Tales — in order to illuminate the world of the play for a modern audience.

Gerry Mackay



PAST PRODUCTIONS OF MEASURE FOR MEASURE

by TONY DAWSON
Department of English

Measure for Measure, with its modern feel and ironic tone, came into its own in the second half of the 20th century. Though it enjoyed a brief vogue during the 18th century—its frank treatment of sexuality more acceptable then than in the following 150 years or so—it was performed only infrequently between when it was written in 1603-4 and 1950. Then, in the 1960s and '70s it became a favorite of producers and is now as popular as *Twelfth Night*. Its central action is built around a case of sexual harassment, which makes it as up to date as yesterday's newspaper. And, in the brilliant scenes between Isabella and Angelo, where every word bristles with sexual tension, it features some of Shakespeare's most intense dramatic writing. It is also a comedy, with a benevolent disguised Duke who guides his wayward charges to reconciliation and a happy ending. Or so it seems. But the play invites ambiguous and even cynical responses. Perhaps Duke Vincentio is a charlatan, a fool, a sensualist, or even a sadist, his elaborate rescue of Isabella either self-interested or gratuitously cruel. Performances have gone both ways.

In 1950, Peter Brook, one of the most innovative of 20th century directors, emphasized the harsh prison world and gritty streets of Vienna, but his Duke was wholly wise, any ambiguity about him being reduced by deep cuts to the part. His eagerness to educate Isabella to mercy was highlighted by a single brilliant effect: Brook instructed Isabella (Barbara Jefford) to wait as long as she felt the audience could endure it before beginning her plea for Angelo's exoneration in Act 5 (the pause sometimes lasted as long as two minutes). She had, that is, to struggle with her desire for revenge against the man she thinks has unjustly executed her brother. For his pains, the Duke was rewarded with her hand, now warmer and more pliant than it had been before her ordeal. In 1970, in a move responsive to contemporary feminism, John Barton changed all that; his Duke was no "power divine" (as Angelo calls him) but a bumbling inept mortal whose clumsy advances in the closing moments were met with confusion and uncertainty by a bewildered Isabella, who was left alone to stare out at the audience. Noting that Isabella says nothing when the Duke twice makes his tentative marriage proposals, Barton and Estelle Kohler interpreted the silence as dismay rather than acceptance. Ever since, that uneasy approach has been an option, frequently, though not always, taken up; either way, modern Vincentios have had to earn the right to marry Isabella—it doesn't simply go with the territory.

In general, the line that a director and company take on the Duke will determine the whole production. One extreme,

exemplified by Tyrone Guthrie in 1966, would see him as a kind of "heavenly Bridegroom," though this allegorical approach has fallen out of favour. More recent directors have chosen darker alternatives. In a punk-inspired production in Stratford, Ontario in 1985, Michael Bogdanov began his version in a night club with leather-clad whores and transvestites performing a frenzied sexual dance. They circled and gyrated around a well dressed customer who turned out to be the pleasure-loving Duke, clad in blazer and gray flannels, who gradually subsided to the floor as they pivoted above him. This set the tone for a sexually knowing and at the same time rather charming Duke whose cynicism and good intentions balanced each other, his very ambiguity a response to the elastic nature of the play.

Indeed, such ambiguity epitomizes the vexed nature of this problematic and unconventional comedy. If Isabella was once seen as repressed and uptight, her passionate religious devotion and commitment to her own values, together with her refusal to bend to sexual blackmail, are now likely to inspire admiration or at least grudging acceptance. Juliet Stevenson's wonderfully sympathetic performance in 1983 was influential in shifting perceptions of a character now more often seen, as in two important productions in 1994, as deeply isolated and even violated. Angelo, himself as repressed as anyone, is sometimes led to paw Isabella indecently in his interview with her, though it is surely better to keep the tension wound tight by suggesting that such overt sexual moves are always on the verge but remain (barely) under control. Angelo, in fact, can evoke sympathy as well, as when Alex Jennings (RSC 1994) came face to face with his awareness of his own illicit desire, which crushed his sense of self-worth and drove him to "pitiless self-loathing".

Productions, such as Trevor Nunn's in 1991, are now often set in Freud's Vienna, taking advantage of the historical coincidence that Shakespeare's unblinking exploration of sexual desire and repression is placed in the city of their most illustrious anatomist. In such a world, a liberal life of dance-halls, cafés and brothels can be effectively contrasted with a code of high-buttoned propriety, starched collars and pristine cuffs, and Angelo's dark desires can find a local habitation and a name. The key thing, wherever the play is set, is to find a theatrical approach that can bring into uneasy harmony the many discordant notes that the play sounds—the satiric cynicism of Lucio and the other shady hangers-on, the probing exploration of justice and its failures, the unsavoury humour of Pompey and the brothel scenes, the comically manipulative stratagems of the Duke, and the psychologically painful realism of the scenes between Isabella and Angelo.

The neighbourhood of the Globe Theatre, engraving by Pierre d'Army, 1646.





Duke Vincentio (preliminary drawing)



Julietta (preliminary drawing)



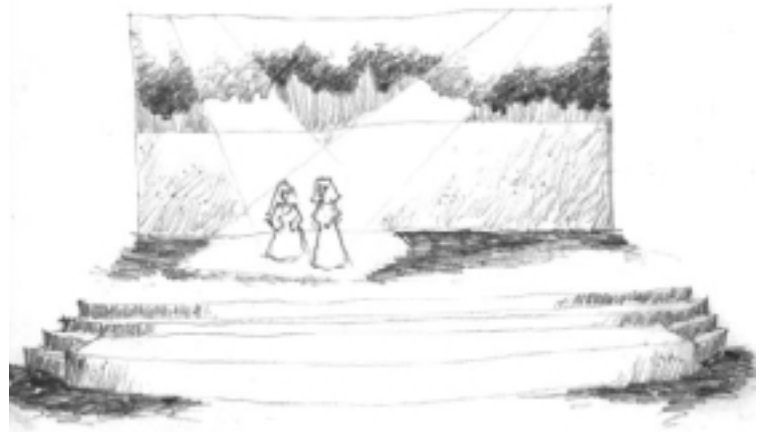
Mistress Overdone (preliminary drawing)

SCENOGRAPHY

by **JANICE CHIU**
Set Designer

I approached the design of *Measure for Measure* in a minimalist manner as the story already speaks for itself. To me, the set should be a visual environment to direct the attention of the audience and to point out the locations physically. The challenge, however, is to have it clearly illustrated without redundancy. Therefore a considerable amount of white space and cut-outs were incorporated to contrast with the solidity of the set pieces and their dissection of space onstage. There is also the incorporation of the idea that the spaces could be filled with shafts of lighting to add spatial dimensions and various colours to the particular worlds in which different characters live.

At first, Vienna had a substantial influence on the design as the sketches included Viennese architecture and layout. However, I soon found that the city wasn't the main focus of Shakespeare's play. The meaning of the text was the focus and, as such, the sense of power, control, morality, mortality, and the various intangible substances that build up the entire story structure all needed to be expressed. Hence, I started to play with more graphic elements to display the truly imbalanced nature of a seemingly well-balanced society. However, Vienna still remains at the back of the set not only to give a sense of locale, but because of its romantic fantasy-like characteristic which aids the fairy tale ambience of the story.



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TRAGIC PROBLEMS COMIC SOLUTIONS

by KATHERINE SIRLUCK
Department of English

Measure for Measure has frequently been termed a “Problem Play”, both because it seems to deal with serious problems (such as the competing claims of justice and mercy, liberty and order, law and equity) and because its structure is generically divided. Its first half is tragic, both in the darkness of the issues presented, and the depth of characterization. Claudio and his fiancée Julietta engage in prenuptial love-making, and are called to account for it before the law by a severe judge, Duke Vincentio’s chosen deputy Angelo. This deputy, uncompromising and assured of his own virtue, seeks to literalize the Bible’s warning that “the wages of sin is death”, usurping divine prerogatives for the State. He condemns the pregnant young woman to prison, and her lover to the executioner’s block, certain that “Tis one thing to be tempted ...another thing to fall”. In a ferocious ironic reversal, Angelo then plummets into a state of erotic obsession when he confronts Claudio’s fiercely virginal sister Isabella, about to enter a convent, who has come to plead for her brother’s life. Isabella finds herself being sexually blackmailed by the

Claudio and Isabella, William Holman Hunt, 1850-53



seemingly upright judge: her virginity for Claudio’s survival. This is an essentially tragic motif. The corrupt judge’s abuse of power makes all authority suspect.

Claudio, young and terrified of dying, abandons his code of honour and begs his sister to save him by submitting to the rape. Isabella, faced with this double masculine betrayal, rebukes Claudio cruelly, and thus fails in the Christian charity she espouses. All three characters are in crisis. There seems no remedy to the tragic dilemma: either a life must be lost, or a soul destroyed. Then suddenly, the Duke, disguised as a friar, intervenes (III, ii, 151) and the rest of the play is “comic” in the sense that solutions are found to each dilemma. A substitute bedmate – Mariana - once contracted to the Deputy, is disguised to take Isabella’s place with the lustful Angelo. A substitute head is found to replace Claudio’s when Angelo breaks his word and goes forward with the execution. In the final scene, virtually everyone is to be married and no one is killed, not even the murderer Barnadine. However, many scholars and audience members find the Duke’s wholesale justice dubious.

The Duke selects Angelo for his severity, to clean up the mess he himself has made with his overly permissive rule, admitting that he does not want to incur public blame for a change in policy. Is Angelo a designated scapegoat from the outset, destined to fall and be exposed as part of the Duke’s plan to rehabilitate his public image? Vincentio’s plotting involves two unwed people in an act of fornication – the same act for which Claudio is condemned. The Duke insists that he cannot be pierced by the “dribbling dart of love”; yet he proposes to Isabella after obliging her to him for saving Claudio’s life. Some commentators believe that the character of Duke Vincentio is meant to be a flattering portrait of King James, before whom the play was performed in 1604. For others, the opportunistic, “slippery” aspects of the Duke make this improbable.

**Measure for Measure explores
the tensions between the
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Measure for Measure is printed in the First Folio with the comedies, and it possesses many of the generic conventions of comedy. The play deals with a comic theme: the struggle to reconcile individual desire with law. *Measure* also contains an array of comic personae. There is a clown, or “simpleton” in the bumbling constable Elbow, whose malapropisms burlesque justice and its ineffectuality in Vienna. A trickster figure, Lucio, teases the Duke, casts shadows on Isabella’s chastity, and escapes execution at the end with a Bre’er

Rabbit device: “Do not marry me to a whore”. A comic Vice, Pompey the bawd, defends prostitution with more wit than Elbow prosecutes it. Pompey and Mistress Overdone, together with Lucio, Kate Keepdown, Barnadine, and Froth, represent the comic world of carnival, the world ruled by flesh, which is traditionally a popular, lower-class realm, where established order is inverted, and the mighty are thrown down – if only for the space of the festival. This motif is echoed in a sinister fashion amongst the more exalted of the play’s characters. Angelo represents the comic “spoilsport”, the principle of Lent, or fasting and penitence, which is hostile to appetite and liberty of all kinds. His ritual punishment at the end of the play is the climax of the comic plot.

The playwright is interested in individual responsibility, but also in how ideas and social practices have a bearing on our actions. *Measure for Measure* explores the tensions between the ideal and the actual, between individual conscience and the law, and between governor and governed. Montaigne wrote: “The very laws of justice cannot subsist without some measure of injustice” (*Essays*, 2, 20). Ideals provide something to aspire to, without which we are bestial; but ideals made into laws can limit our freedom of expression, transforming the most natural gestures into criminal acts. Yet can we live without law? “Go to your bosom”, whispers Isabella, “Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know.” In this play the words “we are all frail”, which ought to encourage compassion and humility, become a disturbing litany, overshadowing comic exuberance and prompting grim reflection.

VIENNA 1899

CARL SCHORSKE

Fin-de-siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture

“At the turn of the century not only Vienna’s finest writers, but its painters and psychologists, even its historians, were preoccupied with the problem of the nature of the individual in a disintegrating society. Out of this preoccupation arose Austria’s contribution to a new view of man.

Traditional liberal culture had centered upon rational man, whose scientific domination of nature and whose moral control of himself were expected to create the good society. In our century, rational man has had to give place to that richer but more dangerous and mercurial creature, psychological man. This new man is not merely a rational animal, but a creature of feeling and instinct. We tend to make him the measure of all things in our culture. Our intra-subjectivist artists paint him. Our existentialist philosophers try to make him meaningful. Our social scientists, politicians and advertising men manipulate him. Even our advanced social critics use him, rather than the criterion of rational right, to judge the worth of a social order. Political and economic oppression itself we assess in terms of psychological frustration. Ironically, in Vienna, it was political frustration that spurred the discovery of this now all-pervasive psychological man. His emergence out of the political crisis of Viennese liberal culture provides my theme . . .”

Vienna Street, Am Graben, circa 1890



MEASURE FOR MEASURE RESOURCE GUIDE

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Editors
Errol Durbach
Annie Smith
Amy Strilchuck

Graphic Design
James A Glen

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