

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S

Measure for Measure

STUDY GUIDE
SCOTCH COLLEGE 2016



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William Shakespeare (1564 - 1616)

In *Measure for Measure*, Shakespeare presents his theories on power and corruption through the medium of a play. Unlike his other works, the ideas and scenarios are explored more deeply than the characters themselves.

Love and lust drive the actions of the characters and affect their ultimate destiny.
Men and women are not equal in the situation.

The story is full of disguise, deception and conspiracy, which Shakespeare uses as devices in exploring his ideas about human weaknesses.

The Duke of Vienna makes it known that he intends to leave the city on a diplomatic mission. He leaves the government in the hands of his deputy, **Angelo**.

Angelo is strict and highly moral. He sets about cleaning up the disorderly streets of Vienna by imprisoning many of the city's pimps and whores. He makes an example of a young nobleman, **Claudio**, by sentencing him to death for getting his young fiancée pregnant before marriage.

The Duke does not in fact leave the city, but disguises himself as a friar, in order to spy on his city's affairs. **Lucio** visits **Claudio's** sister **Isabella**, a nun in training, and suggests she go to **Angelo** to beg for her brother's life.

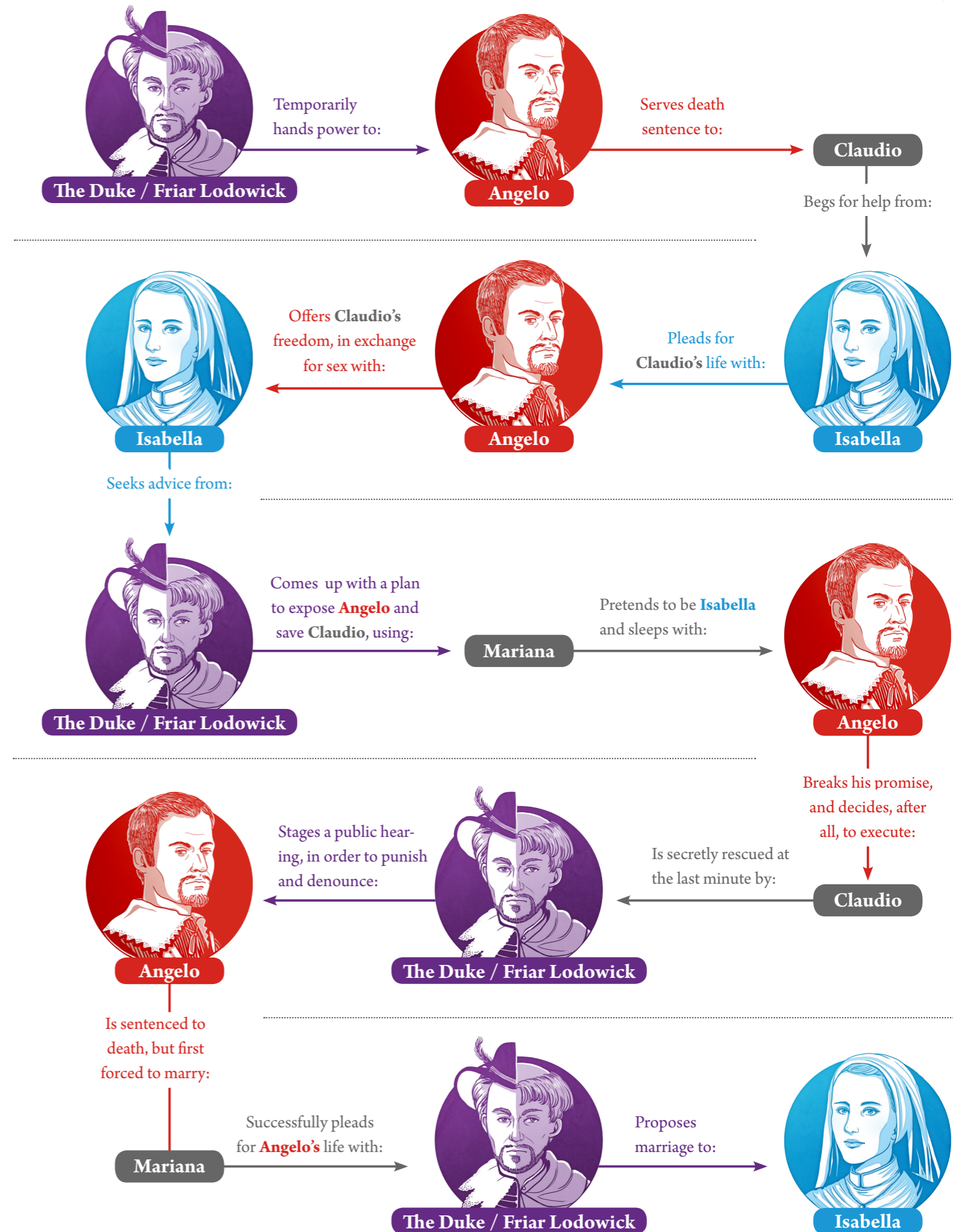
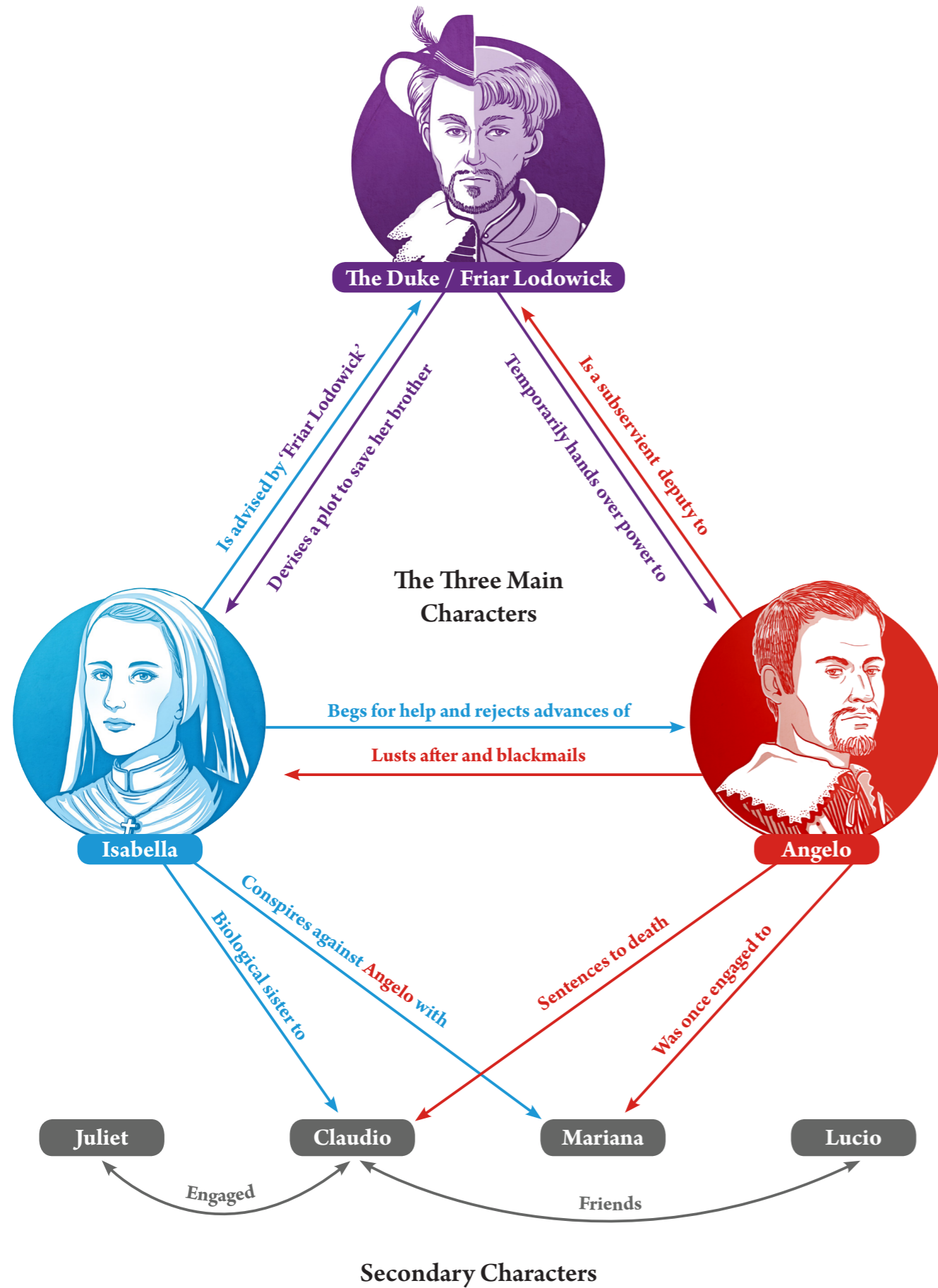
Isabella arranges a meeting with **Angelo**, and pleads with him for mercy. **Angelo** has lustful thoughts about the young virgin, and he eventually offers her a deal: he will spare **Claudio's** life if **Isabella** will agree to sleep with him that night. Distressed, **Isabella** refuses. She visits her brother in prison, tells him of **Angelo's** request and counsels him to prepare himself for death. **Claudio** begs **Isabella** to save his life.

In his disguise as a friar, **the Duke** overhears **Isabella** speaking to **Claudio**. He offers her a solution to trick **Angelo**: he advises **Isabella** to agree to **Angelo's** request but then reveals that he will ask the gentlewoman **Mariana**, who was formerly engaged to **Angelo**, to swap places with her that night.

Mariana agrees to the plan, and **Angelo** is tricked. However **Angelo** then goes back on his word, and sends a message to the prison demanding that **Claudio** should still be executed.

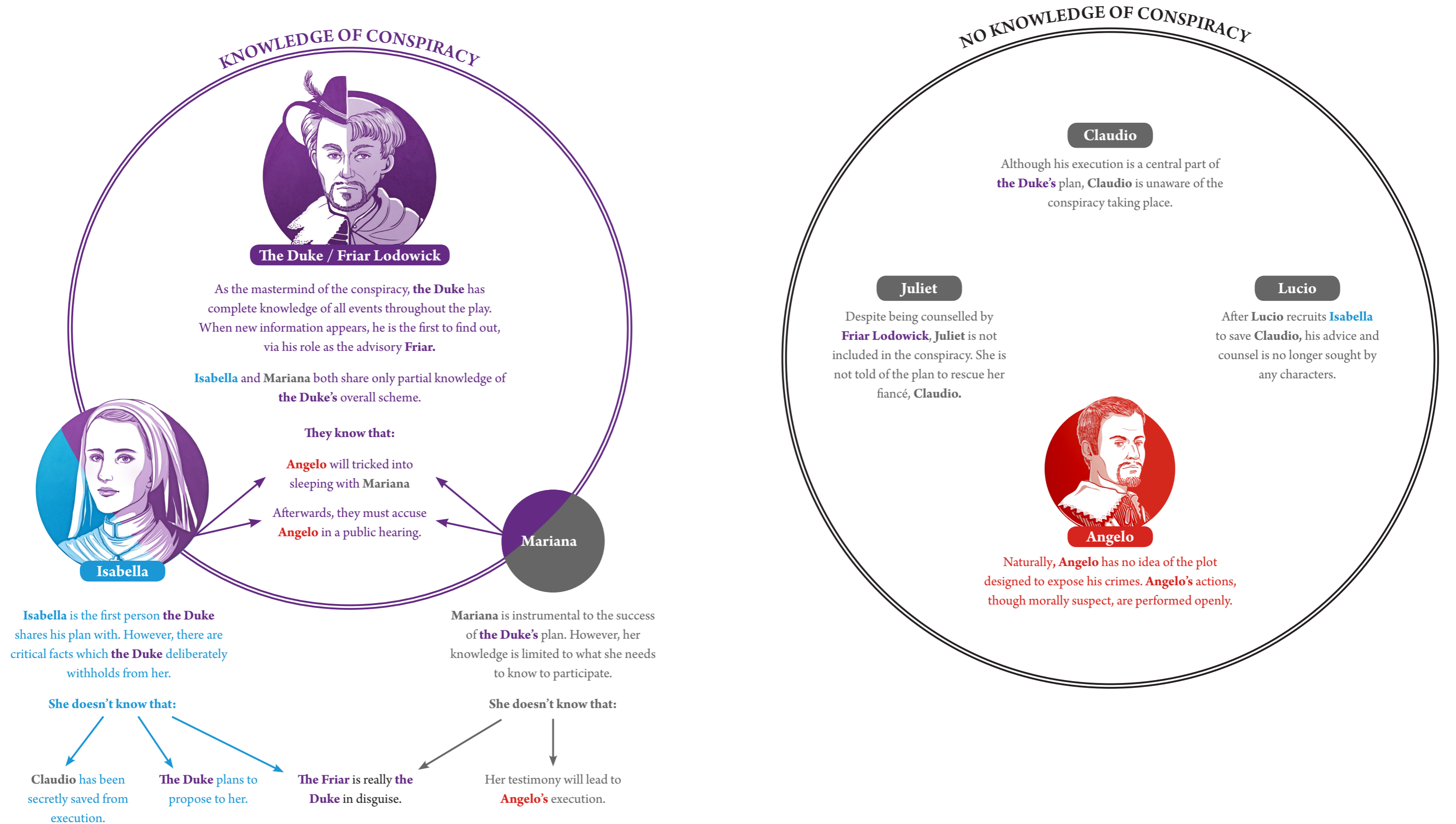
The Duke tries to arrange the execution of another prisoner, **Barnardine**, whose head can be sent instead of **Claudio's**. However, the villain **Barnardine** refuses to be executed in his current drunken state. As luck would have it, however, another prisoner named **Ragozine** has suddenly died, so his head is sent to **Angelo**, instead.

The plot concludes with the "return" to Vienna of **the Duke** in his own person. **Isabella** and **Mariana** publicly petition him, and he hears their claims against **Angelo**, which **Angelo** smoothly denies. However, when it is revealed that 'Friar Lodowick' is in fact **the Duke**, justice is at last seen to be done. The play ends with **Angelo's** guilt revealed. **The Duke** arranges for **Angelo** to be married to **Mariana**. **The Duke** then proposes marriage to **Isabella**.



Character Map: Secrecy and Plotting

The resolution of *Measure for Measure* involves the coming together of a plot devised by **the Duke**. His plan is based on secrecy and trickery. Chosen characters are involved in the conspiracy, others are deliberately left in the dark. This map illustrates how much of the conspiracy each character was aware of.





The Duke of Vienna / Friar Lodowick

The ruler of Vienna during a turbulent time. His city has become rife with prostitution, crime and misbehaviour. He wants to improve standards without becoming unpopular as a result.

Apart from the beginning and ending scenes, **the Duke** spends the entire play disguised as a friar, adopting the name **Friar Lodowick**.

Characteristics:

- » A true politician, **the Duke** is a calculating, careful manipulator.
- » He chooses his disguise as a friar with a distinct purpose. Friars were seen as trustworthy counselors and father figures in the community. **The Duke** uses his persona as **Friar Lodowick** to advise and steer the other characters.
- » Though it seems at first as though the Duke is simply reacting to events as they occur, some aspects of his plot show previous planning.
- » Political ambitions aside, **the Duke** does have strong religious beliefs and a sense of duty to the well-being of his people.

Quotes:

“Haste still pays haste, and leisure answers leisure,
Like doth quit like, and measure still for measure.” (5.1.)

The Duke, on sentencing **Angelo**.

“I have on **Angelo** impos’d the office;
Who may in th’ambush of my name strike home,
And yet my nature never in the fight
To do in slander.” (1.3.)

The Duke, on maintaining his public reputation.

“We have strict statutes and most biting laws
(The needful bits and curbs to headstrong weeds),
Which for this fourteen years we have let slip,
Even like an o’ergrown lion in a cave,
That goes not out to prey” (1.1.)

The Duke, on the decline in law-keeping.



Lord Angelo

With his reputation for upholding virtue and a rigid sense of justice, **Angelo** is chosen by **the Duke** to temporarily rule the city while he is away. **The Duke** wants to see how the city will react to the stricter laws and punishments that **Angelo** is certain to implement. Although initially concerned about the burden of leadership, **Angelo** soon embraces his power and is tempted to abuse it.

The name ‘**Angelo**’ means ‘angel’ in Italian. **Angelo** is referred to as ‘otherworldly’ by many characters, due to his intense piety and lack of human desires. However, he is not incorruptible and falls into temptation, just like the angels who ‘fell from heaven.’

Characteristics:

- » **Angelo** is an introspective man, questioning the reasons behind his thoughts and behaviour.
- » He is hypocritical, for despite reflecting on the morality of his actions, he chooses to justify, rather than reconsider his decisions.
- » **Angelo** is a conflicted character. He is too rigid in his beliefs to show mercy, but too uncertain in his inner virtue to be able to truthfully defend his actions.
- » Until he meets **Isabella**, **Angelo** claims never to have been influenced by lust. He suspects he is attracted to **Isabella’s** incorruptible virtue, rather than her physical appearance.

Quotes:

“A man whose blood
Is very snow-broth: one who never feels
The wanton stings and motions of the sense” (1.4.)

Lucio, on **Angelo’s** otherworldliness.

“Oh what art thou, **Angelo**” Dost thou desire her foully for
those things that make her good?” (2.2.)

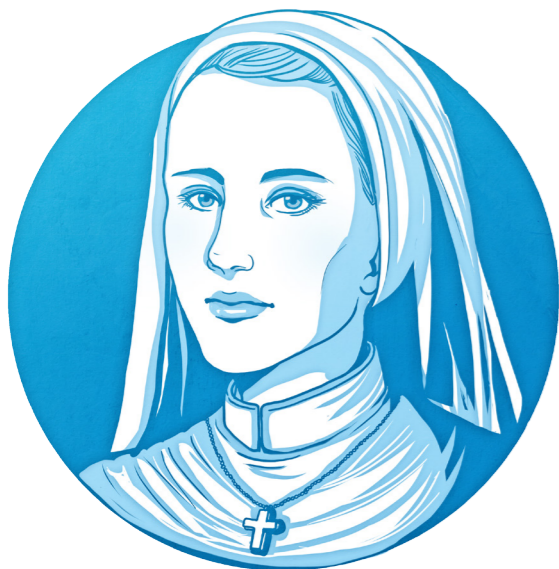
Angelo, on his lust for **Isabella**.

“The tempter or the tempted? Who sins most?” (2.2.)

Angelo, on justifying sin.

“Twice treble shame on **Angelo**,
To weed my vice, and let his grow!
O, what may man within him hide,
Though angel on the outward side!” (3.2.)

The Duke, on **Angelo’s** fall into temptation.



Isabella

Isabella is a beautiful novice, about to take the final step towards becoming a nun and devoting the rest of her life to God. The religious order she plans to join has strict rules: nuns are not allowed to show their faces to a man, or to be alone in his company.

Before she can commit herself to this lifestyle, **Isabella** is asked by her imprisoned brother **Claudio** to come to the city and use her virtuous status and eloquence to plead for his life.

The name '**Isabella**' means 'dedicated to God' in Italian, foreshadowing **Isabella's** strict adherence to virtue and religious purity above all else.

Characteristics:

- » **Isabella** is beautiful, intelligent and eloquent. Her strong religious beliefs and virtuous behaviour contrast with the background of seedy Vienna.
- » **Isabella**, like **Angelo**, is strict in her judgments and beliefs. She refuses to be swayed in her convictions.
- » Though she is compassionate to **Claudio** and desperate to save him, **Isabella's** strongest motivator is her relationship with God.

Quotes:

"Then, **Isabel**, live chaste, and, brother, die:

More than our brother is our chastity" (2.4.)

Isabella, to **Angelo**, on why she is refusing to sleep with him.

"And 'twere the cheaper way:

Better it were a brother died at once,

Than that a sister, by redeeming him,

Should die for ever." (2.4.)

Isabella, on how her virtue is equal to her life.

"I hold you as a thing enskied and sainted." (1.4.)

Lucio, speaking to **Isabella**.

Claudio

Claudio is **Isabella's** brother. He has been imprisoned and is going to be executed. His crime is having sex with his fiancée, **Juliet**, before they were married. Her subsequent pregnancy proves his guilt.

However, as they had performed a folk wedding ceremony and were only waiting to formally register their marriage, the general opinion is that execution is an extraordinarily harsh punishment.

Mariana

Mariana is **Angelo's** ex-fiancée. He abandoned her when her family lost its fortune in an unfortunate accident. Since then, **Mariana** has become a pitiable outcast. Her sadness is known only to **the Duke**, who has been consoling her while disguised as **Friar Lodowick**.

Her name is made up of 'Mary', meaning 'bitter', and 'Ann' meaning 'gracious'. This is an indicator of her past misfortune and her willingness to forgive **Angelo** despite it.

Lucio

A predominantly comic-relief character, **Lucio** is a friend of **Claudio**. **Lucio** is a lewd, promiscuous man, who has friends amongst both the lower and upper classes of Vienna. Though loyal to **Claudio**, he is a first-class liar and will slander anyone to improve his standing.

Quotes:

"Our natures do pursue, like rats that ravin down their proper bane, a thirsty evil, and when we drink we die." (1.2.)

Claudio, on human nature: namely lust.

Sweet sister, let me live.

What sin you do to save a brother's life,

Nature disposes with the deed so far

That it becomes a virtue (3. 1.)

Claudio, begging **Isabella** to save him by sleeping with **Angelo**.

Quotes:

"They say the best men are moulded out of faults, And, for the most, become much more the better For being a little bad." (5.1.)

Mariana begging for **Angelo's** life.

"Nor, gentle daughter, fear you not at all.

He is your husband on a pre-contract:

To bring you thus together 'tis no sin,

Sith that the justice of your title to him

Doth flourish the deceit." (4.1.)

The Duke, explaining his plot to **Mariana**.

Juliet

Juliet is **Claudio's** pregnant fiancée. She and **Claudio** have a monogamous, loving relationship, and she states openly that her pregnancy is a result of consensual sex. Though she longs for **Claudio's** freedom, she accepts his guilt and her own, and seeks forgiveness.

KEY:

- The Duke / Friar Lodowick
- Angelo
- Isabella
- Secondary Characters

THEMES:



POWER

- » Who has power in the scene?
- » Is the character influenced by their power?
- » How do they use their power?
- » Are they aware they are using it?



JUSTICE

- » Can a decision be seen as both just, and unjust by different characters?
- » Is the law a tool used to serve those in power?
- » Does the character have the right to pass judgement?



LIES AND DECEIT

- » Who is keeping secrets from whom?
- » Is withholding information the same as lying?
- » Can you trust someone who is in disguise?



RELIGION

- » Does religion have a place in justice and lawmaking?
- » Do strong religious beliefs make the character more, or less compassionate?



MORTALITY

- » Does fear of death change the way the character thinks?
- » Is it possible for death to be a moral choice?



SEX AND LOVE

- » Are lust and love opposites, or different takes on the same idea?
- » What are the characters' views of sex influenced by?

ACT ONE

S1

The Duke of Vienna, fed up with the disobedience and sinfulness of his people, decides to take a leave of absence. He appoints Angelo, a strict puritan, to take charge while he is gone.



The Duke hands over power to Angelo. Angelo is concerned that he is being tested on his scruples, and may not live up to expectations.

S2



Catalyst 1

Angelo's new regime is very unpopular. The people feel that he has gone too far by sentencing Claudio, a well liked man, to death. Claudio's crime? Getting his own fiancée pregnant before marriage.



Angelo uses his power to implement his idea of righteous justice.



The people of Vienna find the new laws to be very unjust.

S3

The Duke of Vienna, has actually stayed behind in the city. He has disguised himself as friar, and adopts the name of 'Friar Lodowick'. He plans to secretly observe the fallout of Angelo's unpopular laws.



The Duke secretly remains in Vienna and adopts a disguise.



He chooses to impersonate a friar, so that he will be seen as trustworthy.

S4

From prison, Claudio sends a plea for help to his beautiful sister, Isabella. Isabella is a devout nun-in-training, and Claudio hopes she may be able to persuade Angelo not to execute him.



Isabella is about to join a strict religious order. She would like it to be even more restrictive in its rules on virtuous behaviour.



Her position as a nun gives her the power to speak on the behalf of right and wrong.




Act Timelines: Summary and Themes

KEY:  The Duke / Friar Lodowick  Angelo  Isabella  Secondary Characters

ACT TWO




S1

Angelo is unsympathetic to **Claudio's** supporters. He states that if he had committed such a crime, he would accept the same punishment. He claims, however, that he has never been tempted to do so.

-  **Angelo** believes justice to be non-negotiable.
-  As temporary ruler, he can lay down the law as he chooses, and according to what he believes is right.
-  His beliefs are influenced by strict religious beliefs on virtue.




S2

Isabella arrives at **Angelo's** house and begs him to revoke **Claudio's** execution. **Angelo** argues that the law is both impartial and irreversible, however his growing lust for **Isabella** weakens his resolve. He says he will inform her of his decision tomorrow.

-  **Isabella** tries to convince **Angelo** that revoking **Claudio's** execution will be an act of mercy and rewarded by her religious prayers.
-  **Angelo** begins to lust after **Isabella**.
-  **Angelo** begins to wonder if justice is as inflexible as he has previously thought.

S3





Friar Lodowick is at the city prison. There, he comforts **Claudio's** fiancée, **Juliet**, assuring her that he will provide counsel to the imprisoned **Claudio**.

-  **Friar Lodowick** is already investigating **Claudio's** sentence of execution.
-  He believes that **Juliet** and **Claudio** committed sin by having sex outside of marriage. However, due to their mutual love, he tells her that they can be forgiven.
- 

S4

 Catalyst 2



Angelo is consumed by lust for **Isabella**, and decides that he can change the law, but for a price. When **Isabella** arrives, he makes her an offer: if she has sex with him, he will stop **Claudio's** execution. Disgusted, **Isabella** instantly refuses, and **Angelo** angrily informs her that **Claudio** will die painfully as a result of her choice.

-  **Isabella** believes that to lose her virtue and status as a nun would equal her death.
-  **Angelo** decides that satisfying his lust by sleeping with **Isabella** is more important than upholding his strict laws. He uses his power as ruler of Vienna to blackmail **Isabella**.
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- 

ACT THREE


S1

Isabella visits **Claudio** in prison. At first, he agrees with **Isabella's** refusal when she tells him of **Angelo's** proposition. However, fear of his imminent death overpowers him and he begs her to reconsider. Furious, **Isabella** leaves but is intercepted by **Friar Lodowick**, who has been secretly listening. He has a plan to save **Claudio** and discredit **Angelo**.

-  **Isabella** is furious that **Claudio** does not see her virtue as being equal to his life.
-  But **Claudio** is in great fear of his impending death and is desperate not to die. He manages to make peace with himself, accepting his fate.


 Catalyst 3

Isabella should accept **Angelo's** proposition and arrange to meet him at night. However, **Friar Lodowick** will arrange for another woman, **Mariana**, to pretend to be **Isabella** and take her place.

-  **Friar Lodowick** introduces **Isabella** to his conspiracy to trap **Angelo**. **Isabella** is willing to join in the deception.


THE DUKE'S PLAN

Mariana was once engaged to **Angelo**, but he left her when her family lost its money. Once **Angelo** has consummated his relationship with **Mariana**, he will legally have to marry her.

-  When **Mariana** was abandoned by **Angelo**, it is clear that he considered her money to be of more importance than her love.

S2

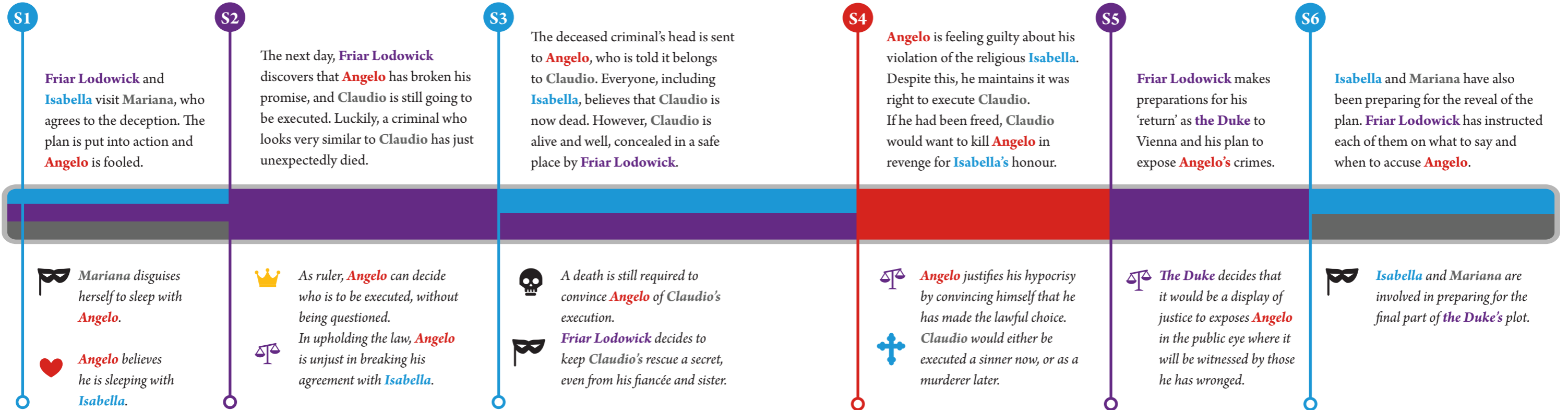
Friar Lodowick uses his anonymity to observe the people of Vienna and find out what his trusted advisors really think about him. He decides that although Vienna still needs stricter laws, **Angelo** has been a failure and will be punished for his hypocrisy.

-  **Friar Lodowick** uses his disguise as a tool to try and find out the truth. He tests people, hoping they will tell **Friar Lodowick** things that they wouldn't tell **the Duke**.

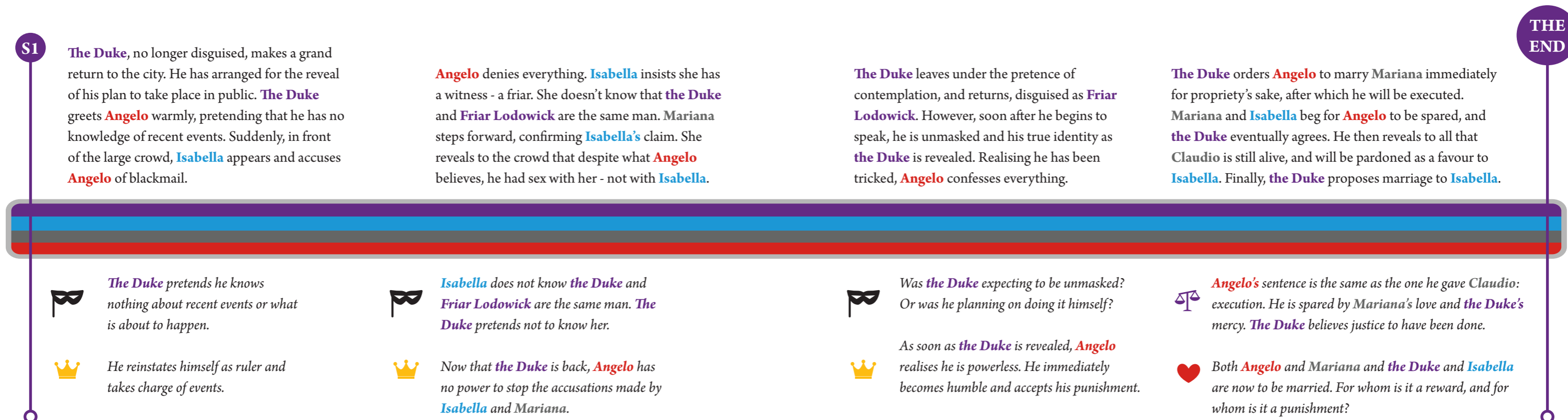
Act Timelines: Summary and Themes

KEY:  The Duke / Friar Lodowick  Angelo  Isabella  Secondary Characters

ACT FOUR



ACT FIVE



Comprehension Questions: Scene by scene breakdown

Act 1 Scene 1 - The Duke's office - The Duke, Escalus, Lords

1. What is the Duke asking Angelo to do?
2. The Duke defines an effective leader as one who has the capacity to be both firm and compassionate. What evidence can you find to support this statement?
3. Compare the character of Escalus and Angelo as they appear in this scene. Does it seem to you that the Duke has made the right choice of Deputy?

Extension:

1. Angelo is seemingly reluctant to take on the responsibility the Duke bestows on him. What does he say (lines 51-3) to suggest this? Explain the pun on "mettle" (line 51) and the significance of the reference to coin.
2. At the end of the scene, Escalus says to Angelo, "I'll wait upon your honour." Consider the double meaning of the term "your honour" to provide two possible interpretations of this line.

Act 1 Scene 2 - A street in Vienna - Lucio and two other Gentlemen; (later) Mistress Overdone and Pompey

1. Mistress Overdone reveals that Claudio has been arrested. Why was Claudio arrested and what will happen to him in three days' time (lines 66-72)?
2. Pompey refers to a "proclamation" issued by Angelo (lines 93-97). What is the proclamation and what does it mean for Mistress Overdone?

Extension:

1. Lucio and his companions joke about contracting syphilis but for the audience there is a grim undertone. What is Shakespeare metaphorically illuminating in a world where sexual promiscuity and disease are rife?

Act 1 Scene 2 - (cont.) A street in Vienna - Provost, Claudio, Juliet, Officers; Lucio and the two Gentlemen

1. What does Claudio mean when he says that Juliet "is fast my wife,/Save that we do the denunciation lack of outward order" (lines 32-34)? In your own words, explain what Claudio is accusing Angelo of in lines 51-57.
2. What does Claudio want Isabella (his sister) to do (lines 62-72)?

Extension:

1. Claudio describes his sexual relations with Juliet as "Our most mutual entertainment" (Line 39). In what way is Angelo's sexual misconduct later in the play worse than the one he is condemning Claudio for?
2. What ideas about justice have been presented in this scene?

Act 1 Scene 3 - A Friary - The Duke and Friar Thomas

1. What reasons does the Duke provide for giving Angelo his "absolute power" (lines 20-32)?
2. Friar Thomas points out that the Duke could himself have "unloose[d] this tied-up justice" rather than leaving it to Angelo. How does the Duke respond to this argument (lines 37-46)?
3. The Duke reveals his intentions to leave Vienna and return disguised as a friar (lines 46-51). What does he want to accomplish through this deception?

Extension:

1. Do you find the reasons that the Duke gives to justify his actions to be convincing? Why/why not?

Act 1 Scene 4 - The Convent of the Sisters of Saint Clare - Isabella and a nun; Lucio

1. How does Lucio describe Isabella in lines 36-39? What picture of Isabella is emerging?
2. How does Lucio describe Angelo in lines 61-65? Compare this to what the Duke said about Angelo at the end of the previous scene (I.iv.53-57). What picture of Angelo is emerging?

Extension:

1. In 1.2. Lucio comes across as a vulgar character, speaking crudely with his friends about visiting brothels and contracting venereal diseases. What is notably different about his presentation in this scene? What has this added to your understanding of Lucio's character?
2. What imagery shapes Lucio's description of pregnancy in lines 41-46?

Act 2 Scene 1 - The courtroom - Angelo, Escalus and a Justice; Elbow with Froth and Pompey

1. What does Angelo say to justify his strict application of the law (lines 1-4)? How does Escalus respond (lines 5-7)? Explain the metaphors that they use to support their views.
2. Escalus asks Angelo whether he has ever done the same thing as Claudio (lines 9-17). How does Angelo respond (lines 18-32)?
3. What measures does Escalus take as a way of resolving the trial?
 - a. with reference to Master Froth? (lines 185-188))
 - b. with reference to Pompey? (lines 244-50)
 - c. with reference to Elbow? (lines 256-271)

Extension:

1. Elbow is the local representative of law and order. He is responsible for bringing Froth, a brothel frequenter, and Pompey, a pimp, before the law. What is Elbow's level of competence? How is this competence reflected in his use of language?
2. What does Pompey say (lines 229-42) that reveals his cynicism towards the enforcement of laws against prostitution? What is his response (lines 251-255) to Escalus' warning against continuing his illicit occupation?

Act 2 Scene 2 - Angelo's office - Angelo and Provost; Isabella and Lucio

1. Briefly summarise Angelo's and Isabella's arguments in this scene. Whose arguments do you find more persuasive? Why?
2. What are the Provost's and Lucio's roles in this scene? Whose side are they on?
3. Describe Angelo's state of mind during his soliloquy at the end of the scene (lines 192-217). What impact has Isabella had on him?

Act 2 Scene 3 - The prison - The Duke [disguised as a friar] and Provost; Juliet

1. Upon learning that Claudio and Juliet's "most offenceful act/Was mutually committed", the Duke (in disguise as Friar Lodowick) tells Juliet that her sin was "of heavier kind" than Claudio's (lines 26-32). What does this suggest about the views and values at the time the play was set?

Extension:

1. Consider the stage direction 'Enter Duke disguised as a Friar.' What ideas are reflected in the fact that the Duke spends the greater part of the play dressed as a Friar?

Act 2 Scene 4 - Angelo's office - Angelo and Isabella

1. What is the bargain that Angelo tries to strike with Isabella in this scene? How does Isabella respond?
2. Summarise the main points Isabella makes in her soliloquy at the end of the scene. Do you commend her for her beliefs or do you consider her to be self-centred? Explore both views.

Act 3 Scene 1 - The prison

Lines 1-187: The Duke [disguised] with Claudio; Claudio and Isabella; Isabella and the Duke [disguised]

1. Paraphrase Claudio's vision of life after death (lines 129-143).
1. How does Isabella respond to Claudio's plea for her to save his life by giving up her chastity (line 149-165)?

Lines 195-284: The Duke [disguised] with Isabella - the Mariana plan

1. Who is Mariana? What is Angelo's history with her? (lines 223-245)?
2. What is the Duke's plan to save Claudio while protecting Isabella "from dishonour" (lines 254-274)?

Act 3 Scene 2 - The street before the prison

Lines 325-467: Pompey's arrest and Lucio's conversation with the Duke [disguised]

1. What is Lucio's opinion of Angelo's leadership and his treatment of Claudio (lines 374-384, 394-400, 450-462)?
2. What rumours about Angelo does Lucio report to the Duke (lines 384-392)?
3. What scandalous assertions does Lucio make about the Duke (396-408)?

Lines 469-end: Mistress Overdone's arrest and revelation of Lucio's wrong-doing

1. Mistress Overdone is arrested on information provided by Lucio. In expressing her outrage, what does she reveal about Lucio? (lines 476-481).
2. What is Escalus' opinion of the Duke's character (lines 510-115)?

Act 4 Scene 1 - The Moated Grange - Mariana and Boy singing; the Duke [disguised]; Isabella

1. Where has Angelo asked Isabella to meet him (lines 28-35)? What evidence is there in his instructions to suggest that he knows he is acting immorally?
2. What does Isabella instruct Mariana to say to Angelo after their encounter (lines 73-75)?

Act 4 Scene 2 - Provost and Pompey; Abhorson; Claudio; the Duke [disguised]

1. The Messenger brings a letter from Angelo ordering that Claudio be executed by 4pm (lines 128-135). What does this mean for Angelo's promise to Isabella?
2. The Duke plans to trick Angelo by executing Barnardine, another prisoner, and sending his head to Angelo instead of Claudio's (lines 173-189). What similarity can you see between this plan and the Duke's earlier plan involving Isabella and Mariana?

Extension:

1. Pompey points out that it is illegal for him to be a bawd, but legal for him to be a hangman (lines 15-17). What comment might Shakespeare be making about the views held by society in the world of the play, and perhaps also in Elizabethan England?
2. The disguised Duke operates behind the scenes to control events. Is he a well-meaning leader who is going out of his way to ensure that good prevails or a dishonest interfering manipulator?

Act 4 Scene 3 - The prison - Pompey, Abhorson, Barnardine, the Duke [disguised], Provost, Isabella, Lucio

1. Why is the Duke unable to execute Barnardine (lines 36-68)?
2. What does the Provost suggest doing instead (lines 69-76)?
3. What do we learn about Lucio's past at the end of the scene (lines 172-177)?

Extension:

1. What is your response to the Duke's decision to withhold from Isabella news that her brother is alive (lines 109-113)? Is the reason he gives justifiable?

Act 4 Scene 4 - Angelo's office - Angelo and Escalus

1. Why does the news of the Duke's return unnerve Angelo? How does he show this in his conversation with Escalus (lines 1-18)?
2. What does Angelo think is going to stop Isabella from telling the truth about him (lines 24-29)?
3. According to Angelo, why did he break his promise to Isabella by ordering Claudio's execution (lines 29-33)?

Act 4 Scene 5 - The Friary - The Duke [in his own robes] and Friar Peter

1. Why might Shakespeare have included this scene? What, if anything, does it add to the play?

Act 4 Scene 6 - The Moated Grange - Isabella and Mariana; Friar Peter

1. What has the Duke instructed Isabella to do (lines 1-4, 6-9)?

Act 5 Scene 1 - The city gates - The Duke [in his own robes], Angelo, Escalus, Lucio, Provost, Isabella, Friar Peter, Mariana

Lines 1-180 - The Duke hears Isabella's petition against Angelo

1. What does Angelo say to discredit Isabella in the eyes of the Duke (lines 35-39)?
2. Isabella accuses Angelo of perjury, murder and adulterous theft (lines 40-45). To what is she referring to with each of these charges?
3. What reasons does the Duke give when he claims not to believe Isabella's accusations against Angelo (lines 121-130)?

Lines 181-283 - The Duke's hears Marian's petition against Angelo

1. What reasons does Angelo give for having broken his engagement to Mariana (lines 235-243)?

Lines 181-283 - Escalus further questions Isabella and Friar Lodowick [the Duke disguised]

1. What is the Duke's assessment of Vienna in lines 342-346? Why might he be making these observations in disguise as Friar Lodowick, rather than in his official capacity as Duke?
2. What happens to the following characters at the end of the play:
 - a. The Duke and Isabella?
 - b. Angelo and Mariana?
 - c. Claudio?
 - d. Lucio?
5. To what extent are these outcomes satisfactory? In what ways are they problematic?

1) Begin by considering the world of the play - the state of Vienna. How has it been governed in the past and how is it shown to be governed during the development of the play?

Individually or with another student, take responsibility for investigating one of the passages below. Prepare a detailed paragraph that provides a close investigation of the implications of your selected passage as it relates to the theme of justice and government within the city of Vienna before presenting your ideas to the class so that collectively, you can work to chart the key points that are raised.

ACT / SCENE / LINES	Implications relating to the theme of justice
Act 2. Scene 1. Lines 1-33	
Act 2. Scene 2. Lines 90-101	
Act 2. Scene 2. Lines 122-147	
Act 2. Scene 4. Lines 109-121	
Act 3. Scene 1. Lines 469-484	
Act 3. Scene 1. Lines 499-509	

Act 3. Scene 1. Lines 520-533	
Act 4. Scene 2. Lines 69-83	
Act 4. Scene 2. Lines 81-99	
Act 4. Scene 2. Lines 116-123	
Act 4. Scene 3. Lines 1-19	
Act 4. Scene 4. Lines 21-35	
Act 5. Lines 1. Scene 340-346	
Act 5. Scene 1. Lines 430-444	

Certainly what emerges from such an investigation is that the play is not without reference to justice. Indeed, it is rife with recurring references to the concerns of justice. It is on the tongues of many and arguably in the conscience of all. This only makes sense because Vienna has clearly fallen into a state of moral chaos. It is now a world where “all sects, all ages smack of ... vice ...” and yet one is “to die for it” raising notions of what is to serve as appropriate punishment or redress. “All”, by extension, have become invested in this dilemma. It could be argued that with the imprisonment of Claudio, Shakespeare symbolically imprisons us “all” as Claudio serves to represent the average citizen of the play’s world. And, as such, Claudio’s problems resonate deeply and dangerously for those who have couched themselves comfortably within the soft folds of liberty. Indeed, so much licence has ensued that the population has swollen and is seen to suffer the effects of disease as rogue, parentless children are raised in brothels by the likes of Mistress Overdone. And, while Angelo and his puritan polemics provide one possible strategy for righting the world, and restoring law and order, his efforts towards establishing justice fail both his people and, above all, himself. His hypocrisy discredits his measures. This raises the question ... how can the law be applied fairly to protect society?

While the Duke steps in and out of the action of the play, with questionable and undefined motives, the audience bear witness to and suffer an education of sorts. We recognise that retributive justice is unsatisfactory and impossible in this world and that seeking any sort of tidy resolution is hard work and essentially unattainable. Just as Juliet never quite reaches full-term and remains pregnant at the end of the play, so too are the implications of justice and mercy unresolved in the play’s final short act. Despite all this, what does seem to be suggested is that laws that are too rigid in their design, rather than leading to justice, paradoxically lead towards injustice.

2) Consider the below passages taken from critical readings of the text. For each reading, answer the questions that follow.

“ *The failure to punish Angelo baffles the sense of natural justice. This, Swinburne noted, was Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s reason for disliking the play: “The expression is absolutely correct and apt: justice is not merely evaded or ignored or even defied: she is both in the older and newer sense of the word directly and deliberately baffled; buffeted, outraged, insulted and struck in the face’.*

- Swinburne, *A Study of Shakespeare*, 1880 ”

- What is the effect of the personification of Justice in the excerpt above?
- What is meant here by the “older and newer sense of the word?” Discuss the play’s reference to the Old Testament in its title and, more critically and broadly, the play’s paradigmatic shift towards the “newer sense of the word” in Act 5.1.
- Look up the phrase *talion law* and consider integrating this word into a later discussion on the theme of Justice.

“ *The action of the play, like the action of life itself for the keener observer, develops in us the conception of poetical justice, and the yearning to realize it, the true justice of which Angelo knows nothing, because it lies for the most part beyond the limits of any acknowledged law.*

The idea of justice involves the idea of rights... The recognition of his rights therefore... is the recognition of that which the person, in his inmost nature, really is; and as sympathy alone can discover, that which really is in matters of feeling and thought, true justice is in its essence a finer knowledge through love.

- Bate, *Rasmussen, William Shakespeare*, (2010.) ”

- What does this critic suggest is the catalyst for Angelo’s failure to govern successfully?
- What does this critic mean when he describes true justice having a “finer knowledge?”

3) Chose one of the questions below, and write an extended paragraph in response.

As you write, draw direct links to key moments within the text to support your discussion.

- What evidence can you find of moments where justice is tempered with mercy?
- Do you think there is some resolution at the end of the play to show that mercy does indeed temper justice?
- Are any laws repealed?
- Are Angelo, Escalus and the Duke shown to have changed their authoritarian approach to government by the end of the play?

4) Leading from this investigation and discussion, draw your attention and insight towards the text response essay question below:

Isabella: “Yet show some pity.”

Angelo: “I show it most of all when I show justice.”

Justice is often mentioned in *Measure for Measure*, but true justice is rarely delivered. Discuss.

Discuss.

- Is this true?
- What evidence can you provide to qualify and support your discussion?
- To what extent is this true?
- What evidence can you provide demonstrate exceptions to this statement?

IN YOUR RESPONSE, BE SURE TO...

Maintain a CLEAR CONTENTION in response to the topic.

Use CLEAR TOPIC SENTENCES to introduce the key idea of each body paragraph

Refer to HOW LANGUAGE IS USED... refer to glossary terms to help support this step

Comment on how THE AUDIENCE IS POSITIONED

Make reference to VIEWS AND VALUES inherent in the text.

TOPIC:

“Measure for Measure values mercy and forgiveness more than strict moral principles.”

Discuss.

Your initial thoughts:

Introduction:

“The title of Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure* is a clear indication that this play focuses on how human beings should judge each other. His Elizabethan audience would have recognised the title’s New Testament reference: “Judge not, that ye be not judged. For... with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again” (Matthew 7:1-2). Just as Christ here urges his followers to acknowledge their own human frailty and to temper their judgements with mercy and humility, so Shakespeare’s play prioritises forgiveness over strict moral rectitude. Left in charge of cleaning up Vienna after the abrupt departure of the Duke, the “precise” Lord Angelo falls prey to the very frailty he so powerfully condemns in others. The exemplar of moral rectitude turns out to be a hypocrite. Shakespeare gives both Angelo and Isabella, a character of contrastingly impeccable morality, some coldly self-righteous lines that suggest a serious lack of compassion. Conversely, the most controlled and sympathetic characters think it quite unreasonable to condemn Claudio to death when “all sects, all ages smack of this vice”. Indeed the most powerful poetry in the play is given to those who protest against the application of the absolute and inflexible punishment of sin. In the end, Shakespeare’s comedy ends with hypocrisy exposed, sins forgiven and quarrels resolved, but only through the God-like intervention of “the old fantastical duke of dark corners”. Without him, the play would have been a tragedy rather than a comedy.”

Notes:

Body Paragraph 1 - Topic Sentence:

“A range of moderate and controlled characters all express serious reservations about Claudio’s death sentence, indicating the importance of mercy.”

What would you focus upon in this body paragraph?

Body Paragraph 2 - Topic Sentence:

“Conversely, although the play contains many disreputable characters, it is the respectable advocates of strict morality who often emerge as alarmingly self-righteous and harsh.”

What would you focus upon in this body paragraph?

TOPIC:

Angelo: "Oh heavens, why does my blood thus muster to my heart?" (2. 4.)

Though Angelo's crimes are abhorrent, we cannot dismiss him as a mere villain.

Discuss.

Your initial thoughts:

Introduction:

Individuals are multifaceted and complex beings, and despite our natural inclination to view the world in black and white, it is seldom beneficial to approach things in this starkly defining manner. Exploring this underpinning truth is William Shakespeare's morally challenging *Measure for Measure*. Through the examination of antagonistic Angelo, Shakespeare persuades his audience of a singular and morally pregnant revelation; that no one person can simply be one thing. Humans are richly multifarious, and while Shakespeare clearly portrays Angelo's lechery and deception as criminal and repulsive, he simultaneously evokes true feelings of pity for his character. By illuminating Angelo's inability to open himself to those experiences which are truly human, Shakespeare establishes some sympathy for his character. Through his development of Angelo, Shakespeare displays that individual acts, no matter how wicked, cannot entirely define a person if their actions are in response to the laws and culture of the society in which they exist. Demanding his audience re-examine their moral code to be more cognizant and accommodating of the ever challenging 'grey area', Shakespeare insists we recognise Angelo's diverse nature in order to understand his society.

Notes:

Body Paragraph 1 - Topic Sentence:

"It is Angelo's abhorrent manipulation and mistreatment of Isabella that Shakespeare deems unforgivable and villainous."

What content would you consider in this body paragraph?

Body Paragraph 2

While Angelo's more egregious acts are depicted as repugnant, Shakespeare suggests that he is not solely at fault for his harsh rulings. Establishing Angelo as "precise" and puritanical, Shakespeare juxtaposes his antagonist against a world where "liberty plucks justice by the nose" and wherein sexual desires run rampant. In a society that has gone to rack and ruin in the hands of a "superficial, ignorant, unweighing fellow", Angelo is a remedy of sorts; a man who, no matter how cold or calculating, has been tasked with righting the current state of society. Having been recognised by both the Duke and Escalus as better positioned to "unloose this tied up justice" than the Duke himself, Angelo attempts to rectify the situation with an extremism that befits his nature. Targeting the lenient legacy that the Duke has left behind, Angelo remains steadfast in his resolve "to make [Claudio] an example", and instead of heeding Escalus' calls to "cut a little" rather than "bruise to death", Angelo's verdict remains resolute: "Sir, he must die". Here, Angelo is seen to be the antidote to Escalus', and therefore the Duke's, leniency; while his "snow-broth" nature may be unappealing, it is equal parts a necessity in righting wayward Vienna. This polarising depiction of the two characters invites some level of compassion for Angelo as he describes his fear in allowing society to continue to make "a scarecrow of the law". In this way, then, the Duke's unwillingness to take responsibility for the "headstrong weeds" he has "let slip" throughout his reign renders him as being similarly ill-befit for the position of governance. Here, Shakespeare reminds us that just as a garden needs weeding by a firm hand, so too does society need strict ruling. Suggesting that his "slip" is merely by accident, the Duke rids himself of responsibility for the state of Vienna and instead places Angelo in the spotlight, despite describing him as a man who "never feels the... motion of sense". Therefore, If Angelo is to be accepted as a man who "scarce confesses that his blood flows", puritanical and unflinching in his reign, then Duke Vincentio must truly be recognised as "the duke of dark corners", manipulative and more so irresponsible in his rulings. Therefore, we see that Angelo's more severe and tyrannical rulings are, at least partly, in response to the myriad problems left by the Duke. As such, Shakespeare suggests that Angelo's hand has been, at the very least, guided by the Duke's rule and thus he cannot be viewed as the sole perpetrator of his extreme rulings.

Reference: Asquith, C. 'The Hideous Law' in *Shadowplay – The Hidden Beliefs and Coded Politics of William Shakespeare* (PublicAffairs, New York, 2005)

Before reading the extract on the following pages, read the Wikipedia entry on the *Basilikon Doron* – King James' dissertation on government.
(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basilikon_Doron)

Note on the text:

In mentioning Cecil (p.192), Asquith is referring to Robert Cecil, 1st Earl of Salisbury, who served as spymaster and secretary of state to both Elizabeth 1 and James 1.

The Hideous Law

The first of Shakespeare's plays written for James was *Measure for Measure*. Performed at court along with *Othello* during the Christmas season of 1604, it is yet another conspicuous example of the way the incomplete history of the English Reformation has for centuries handicapped our appreciation of some of his cleverest work. The plot is one of his most cerebral, reflecting early Catholic hopes that the King might be brought to see reason by means of the kind of intellectual debate he loved. It presents a startling, unexpected angle on the events of his first year on the throne, giving full credit to his shrewd Scots cunning but opening his eyes to the fatal impact of his domestic and foreign policy on his Catholic subjects.

In the play, a duke delegates his entire authority to an untried deputy. The deputy protests at being granted such sweeping powers, but the duke hurries away: 'Your scope is as mine own', he repeats, telling him they will communicate by letter, as James did with Cecil. Left alone, the deputy reveals his true colours. A fanatical, though hypocritical, moralist, he revives a 'hideous law' (1.4.63) against illicit love-making and implements draconian penalties that the tolerant duke neglected. The first casualty is Claudio, who faces execution for sleeping with his fiancée. Claudio's sister, Isabella, about to join the order of Poor Clare nuns, is induced to plead for him with the new deputy—but in doing so, she inadvertently arouses his lust. Isabella indignantly refuses to save her brother's life by sleeping with the deputy—and is horrified to find her condemned brother guiltily wishing she would.

The play has reached the kind of moral question James found irresistible: is it right to risk damnation in order to save a life? But along the way the King's astute mind would not have missed those uncomfortable references. He too had delegated his authority to unworthy deputies, led by Cecil; his deputies too had revived dormant laws and given them new teeth; they too refused to countenance high-level pleas for mercy. In the play, the duke intervenes after secretly observing the conduct of his deputy and restores justice all round. As it turns out, it has all been a ducal ploy to test the deputy's character. Shakespeare suggests that this might be the case with James—that he too is about to reclaim the reins of power and restore justice.

Measure for Measure flatters James with the suggestion that he is the omniscient ruler who steps out from the shadows to awe his subjects with Solomon-like powers of judgment. He had impressed the country with just such a *coup de theatre* shortly after his accession, reprieving three of Cecil's old enemies after a dramatic period of suspense on the scaffold. Similar moments would recur throughout the reign. James himself took centre stage at the 1604 Hampton Court Conference, in which he outwitted the Puritans in debate 'Delight to haunt your session and spy carefully their proceedings', James advised his son, 'be a daily watchman over your servants that they obey your laws precisely'. The play's 'old fantastical duke of dark corners' (4.3.152-153) embodies James's concept of kingcraft as described in *Basilikon Doron* but also exhibits James's own quirks of character, among them his fear of crowds and his notorious paranoia. James would have been on tenterhooks throughout the play to discover the fate of the backbiting Lucio, who sneers at the duke's reputation as scholar and statesman, opining that though 'the greater file of the subject held the Duke to be wise', he was actually 'a very superficial, ignorant unweighing fellow' (3.2.127-130). Lucio is sentenced to be hanged in the last scene: 'slandering a prince deserves it'. There are further flattering allusions—among them to James's deadpan sense of humour, and his idiosyncratic, speculative cast of mind: the duke is 'one that, above all other strifes, contended especially to know himself' (3.2.218-219).

As the plot unfolds, deft strokes of colour highlight the topical parallels—perhaps aware of James's reputedly short attention span, Shakespeare repeats his key point several times. The story of Angelo, the deputy, emphasises the central error of James's domestic policy—his unquestioning reliance on the civil service he found waiting for him in Whitehall. To underline the abuse of royal authority by James's advisers in reintroducing the penal laws, Shakespeare gives heavy emphasis to the theme of *Basilikon Doron*. Even the play's title comes from a passage in the book that specifically warns against delegating power to deputies who have scores to settle: 'And above all, let the measure of your love to everyone be according to the measure of their virtue... letting your favour to be no longer tied to any than the continuance of his virtuous disposition shall deserve, nor admitting the excuse upon a just revenge to procure oversight to an injury'. Shakespeare drives home the point by creating in Angelo a memorable portrait of a hypocritical, worldly Puritan. Remember what you wrote about justice, pleads the play—deal with Catholics yourself, don't hand them over to their traditional enemies. He spells out the precise dates of Angelo's revived statutes, relating them closely to the anti-Catholic statutes revived by Parliament in 1604 and reinforced by the Privy Council in 1605. One is '19 zodiacs' old, like the 1585 'Act against Jesuits ... and suchlike Disobedient Persons' that made sheltering a priest a capital offence; the other, fourteen years old, matches the 'Proclamation' of October 1591, which invited the whole nation to hunt down recusants.

Further precise touches relate the bargaining over the fate of poor Claudio to the repercussions for English Catholics of James's foreign policy coup—peace with Spain. The nun's name, Isabella, linked with a Poor Clare convent, would have brought to mind someone as closely identified with Spanish Catholicism as the name Orsini was with the Vatican. Isabella Clara Eugenia, Archduchess of Flanders, was the sister of Philip III of Spain. A popular figure in Flanders and in England, she was renowned for her beauty, piety and common sense. The Spanish royal family, and Isabella Clara in particular, had close links with the Poor Clare nuns; among many other good works in Flanders, Isabella founded a number of convents for the Poor Clares. In spite of her Catholicism, her claim to the English throne had been supported at various points by Cecil as well as Persons. Though she resisted their diplomatic overtures, she was among the first to congratulate James on his accession, assured that he would bring toleration to Catholics. Yet she did nothing to bring it about; her brother's anodyne peace treaty with England went ahead without protest.

The ineffectual Isabella in the play, who has to be prompted and nudged into pressing her brother's suit, would have reminded English Catholics of the inexplicably half-hearted support by Catholic leaders abroad like Isabella Clara. They could not have known that even before the peace treaty was discussed, Spain had washed its hands of their cause. The Spanish Ambassador had reported that James would never relent, and the Primate of Spain shrugged off

the whole business, arguing that Spain had no moral obligation towards a group that was not, after all, composed of Spanish subjects.

This issue would have been particularly close to Shakespeare's heart. One of the tasks of the King's Men as they accompanied the delegation from Dover to London was to arrange for interviews between Spanish delegates and imprisoned priests and recusants, ostensibly an information-gathering exercise into the true state of English Catholics. This experience may account for the spine-chilling dungeon scenes in the play, in which the visiting Isabella's piously resigned platitudes meet Claudio's anguished 'Ay, but to die and go we know not where, To lie in cold obstruction and to rot...' (3.I.I 19-120).

Abandoned by Spain, desperate English Catholics proposed that Rome should purchase toleration for them by bribing James's counsellors. Publicly, the papacy reacted with the same horror the nun in the play exhibited. The suggestion was 'unworthy and scandalous.' But secretly, the Church acted on it. Before long every influential member of the English government, Cecil included, was receiving hefty retainers from Spain in return for promises to work for toleration. *Measure for Measure* dramatises the one-sided bargain. Like Spain getting into bed with James's corrupt advisers, the saintly Isabella at last agrees to pretend to trade her virtue for her brother's life. And exactly like the advisers who took the Spanish money and did nothing to stop the persecution, the cynical Angelo beds 'Isabella'—in fact, his disguised ex-mistress—and goes ahead with Claudio's execution regardless. So Shakespeare reminds James about—or perhaps alerts him to—the grubby role played by his Privy Council in facilitating the peace treaty.

The play's minor characters give a further taste of the style of the Jacobean court. The two-faced courtier Lucio is a new and depressing variation on Shakespeare's sequence of 'Luke' names. He is a portrait of the rising breed of unscrupulous Catholic who came to prominence under James, the result of Cecil's skillful pre-accession window-dressing. The most conspicuous examples were the Howard family, who seized the opportunities offered by Cecil and made a fortune over the next decade, their greed and immorality dragging into disrepute both the public face of Catholicism and the already dissolute image of James's court. Equally topical is the fate of Mariana, Angelo's mistress, ditched the moment she lost her dowry. She is yet another image of the original Puritan ideal, outlawed by the state religion, its aims betrayed by worldly Puritan zealots such as Edward Coke, the Attorney-General, and the Chief Justice, John Popham—the men who implemented the persecution of Catholics under James.

At first sight a flattering 'patronage' play, *Measure for Measure* contains not only urgent pleas to James to listen to the 'cries of men' but grim premonitions of the future position of the monarchy. It is a minutely political drama—the unlikely ending in which Claudio lives and the duke weds Isabella is one of the many aspects that make sense only on the allegorical level, expressing the longed-for solution to the whole unhappy problem—the re-union of Stuart England with the universal Catholic Church.

Questions for Discussion

1. What are the references in *Measure for Measure* that, according to Asquith, King James would have found 'uncomfortable'?
2. In what ways is James' concept of kingcraft embodied by the Duke?
3. Asquith observes parallels between:
 - *Measure for Measure*
 - King James' beliefs and policies
 - the Jacobean political world

Summarise his observations regarding the following:

- The story of Angelo and the 'central error of James' domestic policy
- The title of the play and the Basilikon Doron
- The bargaining over the fate of Claudio and the impact on English Catholics of James' establishment of peace with Spain (especially consider the comparison of Isabella in the play with Isabella Clara Eugenia, Archduchess of Flanders)
- Isabella's pretence with Angelo, and James' corrupt advisers accepting bribes from Spain
- Lucio and profiteers in the Jacobean court

Introduction to Measure for Measure by John Wilders

Measure for Measure is one of the few plays of Shakespeare to which we can give a more-or-less precise date. In the account books of the Master of the Revels, the official responsible for providing entertainments for the monarch, there is an entry noting that a play called 'Mesur for Mesur' by 'Shaxberd' was performed in the banqueting hall of Whitehall on the night after Christmas 1604, presumably as part of the seasonal festivities and in the King's own presence.

If we compare *Measure for Measure* with any of Shakespeare's previous comedies we can see at once that he was here experimenting in a new kind of drama. In all his earlier comedies he had written chiefly about love, courtship and marriage. In *Measure for Measure*, however, he writes about sex and fornication. The settings for the earlier comedies had often been domestic: the houses of Baptista and Petruchio in *The Taming of the Shrew*, Leonato's estate in *Much Ado About Nothing* with his immediate family and guests, the households of Orsino and Olivia in *Twelfth Night* with their servants, Cesario and Malvolio. *Measure for Measure*, on the other hand, is very much a city comedy. It takes place in Vienna and, as the action moves from the ducal palace to the brothels, the convent, the courtroom and the prison, it portrays the richly-textured experiences of city life. It also conveys, like the greatest chronicles of the city, the novels of Dickens, the fragmentation of urban society. Just as in *Bleak House* the aristocracy exist in remote isolation from the crumbling, diseased tenements frequented by Jo the crossing sweeper, so in the opening scenes of this play the withdrawn, contemplative Duke, the fastidious scholar Angelo, and the ardent young novice Isabella lead separate lives, unaware of Pompey, Froth and Mistress Overdone whose haunts are the back streets and the brothels. And the high-principled solitaries discover, as they do in *Bleak House*, that their lives are linked with the criminal world in ways they had never supposed.

Measure for Measure was also, in its time, a fashionable play. Unlike Shakespeare's previous comedies it deals not so much with the problems of love and with domestic, household affairs, but with the problems of the community as a whole, with 'government', one of the very first words to be spoken in the dialogue. Its concern is specifically with the difficulties encountered by the ruler in his attempts to administer the law. This was the subject of a book which had been widely discussed during the year before the play was written, the Basilicon Doron (or 'Royal Gift'), the author of which was obviously the most prominent and noticeable member of the audience at that Christmastide production in 1604, James I himself. In his treatise on government, the King, who had come to the throne of England only a year previously, had observed that

Lawes are ordained as rules of vertuous and sociall living, and not to be snares to trap your good subjects: and therefore the lawe must be interpreted according to the meaning, and not to the literall sense.

These reflections are, as we shall see, particularly relevant to the crises which develop during the play. Moreover, the presence of the new monarch, who was also the author of a book of instruction in government, gave a topical significance to the Duke's opening speech:

*Of government the properties to unfold
Would seem in me t' affect speech and discourse,
Since I am put to know that your own science
Exceeds, in that, the lists of all advice
My strength can give you.*

This is not simply a compliment addressed by Duke Vincentio to his faithful counsellor but, at the same time, a courteous tribute by Shakespeare to his King, the patron of his theatrical company.

Measure for Measure was also a topical play, it has been suggested, in the choice of Angelo as its central character. His character was probably based on that of the strict puritans whose presence in English religious and social life was by then familiar. We may, today, assume that Shakespeare's introduction into the play of a law which defines adultery not simply as a sin but as a crime punishable by death was no more than a dramatic convention, highly improbable but necessary for the plot. In the early seventeenth century, however, it was far from improbable: the stricter puritans hoped to place such a law in the statute books if ever they came to political power.

It is with the problem of putting this law into effect that the action of *Measure for Measure* begins. Angelo, the newly-appointed deputy for the Duke, is determined to revive this neglected statute and to enforce it absolutely, but finds himself, immediately he takes office, confronted with what we should now call a test case, the case of Claudio. Claudio is practically the only major character in the play who is an ordinary, average man. The rest are, in one way or another, extremists. The characters are divided, roughly, between the whoremongers Lucio, Pompey and Mistress Overdone - and the celibates - Angelo, Isabella and the Duke. Claudio, however, belongs to neither side. He is guilty, certainly, of adultery and is an acquaintance of Lucio's, but he also loves Juliet and is betrothed to her. By committing adultery with her before his actual marriage he is guilty, technically, of a capital offence, yet one which any young man might commit. As the Provost remarks,

*All sects, all ages, smack of this vice; and he
To die for it!*

In a play characterised by its intractable moral dilemmas, the problem of applying the law fairly in the case of Claudio is the first dilemma. Towards Claudio's offence, the various characters express widely differing, indeed opposing attitudes, all of them simple and extreme. Lucio, apparently Mistress Overdone's most regular client, sees it as trivial and regards Angelo's severity as absurd:

*A little more lenity to lechery would do no harm in him...
Why, what a ruthless thing is this in him, for the rebellion of a
codpiece to take away the life of a man!*

This is, of course, precisely the opinion we should expect from someone who spends his time in whorehouses and, moreover, Lucio has a special interest in the case of Claudio because, if the latter is executed, his own head will be at risk. Moreover, lenity towards lechery has been the policy adopted by the Duke with disastrous consequences: the city has degenerated into anarchic license, Vienna has spawned brothels like mushrooms, and the topic of conversation in them, as we soon discover, is not the pleasures of fornication but its after-effect, syphilis, an infection much less easily cured in Shakespeare's time than in our own, and therefore more terrifying. To overlook Claudio's crime of adultery is, therefore, not a satisfactory solution and, indeed, the Duke's failure to enforce the laws, and its unhappy consequences, is one reason for his retirement in favour of the rigorous Angelo.

The Deputy's attitude towards Claudio's offence is precisely the opposite of Lucio's, though equally simple, extreme and, again, characteristic of the man who expresses it. His own moral restraint, his strict control over his sexual appetites, is a quality which all the characters recognise. To the Duke, for example, Angelo is 'a man of stricture and firm abstinence', one who 'scarce confesses that his blood flows, or that his appetite is more to bread than stone'. As a man of absolute continency himself, Angelo has no hesitation in condemning Claudio to the block. Yet his point of view is no more satisfactory than Lucio's.

Not only are there, in Claudio's case, extenuating circumstances, but the imposition of the law against adultery will have effects on his subjects of which Angelo is unaware. The demolition of the brothels will, from what we see of the city, cause widespread unemployment in Vienna, and professional bawds such as Pompey and his mistress will lose their livelihood. Moreover, as the more realistic characters frequently point out, adultery is so general a vice that, as Lucio observes,

it is impossible to extirp it quite... till eating and drinking be put down.

The function of the law in any society is to protect its members against their own destructive or self-destructive appetites, whether for sexual satisfaction or for such obviously criminal activities as robbery or murder. This truth is grasped by the unfortunate criminal himself, Claudio, who does not deny his guilt nor is unwilling, at first, to endure the penalty:

*Our natures do pursue,
Like rats that ravin down their proper bane,
A thirsty evil; and when we drink we die.*

Although laws are, therefore, necessary for the survival of a society, there appears to be no wholly acceptable way of applying them. Since the two conflicting attitudes towards Claudio's predicament are expressed with great conviction by the characters, the audience is itself forced into a dilemma, made more acute by their recognition that the man on trial is their own representative, the average man.

These two extreme positions, the one of lenience, the other of rigidity, are brought into direct conflict in the two most intensely dramatic scenes in the play, the interviews between Isabella and Angelo (II ii and II iv), which in turn give rise to a moral dilemma of a different kind. The basis of Isabella's plea to Angelo for mercy towards her brother is, yet again, consistent with what we know of her. As a young woman devoutly committed to the religious life, she invokes Christ's injunction 'Let him that is among you without sin cast the first stone', or, in her own words to Angelo,

*Go to your bosom,
Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know
That's like my brother's fault. If it confess
A natural guiltiness such as is his,
Let it not sound a thought upon your tongue
Against my brother's life.*

No doubt we sympathise with her argument more strongly than with any other we have so far heard, yet Angelo's defence is also persuasive:

*It is the law, not I condemn your brother.
Were he my kinsman, brother, or my son,
It should be thus with him.*

In other words, the law embodies principles which exist irrespective of the judge whose duty it is to safeguard them. Yet, although our sympathies may be divided between Isabella, who is after all trying desperately to save the life of her own brother, and Angelo who, however uncongenial personally, adheres to an irrefutable principle, neither is allowed to convince the other. For Isabella has, unknowingly, been testing Angelo at his weakest point: in the process of pleading for clemency towards Claudio's crime of adultery she has aroused the sexual appetite of Angelo himself. The underlying impulse behind Angelo's castigation of vice has been an unconscious sense of similar inclinations within himself. He has been punishing others for the weakness which he has himself with shame and difficulty repressed.

The first of these two great scenes is therefore the testing of Angelo. The second is the testing of Isabella, who is forced to make a choice between satisfying Angelo's lust as the price for her brother's reprieve, and rejecting his advances and thereby voluntarily allowing Claudio to be executed. In short, she must choose between the sacrifice of her virginity and the sacrifice of her brother. In the first of the two scenes Isabella unwittingly tests Angelo's sexual restraint; in the second Angelo tests Isabella's sense of compassion, ironically the very quality she had formerly tried to awaken in Angelo. But whereas the result of their first encounter is to break down Angelo's defences, the result of the second is to force Isabella into a more extreme religious and moral rigidity:

*Then, Isabel, live chaste, and, brother, die:
More than our brother is our chastity.*

Shakespeare has now shifted our attention from the apparently insoluble problem of Claudio to the intolerable dilemma of Isabella. Whether or not we support her resolution to protect her chastity at the expense of Claudio's life will depend very much on our own character and attitudes: the audience is again placed in the position of judge, and different readers have pronounced very different verdicts. The eighteenth-century critic Charlotte Lennox denounced Isabella as 'a mere vixen in her virtue' with 'the manners of an affected prude'. The nineteenth-century critic Mrs Jameson, on the other hand, saw in her 'a certain moral grandeur, a saintly grace, something of a vestal dignity... She is like a stately and graceful cedar, towering on some alpine cliff, unbowed and unscathed amid the storm'. Isabella's problem, like the case of Claudio, is one to which there is no wholly right solution.

Our attention is now transferred to the prison where Claudio is waiting to hear the result of his sister's intercession and, meanwhile, is being prepared by the Duke for death. Here, once more, we are shown two extreme and conflicting points of view, each consistent with the man who expresses it. In making the condemned man ready for execution, the Duke, in his disguise as a friar, argues that life is so inherently painful and corrupt that death should not be feared but welcomed as a release:

*Reason thus with life.
If I do lose thee, I do lose a thing
That none but fools would keep. / A breath thou art,
Servile to all the skyey influences, / That dost this habitation where thou keep'st Hourly afflict.*

For the moment, the Duke's words of comfort convince Claudio that death is preferable to life, but when his sister announces that she has rejected Angelo's offer, he instantly changes his attitude from one of stoical resignation to terror and panic at the prospect of his imminent dispatch into the unknown:

*Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;
To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot;
This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit
To bathe in fiery floods or to reside
In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice;
To be imprison'd in the viewless winds,
And blown with restless violence round about
The pendant world; or to be worse than worst
Of those that lawless and incertain thought
Imagine howling - 'tis too horrible.*

Having been persuaded, a few moments earlier, that life was not worth living, Claudio is now convinced that death is too terrifying to contemplate. Like all the major characters, Claudio is first wrenched from one extreme attitude to its opposite and, as a result, finds himself in an insupportable dilemma. Neither death nor life appear to him acceptable. There is, needless to say, no other choice available to him.

The role of the Duke is the longest in the play and he dominates the last two acts. It is, as any actor who has played the part will confirm, a very difficult one to interpret with any psychological consistency. He is first shown to have been a dangerously indulgent ruler whose neglect of the law has allowed the city to become corrupt, and then to have foisted his problems on a substitute whose reliability is, as he himself suspects, uncertain. Although, to himself, he defends his actions as necessary for the moral education of Angelo, nevertheless the Deputy is tested at a very high cost: Claudio is made to believe that his execution is imminent and Isabella is allowed to think, almost until the end of the play, that Claudio is dead. On the other hand the Duke delivers a number of general observations on the nature of government of which, apparently, Shakespeare intended us to approve, and it is he who makes the most spectacular appearance 'like power divine' in order to dispense justice in the closing scene. It may be, however, that Shakespeare intended *Measure for Measure* to show the trial and education of the Duke as well as of Angelo and Isabella, and that this provides some explanation for the apparent inconsistencies in his character.

To begin with, the Duke appears self-assured and certain of his shrewdness in judging other people, his corresponding knowledge of himself, and his power to intervene and resolve any difficulties which may arise during his supposed absence. In all three respects he discovers he has been self-deceived. He assumes that Angelo, having spent the night with Mariana, will be a man of his word and pardon the condemned Claudio, whereas Angelo actually confirms the order for Claudio's execution. He prides himself as one who, in the words of Escalus, 'contended especially to know himself', yet discovers that his reputation, at least with Lucio, is quite different from what he had supposed: 'a very superficial, ignorant, unweighing fellow'. He imagines he can save Claudio from execution by placing Barnardine on the block instead, but discovers that Barnardine is not willing to co-operate. Deprived of his robes of office he is less able to manipulate and control than he had imagined. And when, as Duke, he reappears to pass formal judgement on the guilty, his attempts to resolve the problems he has created are not wholly satisfactory, for no such resolutions are possible.

When Angelo's guilt is finally exposed and he stands ashamed, repentant and begging for death, the Duke awards him life and marriage to the woman he has formerly rejected. The unfortunate Lucio is first condemned to death for slander but then allowed to live and compelled to marry a whore, a sentence which the accused regards as worse than death. To Isabella, the devout religious celibate, he proposes marriage, an invitation which, significantly, she greets with silence. Although *Measure for Measure* concludes, like the earlier comedies, with the prospect of several marriages, none of them seems likely to succeed. It is a comedy which seems designed to show the impossibility of writing comedy.

The underlying cause of the insoluble dilemmas which characterise this uniquely philosophical play is the essentially divided nature of man. Shakespeare recognises that we are individuals with demanding impulses and desires of our own, but that we are also members of a community with an obligation to control our own wills for the sake of peace, stability and the common good. Whereas the unrestrained pursuit of personal appetite leads to anarchy, the rigid application of the law leads to injustice. Moreover, the presence of Isabella reminds us that we also have an obligation to God and that this may conflict with our obligation to our fellow men. The unresolved conflicts in *Measure for Measure* arise because the human condition is itself one of conflict. The cumbersome, half-satisfactory resolution which the Duke supplies is perhaps, under the circumstances, no worse than we can expect.

Introduction to *Measure for Measure* by Anne Barton

G. Blakemore Evans (Editor) 'Introduction to *Measure for Measure*' in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, Houghton Mifflin; 2nd edition (April 15, 1997)

MEASURE FOR MEASURE was performed at court on December 26, 1604, and probably was written earlier in that year. It is the last of Shakespeare's comedies. After it come *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus*, and *Timon of Athens*: an unbroken progression of tragedies halted only with the composition of *Pericles* in 1607-8. *Pericles* and its three successors among the romances are not tragedies, but neither are they plays which seem to fit into the category of comedy as we understand it in Shakespeare's earlier work. In tone and structure they constitute a race apart a new and different species of play. *Measure for Measure* stands then as the end of a development, the last word spoken in a particular kind of dramatic investigation which seems to have begun in the early 1590's and which extended itself through some eleven comedies before reaching this terminus. The play itself has some of the qualities of a farewell: a sense of dissatisfaction with its own dramatic mode, concentrated in its notoriously troublesome final scene, and a predominant harshness of tone, a savagery even in its clowning. Frequently, it has been classed as a "dark" comedy, or as a "problem play." Certainly the shadow of the tragedies Shakespeare was to write after *Measure for Measure* seems to hang over it. Much of the action takes place in a prison, and the comedy as a whole is obsessed with the idea of death.

Measure for Measure is the only one of Shakespeare's twelve comedies which can be said to have aroused as much disagreement over interpretation as any of the great tragedies. The language of the play is particularly rich in religious imagery and reference and, of the major characters, one makes her first appearance as a novice in a convent, while another spends most of his time acting the part of a holy friar. Ideas of Christian mercy, atonement, chastity, and sin are constantly invoked. A passage from Christ's Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's gospel seems to underlie, not simply Shakespeare's shaping of the Angelo story, but the entire play: "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured unto you again" (Geneva). Not surprisingly, attempts have sometimes been made to see *Measure for Measure* as a Christian allegory. The Duke takes his role as the deputy of God on earth, a prince bearing the sword of heaven, with the utmost seriousness, but not even he goes as far as those commentators who have insisted upon identifying him quite literally with Christ. This theory, taken to its logical extreme, produces readings of the play in which Isabella comes to represent Man's Soul (or else the Church), with Lucio functioning as a rather shabby Satan. On the whole, doctrinaire Christian interpretations of this kind are unactable without drastic cutting and distortion of individual roles. More important, they have a way of reducing one of Shakespeare's most profound and disturbing plays to a collection of pious and undramatic platitudes.

The story of the corrupt governor who perverts justice in order to gratify his own lust, the central plot element in *Measure for Measure*, exists in a great many versions and in a variety of European languages. Shakespeare undoubtedly knew the story of Juriste, Epitia, and her brother Vico as told by Cinthio in his prose collection *Hecatommithi* (1565). Cinthio also completed a dramatic version of the story, a tragi-comedy called *Epitia* after its heroine, published in Italy in 1583. Shakespeare may have seen it. The most important influence on *Measure for Measure*, however, was undoubtedly the English *Promos and Cassandra* (1578), a two-part play by George Whetstone. Whetstone himself drew upon Cinthio's novella, and possibly upon a sixteenth-century Latin play, *Philanira*. As in all other known versions before Shakespeare, *Cassandra*, the Isabella character, does in fact sleep with the unjust judge in order to save the life of her brother. (In some stories it is her husband who is in danger.) There is no real equivalent for Shakespeare's disguised Duke, although Whetstone's plot does contain a virtuous king who appears in Part II to redress *Cassandra's* wrongs. Most important of all, there is no hint of a Mariana. Reparation is made at the end by a marriage between *Cassandra* and *Promos*, the man who has treated her so badly.

Whetstone's play raises no problems of interpretation. It is a straightforward moral drama, perfectly summed up by the description provided on the title-page:

The Right Excellent and famous Historye, of Promos and Cassandra: Devided into two Commicall Discourses, In the fyrste parte is showne, the unsufferable abuse, of a lewde Magistrate: The vertuous behaviours of a chaste Ladye: the uncontrold leawdness of a favoured Curtisan. And the undeserved estimation of a pernicious Parasyte. In the second parte is discoursed, the perfect magnanimitye of a noble Kinge, in checking Vice and favouring Vertue: Wherein is showne, the Ruyne and overthrowe, of dishonest practises: with the advauncement of upright dealing.

It is worth noting, in view of the claim still often made for Isabella as an unexamined absolute, a girl who could not possibly have behaved better in an agonizing situation, that Whetstone's Cassandra does sacrifice herself for her brother but is still described as a "chaste Ladye" and her behavior as "vertuous." To say categorically that Shakespeare's heroine ought to have emulated Cassandra (and, for that matter, all her predecessors in the same predicament) by yielding to Angelo, in the knowledge that the sin would be cancelled out by the circumstances of victimization and constraint, would obviously be to create yet another simplification of a decision which Shakespeare presents as complex. Yet the argument that Elizabethans (as opposed to our permissive twentieth-century society) must necessarily have endorsed Isabella's attitude in the prison scene with Claudio because they believed that fornication, on whatever grounds, involved the perdition of the soul, is simply not borne out by *Promos and Cassandra*. Nor, for that matter, is it a view sanctioned by *Measure for Measure*.

Shakespearean comedy is in general deeply distrustful of absolutes, of characters who attempt to guide their lives according to rigid (and usually unexamined) ideals of conduct. *Measure for Measure* is no exception. Angelo's absolute of icy self-control is suspect from the beginning; it is an idea, not a fact, and it gives way entirely as soon as he faces a real temptation. There is an ironic correctness, however, in the fact that it is Isabella who brings him down. She is a kindred spirit, another virtuous absolutist. Like calls to like between them, and it is precisely this affinity which, as he senses himself, makes her so deadly to him: "O cunning enemy, that to catch a saint, / With saints dost bait thy hook" (II.ii.179-80). Beneath the sober and inflexible deportment of the lawgiver lurks a frustrated sensualist. 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. In collision over Claudio's fate, these two absolutists elicit from each other the unacknowledged and destructive aspects of their respective personalities. Angelo plunges into depravity, Isabella merely into hysteria and intolerance.

In the course of the play both undergo a painful process of education. By the end, Angelo stands humiliated and exposed before everyone: convicted of hypocrisy, avarice, lust, and a criminal perversion of justice. His only wish is for death. Isabella, the girl who could not bring herself even to name her brother's sin directly in her initial interview with Angelo, is brought to the point of urging another woman to behave like Juliet, and also consents to, make, in public, a false declaration of her own loss of virginity. The Isabella who kneels beside Mariana in the final scene to beg for the life of Angelo is a different person from the chilly maiden who had to be coaxed by Lucio into pleading her brother's cause with any vigor, or from the terrified virgin who turned on Claudio like a Fury when he ventured to suggest that death might be worse than an enforced loss of chastity. Like Angelo, she has arrived at a new and juster knowledge of herself and also, by implication, of a world of compromise and imperfection which has, at least to some extent, to be accepted on its own terms.

Society in Vienna is demonstrably corrupt, but energetic. It looks, in fact, all too familiar: a recognizable image of almost any big city. When Angelo and his partner Escalus, as justices, try to set it right they become enmeshed in a web of detail. The wrong (if there was one) done to Elbow's wife cannot be disentangled from two stewed prunes—the others having been eaten—in a threepenny fruit-dish which was not china but was a good dish all the same. Justice as an abstract concept, which is how Angelo sees it, wants nothing to do with an inn-room called the Bunch of Grapes, with its low chair and its fire in winter, nor with Master Caper's four suits of peach-colored satin, as yet unpaid for, nor with young Master Rash and his commodity

of brown paper and old ginger. Yet it is only by entering into this concrete world of individualized instances, of stubborn particularity, that anything like justice can be done. Angelo soon becomes exasperated when asked to make sense of the Froth/Elbow/Pompey imbroglio, and leaves the court, "hoping you'll find good cause to whip them all." It is not a very constructive approach. His far more diffident colleague Escalus, left alone to make sense of the matter, is patient and intuitive. The sheer stupidity of Constable Elbow makes a conviction impossible (much as it did in the analogous ease of Mistress Quickly, Falstaff, and the Lord Chief Justice in 2 Henry IV), but Escalus does reach the bottom of the matter. He has to turn Pompey loose, for lack of evidence, with nothing more than a warning, but he knows how to deal with him on the next encounter, and he has uncovered at least one civic abuse, in the form of those householders who pay Elbow to do their job for them, which can be set right.

Vienna is certainly in need of more magistrates like Escalus. What it emphatically does not require are draconic, inhuman laws of the kind that Angelo, with the Duke's sanction, attempts to enforce. The view that the Duke is a character who exists on a plane different from that of everyone else in the play, a personification of Christian Providence and not really a human being, is not easy to sustain from the text. It becomes particularly implausible in the theatre. What an audience actually sees is a man who has delivered up his authority to another man—and a man he has reason to suspect—in order that this surrogate should bear the opprobrium of reactivating certain harsh statutes which the Duke himself has let slip. He is a false friar, not a real one, but this does not prevent him from playing upon the credulity of his victims and hearing confession. He also tends to play upon people's emotions, displaying a kind of scientific curiosity as to how they will behave under stress. He even devises special tests for them in which pressure can be applied to points he knows, or guesses, are weak. So, he torments Isabella by withholding from her the information that her brother is really alive. Most baffling of all, he carefully arranges a bed-trick, the substitution of Mariana for Isabella, which is not only a sin in the eyes of the Church; in terms of Elizabethan common law it represents a union considerably more dubious (even without taking into account the fraud involved) than the *de praesenti* contract which allows Claudio to claim perfectly correctly, in secular terms, that Juliet "is fast my wife" (1.ii.147).

If the Duke is an image of Providence, there would seem to be chaos in heaven. Certainly, error and miscalculation arc rife in his plot. In the second scene of Act IV, he talks to the Provost in terms of complete confidence about Claudio's pardon: "As near the dawning, Provost, as it is, / You shall hear more ere morning" (94-95). While the Provost reads Angelo's message, the Duke indulges in some rather complacent rhyming couplets: "This is his pardon, purchas'd by such sin / For which the pardoner himself is in" (108-9). Angelo has not, however, sent a pardon, only a reaffirmation of the original order for Claudio's execution. Providence, if that is what the Duke is, finds itself at this juncture seriously embarrassed. Clutching at straws, he decides that the long-term prisoner Barnardine must die in place of Claudio. The trouble with this is that Barnardine, understandably enough, happens not to like the idea. He sees no reason why he should suddenly go to the block at a moment convenient for the Duke's purposes, and says so. Indeed, like Juliet in an earlier scene, he interrupts the Duke in mid-sentence, then turns on his heel and departs. It is the Provost who finds a solution to the dilemma by way of the conveniently dead pirate Ragozine.

Like Angelo and Isabella, the Duke is a virtuous absolutist. He is in fact a kind of comic dramatist: a man trying to impose the order of art upon a reality which stubbornly resists such schematization. As such, he is continually being surprised by the unpredictability, not to mention rank insubordination, of his elected east of characters. Angelo and Isabella, Barnardine, Juliet and Claudio get out of control; they do things that are not in their parts as conceived by the Duke and, as they do so, they force upon him a series of hasty rearrangements and patchings: re-writings of the script characterized by their makeshift quality. Reality in Vienna resists patterning. It can and should be cleaned up a bit, as Escalus tries to do, but essentially it remains its own vigorous, untidy self. Barnardine refuses to die at the moment required by the scenario. Claudio is won over by the rhetorical persuasion of the Duke's speech, "Be absolute for death" (III.i.5-41) but soon after is fighting for life on any terms as though he had never spoken to the friar. Angelo promises one thing and then, unexpectedly, tries to write his own fourth act. Moreover, there is one character for whom there is no place in the design as the Duke sees it, but who nonetheless refuses to get off the stage. Lucio does nothing at all for the Duke's godlike detachment, his pretense of being above ordinary human emotions and responses. He clings like a burr, breathing into the ear of the supposed friar all the scandal that this somewhat irresponsible disguise has made possible. In the final scene, where the Duke's role as a manipulator of action is most apparent, Lucio threatens continually to divert or interrupt the unfolding of the plot. He has to be shouted down before the scene can proceed as planned.

With all his faults, he stands here as a man instinctively opposed to the artificial ordering of a dramatist duke. In his presence, the resolution imposed upon the comedy in its last moments looks even odder and more perfunctory than it might otherwise have done.

The long and notoriously difficult last scene of *Measure for Measure* seems to offer a strong hint as to why this was the last comedy Shakespeare ever wrote. As a comic dramatist, remaking reality in the arbitrary image of art, conducting events towards the happy ending required by this particular form, the Duke suggests an obvious parallel with Shakespeare himself. There is something forced and blatantly fictional about the Duke's ultimate disposition of people and events—and so there is about Shakespeare's. The Duke refuses to admit failure, but Shakespeare seems perversely to stress the hollowness, in a sense the falsehood, of the happy ending of this comedy. He suddenly imposes upon a play which hitherto has probed uncomfortably deep into the dark places of society and the human mind, which has been essentially realistic, an ending which is that of fairy-tale: conventional, suspect in its very tidiness, full of psychological gaps and illogicalities.

There is, after all, nothing to prepare one for a marriage between the Duke and Isabella. There have been no love passages of even the shyest and most inarticulate kind between them. She has never expressed any dissatisfaction with her original choice of a religious life, nor has the Duke retracted his statement at the beginning of the play that he, personally, is impervious to love: "*Believe not that the dribbling dart of love / Can pierce a complete bosom*" (I.iii.2-3). When he abruptly asks her to "be mine" (characteristically choosing the worst possible moment to do so, when Isabella is wholly taken up with Claudio, restored to her beyond hope) and when he tells her, "*I have a motion much imports your good*," what seems to confront us is not an emotional reality, but simply an obeisance to the laws of comic form. It is in effect an outbreak of that pairing-off disease so prevalent in the fifth acts of Elizabethan comedy which here openly declares itself as such. The situation is not made more credible by the fact that, even as Angelo has uttered no word of love or acceptance to the faithful Mariana, so Isabella says nothing whatever in response to the Duke's proposal of marriage. Like the theatre audience, presumably, she is dumb with surprise.

Almost all of Shakespeare's comedies before *Measure for Measure* end with the formation of what Northrop Frye has called a "new society." This society is never flawless, but it is based upon tolerance and self-knowledge and it faces the future with optimism. In the dance at the end of *As You Like It* or *Much Ado about Nothing*, in the blessing of the marriage beds in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or the last of the entertainments in *Love's Labor's Lost*—that dialogue between the Owl and the Cuckoo where everyone, it last, has learned to listen courteously—we see the play projecting itself into the future, beyond the formal limits of its fifth act. There is continuity and promise, not simply arbitrary resolution. *Measure for Measure*, by contrast, does not really create anything that can be understood as a new society. Of the three marriages set up in its final moments, only the previous bond between Claudio and Juliet has any reality for us. The other two are ciphers. Most important of all, the play has admitted in its fifth act that it is only a play, a false geometry.

Measure for Measure departs from the norm of Shakespearean comedy in another important way. Most of its predecessors had been structured upon the idea of two contrasted localities of which one was heightened and more extraordinary than the other. The shape of the comedy was dictated by a journey from one realm into the other with, usually, a return to the normal world either implied or actually accomplished at the end. Almost all of *Measure for Measure*, however, takes place in Vienna: a city which is an image of the ordinary, the sordidly everyday. There is only one other place in the comedy. With its music and its gentle melancholy, its sense of isolation from an urban society which has passed it by, Mariana's moated grange seems to stand in the same relation to Vienna as Belmont to Venice, the wood to Duke Theseus' Athens, or Arden to the court of Duke Frederick. The great difference lies in the fact that the grange is not at all a place where people come and are transformed. It is a sealed-off enclosure, consciously thin in texture: literary and artificial. Mariana is taken away from it and transported to Vienna, a world to which she does not belong. A kind of fairy-tale princess, the mechanism of a happy ending unlikely in more realistic terms, she is made to take Isabella's place in Angelo's bed—an imaginary character substituting for a real one—and then to force a resolution which is contradictory and psychologically improbable, no matter how gratifying it may be in terms of the symmetry of plot.

Mariana is the only absolutist character in the play who escapes criticism. Her undeviating single-mindedness, the obsessive emotionalism which Tennyson explored so brilliantly in "Mariana" and "Mariana in the South" are, in Shakespeare, simply the servants of plot. Because of Mariana, there is a happy ending. It is an ending, however, which seems to create as many problems as it solves. Isabella, kneeling beside Mariana at the close, begs for Angelo's life on the grounds that:

*My brother had but justice,
In that he did the thing for which he died;
For Angelo,
His act did not o'ertake his bad intent,
And must be buried but as an intent
That perish'd by the way. (Vi.448-53)*

It is hard to make sense of this argument. At best, it is special pleading of an illogical kind. That Angelo has not slept with Isabella, as he intended, is true. He has, however, slept with Mariana outside the bonds of holy matrimony, even as Claudio did with Juliet. How, then, can Isabella claim that her brother "had but justice" when he has died (as she thinks) for exactly the same sin, fornication on a pre-contract, committed by Angelo with Mariana?

There seems to be a desperate, and surely deliberate, confusion of values in *Measure for Measure*. Isabella perhaps speaks more truly than she knows when she says, in Act II, that the laws of heaven often seem oddly incompatible with those of society: "*'Tis set down so in heaven, but not in earth*" (II.iv.50). There is in this play an unresolved conflict between religious and secular law, between absolutes and anarchy, between a necessary but sterile order and a vigorous but suspect world of self-gratification and individualism. There is also a clash between fairy-tale and realism, the simplifications of plot and the horrifying complexities of character. In the midst of all this, Mariana seems like an exile from a land of fiction. Her moated grange is like Isabella's nunnery, or Angelo's impossible court of justice, in that it too deals with absolutes: with clear-cut black and white. It will not bear close examination of the kind urged elsewhere in the play. As for the Duke, an absolutist of an artistic as opposed to a moral, religious, or emotional kind, he appears to embody some of the problems of a Shakespeare now seemingly disillusioned with that art of comedy which, in the past, had served him so well.

1. Lucio: 'The old fantastical duke of dark corners.'

To what extent is Lucio's description of the Duke justified?

2. Angelo: "Oh heavens, why does my blood thus muster to my heart?" (2. 4.)

Though Angelo's crimes are abhorrent, we cannot dismiss him as a mere villain. Discuss.

3. Isabella: 'More than our brother is our chastity.'

In denying human feeling, Isabella proves she is merely another part of the harsh world depicted in *Measure for Measure*. Do you agree?

4. Isabella: "Yet show some pity."

Angelo: "I show it most of all when I show justice."

Justice is often mentioned in *Measure for Measure*, but true justice is rarely delivered. Discuss.

5. *Measure for Measure* values mercy and forgiveness more than strict moral principles. Discuss.

6. Duke: 'I have seen corruption boil and bubble till it o'er-run the stew.'

Shakespeare suggests that corruption is endemic to the society of *Measure for Measure*. Discuss.

7. In *Measure for Measure*, Shakespeare suggests that liberty without restraint is as problematic as the reverse. Discuss.

8. In *Measure for Measure*, Shakespeare suggests that passion and lust are ungovernable forces which should be allowed to run their course. Discuss.

9. Power in *Measure for Measure* is derived from appearance and reputation rather than deeds and truth. Discuss.

10. "For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" – Jesus Christ, Matthew 7:2

In the end, all of the characters in *Measure for Measure* get what they deserve. Do you agree?

11. Escalus regarding the Duke: 'One that, above all other strifes, contended especially to know himself.'

In *Measure for Measure*, knowledge of self is integral to understanding others. Discuss.

12. Shakespeare reveals human strengths and failings in each of the worlds he depicts in *Measure for Measure* - the government, the Church and the brothel. Discuss.

13. Shakespeare presents love as a transactional exchange rather than based on emotional connection in *Measure for Measure*. Do you agree?

14. Claudio: '... the body public be a horse whereon the governor doth ride.'

What does *Measure for Measure* aim to teach about the function of government?

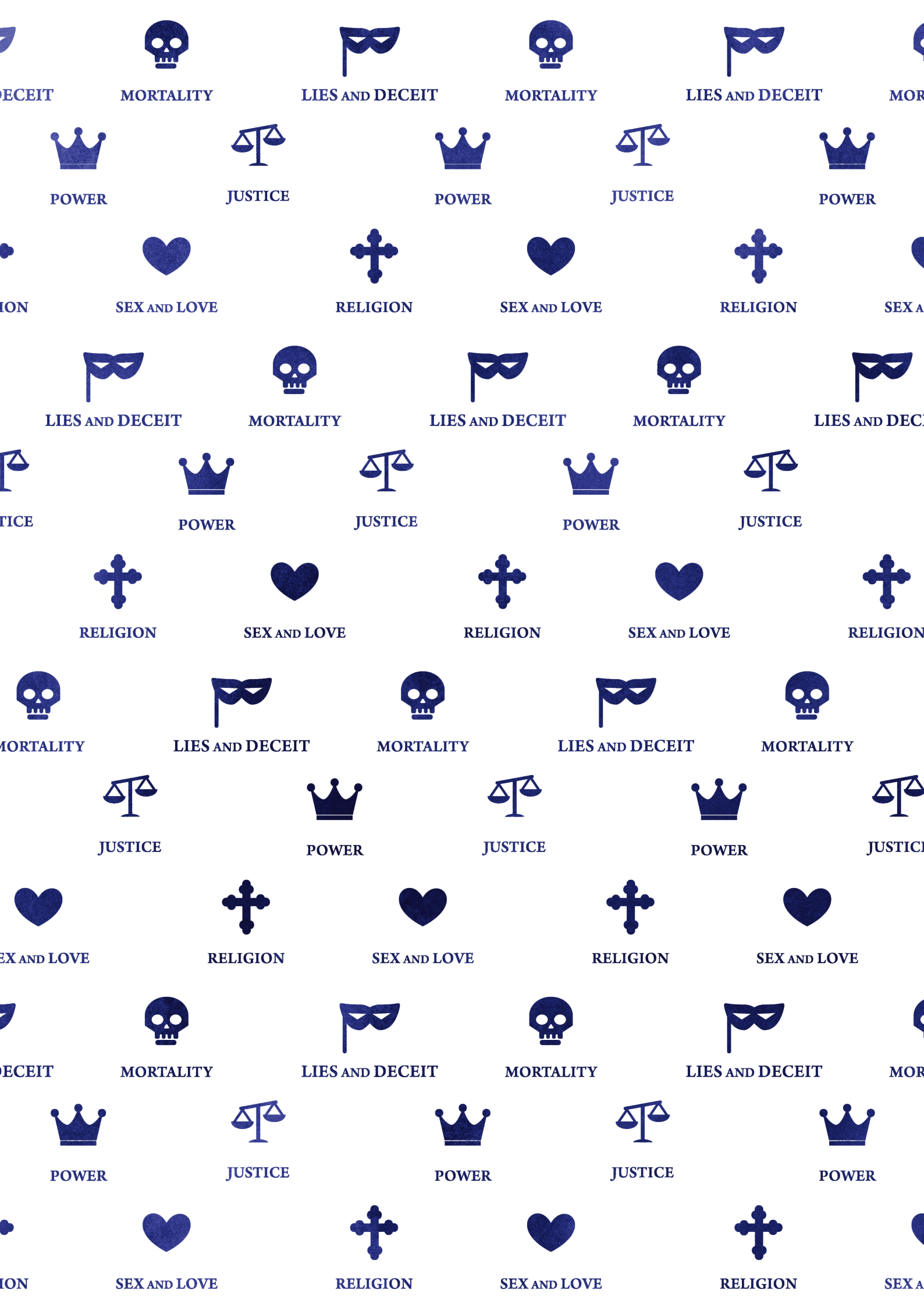
15. Though *Measure for Measure* is often a confronting play, Shakespeare also uses humour to develop his serious messages. Discuss.

16. Though the views of *Measure for Measure*'s female characters are often spurned and rejected, they reveal a stronger understanding of humanity than those offered by the men. Discuss.



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MORTALITY

LIES AND DECEIT

MORTALITY

LIES AND DECEIT

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