KEMANUSIAAN 16 (2009), 13–33

MEASURE FOR MEASURE: A THRICE TOLD TALE

HALIMAH MOHAMED ALI
Universiti Sains Malaysia
halimah@usm.my

Abstract. This paper argues that *Measure for Measure* is a difficult play to perform because it has problematic themes, especially the theme of sexuality, that clash with the way of life and thinking of contemporary society. As such, any director who chooses to stage it must consider these difficulties and how to present them in a natural manner without making the audience feel that the whole production is contrived. The directors of the two major productions discussed in this paper tried their best to present a *Measure for Measure* that would be acceptable to the modern society. It is evident that there are many interpretations of the Duke and Isabella's characters and also of Isabella's reaction to the Duke's proposal at the end of the play. It can be concluded that no interpretation is wrong because each actor or director brings with him his own reading of the play, and every reading has been influenced by other performances and textual criticisms. Since *Measure for Measure* is a thematically rich play, it should not be confined to a single interpretation. The different performances of *Measure for Measure* have proven that theatre is experimental as well as ageless. Because it is a brilliant play with a myriad of interpretations, *Measure for Measure* will not cease to be a favourite for directors in times to come. It is not wrong to predict that fans of Shakespeare in general and of *Measure for Measure* in particular can look forward to many more productions.

> For experienced Shakespeare observers all performances are thrice-told tales. The perceiving eye absorbs the performance even as the mind's eye attends to the text. Both are augmented by the inner ear buzzing with those other voices, both critical and dramatic, carried by the observer into the theatre.
>
> (Crowl, Samuel 1992: 3)

Keywords and phrases: Shakespeare, sexuality, law, theatre, ducal robes.

INTRODUCTION

Crowl's observation of theatre-goers who are fans of Shakespearean theatre is very precise. They attend the theatre carrying with them memories of other Shakespearean performances. They also bring criticisms of the plays and other

productions, as well as textual criticisms. Comparisons of different productions definitely play a part in motivating new thoughts and opinions on Shakespeare's plays, as well as theatre performances in general.[1]

Therefore, this paper will compare and contrast two different productions of one of Shakespeare's most discussed and performed plays, *Measure for Measure*, which dates to 1604.[2] It was performed at the court of James I on 26 December 1604, on St. Stephen's Night (Zesmer 1976, 287). Many critics, academicians and scholars have written about the performance and the text itself. It has been dubbed by critics as one of Shakespeare's 'problem' plays or 'dark' plays.[3]

THE PLAY

Measure for Measure is set in Vienna, where although there were once strict laws, the Duke, Vincentio, has let the law go lax for fourteen years. He admits to this when he says:

> We have strict statutes and most biting laws,
> The needful bits and curbs to headstrong jades,
> Which for fourteen years we have let slip.
>
> (I. iii. 19–21)[4]

He hands his ducal duties to Angelo, his deputy, on the pretext of some mysterious business that he does not reveal to either Escalus, an ancient Lord, or Angelo. However, the Duke does not leave Vienna. He stays on and requests the help of Friar Thomas to disguise himself as a friar. He then goes about the city of Vienna using the name Friar Lodowick and spying on his subjects. In his absence, Angelo does exactly as the Duke had hypothesised: he implements the laws that the Duke had let slip:

> Therefore indeed, my father,
> I have on Angelo impos'd the office;
> Who may in th'ambush of my name strike home.
>
> (I. iii. 39–40)

One of the strictest laws that Angelo implements is the law against fornication; the first victim is Claudio, who is caught with his fiancée Juliet because she is pregnant. Angelo rules that Claudio is to die the next day. In desperation, Claudio asks Lucio to seek out his sister Isabella, who has on the day of his arrest entered a nunnery as a novice nun. She is to go and beg for Claudio's life from Angelo. When Isabella goes to see Angelo and pleads her brother's case, she ends up

provoking his sexual desire, and he propositions her. He says that he will let her brother free if she sleeps with him. Isabella rejects the idea and goes to Claudio in the hope that he will understand that she has tried her best, but she will not yield her virginity to Angelo in exchange for her brother's life. Claudio, in his desperation, does not see Isabella exchanging her virginity for his life as a sin because, he says, 'Sure it is no sin;/or of the deadly seven it is the least' (III. i. 109–110). This confuses her, but the Duke steps in with a plan. He suggests a bed trick that involves Mariana, who was once engaged to Angelo. Surprisingly, Isabella agrees to this suggestion and assists the Duke. Angelo believes that he has slept with Isabella, but instead of pardoning Claudio he orders that Claudio be executed earlier than is expected, and he wants Claudio's head presented to him. The Duke once again intervenes; without Isabella's knowledge, Claudio is saved from being executed. The Duke then returns from his so-called travels. When he meets Angelo and Escalus in the city of Vienna, Isabella comes to plead her case. Thus, Angelo's dishonesty is unravelled. In the end Mariana marries Angelo, Claudio is brought to meet Isabella and marries Juliet, and finally the Duke proposes to Claudio's sister.[5] Yet Shakespeare does not provide a conclusive ending because in the end Isabella is not given a voice. There is no indication of whether she accepts or rejects the Duke's proposal.

THE PROJECT

This paper will explore how the text of *Measure for Measure* and its two main characters, the Duke and Isabella, are treated by different directors and actors. It will also look at the effect that design decisions have on the play as a whole. The treatment of the text and the characters and the design decisions will reflect the manner in which the two main characters; the Duke and Isabella, are portrayed in the play. This paper will also criticise and analyse the final scene of *Measure for Measure*, which is much discussed by critics, and consider the appropriate ending for the play. It will also look into whether the productions discussed succeed in their interpretations of the ending in Shakespeare's text. Although there have been many productions of *Measure for Measure* by numerous theatre companies, this paper will only concentrate on two productions performed by The Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) in 1983 and 1994 because there has not been an exhaustive amount of writing on these productions, unlike other prominent ones such as Peter Brook's much acclaimed production of 1950.[6] Nevertheless, for purposes of comparison, other RSC productions of the play will be referred to as well in the course of this paper.[7] The reason for looking at only the RSC[8] productions is because the company can be considered one of the most innovative and active theatre companies in its productions of Shakespeare.[9]

Interestingly, in 2002 Phil Willmott directed *Measure for Measure Malaya*. This rendition of Shakespeare's play was performed in London and produced by Suzanna Rosenthal. The setting is imperial Malaya, and there are a few changes to the characters, but the theme is still the same. However this paper will not discuss this production due to a lack of material concerning it.

THE DUKE

It cannot be denied that Shakespeare's plays are 'related to the contexts of [their] production – to the economic and political system of Elizabethan and Jacobean England and to the particular institutions of cultural productions (the court, patronage, theatre, education, the church)' (Dollimore and Sinfield 1985, viii). It is said that *Measure for Measure* is different from all other Shakespearean comedies because it 'has a highly significant title, a phrase that not only sums up the basic theme of the play, but is brought out and emphasised at the crisis in the last act when the Duke condemns his deputy' (Pope 1994, 57). The context in which *Measure for Measure* was written makes it a difficult play to produce and perform today. Although there have been many productions of it during the post-war era until now, not many of them do justice to the play as a whole and the themes that surrounded it. Adrian Noble is one of the few directors who seem to have managed to portray his interpretation of the play successfully.

Noble's *Measure for Measure*, which was performed at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1983, was considered to be very successful by many critics. He has been labelled as having his own 'signature style – bold, imaginative conception, narrative clarity, inventive visual texture, and richly theatrical effects' (Frick and Vallillo 1994, 288). Barber (1983) in his review in the Daily Telegraph said that Noble (1983) should be given credit for the play's success because of his creativity (Barber, 1983). His decision to place the play in 18th century Vienna was ingenious. It can be assumed that this is the main reason for the success of the play. According to Massey (1988), the actor who played the Duke, Noble's choice of placing *Measure for Measure* in an 18th century setting contributed to the play's success, because there was not much difference in the way the people of the 18th century looked at God compared to the Elizabethans (Jackson 1988, 15).

Measure for Measure has often been interpreted as a Christian allegory, especially with regard to its main character, the Duke.[10] That is the reason that most productions present him as a Christ-like figure. This is most probably due to the Renaissance notion that civil rulers derived their authority from God. Noble's production presents a different kind of Duke. In this version, the Duke, played by

Daniel Massey, is a very shy person who goes on a journey to find himself (Jackson 1988: 18). This interpretation is not wrong, because the Duke's shyness is evident when he says, 'I love the people,/But do not like to stage me to their eyes' (I. ii. 67–68). The director wanted to present a Duke who wanted to break free from all of the pomp and travel (Ibid. 17). The production conveys this idea successfully to the audience when the Duke sheds his ducal robes and steps into the friar's garb on the stage before act two starts. Although this is not in the text, it is a very successful device that emphasises the idea that the Duke is shedding his skin and cutting loose from his ducal duties. The transformation of the Duke into Friar would not have been successful without Bob Crowley. His design of the costume played an important part in making the transformation complete. According to Massey:

> Dear Bob Crowley's designs were a huge asset...Indeed, as I stepped out of the formal black breeches, frock-coat, buckle shoes and powdered wig into the simple monk habit, I really did feel an instant sense of physical freedom (Ibid. 18).

Both Massey (1988) and Noble (1983) saw the Duke as someone who wants to be free, which is why he decides to go on a journey. This reading of his character by the director and actor can be questioned, because in the text the Duke does not go on a journey. What actually happens when he changes from his ducal robes into the friar's garb is that he shakes off the responsibilities of the state and is free. He can be compared to a little boy who wants to go out and play. He gets his chance when he plays with the lives of his subjects.

However, unlike an innocent little boy who just wants to have some fun, the Duke can be seen as a manipulator. He stays in Vienna, and manipulates the lives of some of his subjects. His first contrivance involves Angelo, because he hands over his power to him so that he can implement the law as well as save the Duke from his subjects' disfavour:

> Sith 'twas my fault to give the people scope,
> 'Twould be my tyranny to strike and gall them
> For what I bid them do: for we bid this be done,
> When evil deeds have their permissive pass,
> And not the punishment. Therefore indeed, my father,
> I have in 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.
>
> (I. iii. 35–43)

He also takes advantage of his anonymity to play God with some of his subjects' lives. This is clear when he hatches the plan for Mariana, rather than Isabella, to sleep with Angelo: 'We shall advise this wronged maid to stead up your appointment, go in your place' (II. i. 250–251). This is not the only time that he plays God; his decision to execute Barnardine instead of Claudio is another instance of his godly authority: 'let this Barnardine/be this morning executed, and his head borne to/Angelo' (IV. ii. 169–171). It is like a game of chess to him, and he is the master player.

Although the Duke plays God with the lives of his subjects, it is clear that he is not portrayed as a representation of Christ. Massey (1988) rejects Knight's (1949) interpretation of the play as a Christian allegory (Ibid. 15). Nor does he interpret the Duke as 'an amoral manipulator of people's lives' (Ibid. 16). According to Massey, there is a 'high moral purpose' behind all the 'plots and schemes', and the Duke only has the best interest of his people, his city and of course himself at heart (Ibid. 16). Massey defends the character of the Duke by saying that he only starts to scheme after he receives news of Angelo's deception. According to Massey, that was the only way the Duke could respond to what Angelo had done (ibid. 18). In order to emphasise the idea that the Duke has the best interest of his people at heart, the director, Noble puts him at the centre of the play. Billington (2002) notes in *The Guardian* that the play revolves around the Duke rather than Angelo (as it usually does). In this production the Duke becomes the most important figure.

Steven Pimlott's 1994 RSC version is very different from Noble's 1983 production. This play is a modern version of *Measure for Measure*. According to Holland (1997), 'That almost any play can define different relationships to the present is obvious but *Measure for Measure* occupies an especial position in its negotiations with contemporary society' (Holland 1997, 206). This is clear when we look at the costume and set design, although 'Pimlott did not shackle the play with too strict a definition of period and location' (Jackson 1995, 355). This may be due to the fact that he has observed this:

> Productions that insist Vienna is effectively John Major's Britain run up against two problems. First, Britiain's government is effectively secular, while the Vienna of the play has somehow to accommodate the scope and respect accorded to friars. Second, the audience must believe that capital punishment exists and arbitrary ducal decrees are law (Ibid. 355).

However, what can be observed is that in his struggle to create a difference Pimlott ends up stifling the play. Critics of this production have not been kind in their criticism. This is evident when one of its reviewers, Jack Tinker, says that it is too calculated and 'it lacks... the power to surprise or shock' (Tinker 1994).

The production's lack of success might also be due to Pimlott's strange choice of actors (ibid). Feast, who plays the Duke, made the character look like 'an ascetic, tortured figure who was very clearly a fantastical duke of dark corners ... and a voyeur of suffering' (Jackson 1995, 356). Unlike Massey's Duke, who is portrayed as a very caring man when he deals with Claudio, Isabella and Juliet, the good side of Feast's Duke is not evident. He can be seen as a man who is too crude in everything that he does; he does not deal with the problems of others with the holiness and dignity of a friar. This is evident in his meeting with Juliet where he ends up upsetting her more than advising and calming her, and the same thing happens when he meets with Claudio. His meeting with Lucio proves to be even worse. Lucio puts an apple core in the hood of the friar's garb in jest, and the Duke-friar retaliates by throwing the apple core at Lucio.

Feast's Duke-friar is not only unconventional in his behaviour but also in his physical appearance. This Duke has his head shaved, which gives him a devilish look, and also the look of a schemer. Noble may have wanted to portray a duke unconnected with Godliness, but Pimlott goes further, and it can be argued that he is more successful. In creating a devilish-looking duke, Pimlott totally disrupts the Renaissance idea that a ruler is the embodiment of Christ or God. Why the director chose to portray an eccentric and unholy Duke is uncertain, but what is clear is that he must have certainly made a conscious decision. The Duke in Pimlott's production is a man who is always in a rush. In Act 1, Scene 1, after the Duke hands over his power to Angelo he leaves hastily. When Massey's (1988) Duke handed over his power to Angelo it was done with a certain amount of dignity. His exit from the stage made him seem more like a dignified ruler, although it has been said that he was shaking off his duties as a ruler. Feast's Duke, in comparison, seems to be more than anxious to run away from his duties.

The change from prince to friar is also differently portrayed in these two productions. In Noble's (1983) production, the Duke changes his attire in front of a large gilded mirror. The mirror can be seen as 'a metaphoric glasshouse' (*Shropshire Star* 1983). It signifies a reminder of the gulf between the outward image and the true nature of man. The idea is that the mirror never lies; everything that it reflects to us is true. A man can portray himself in many different ways to the people around him, but when he looks into the mirror he sees his true self. This is depicted perfectly by Massey when he dresses himself as the Duke in front of the mirror in the first scene, as the first act opens. The image recurs when he sheds his ducal robes and steps into the friar's garb. This is done as a reminder to the audience that the Duke is going to deceive the world, but will not be able to deceive himself. The Duke's transformation from prince to friar is achieved with a small amount of elegance. This is due to the fact that the

he changes clothes in front of a beautifully gilded mirror that stands on diagonal yellow-gold carpets that criss-cross each other.

On the other hand, Feast's Duke can be seen as having 'an unholy enthusiasm for exploring the emotions of others' when he 'snatches the rosary and crucifix from friar Thomas' (Ibid.). He is indeed the 'fantastical Duke of dark corners' that Lucio implies him to be (IV. iii. 156), because his transformation is carried out in the dark. According to Doughty (1994), 'The general tone of Pimlott's production is one of darkness and oppression' (Doughty 1994). On the darkened stage, voices of two men speaking to each other can be heard. The Duke is asking the friar to teach him the mannerisms of a friar, and he is also explaining to him the reason for his absence from his princely duties (III. i.). However, the audience can only see one figure. When the Duke stands up and snatches the rosary from the friar, only then does the audience realise that these two characters were sitting on two chairs placed back to back. This device of Pimlott's can be read as a psychological symbol. The producer may want to give the image that the Duke and the Friar can be seen as one. However, Feast's Duke does not make a good friar, because his very crude mannerisms do not lend him a holy character. Macauly (1994) in his review of the play makes these comments about the Duke's character in this production:

> Everything here is insincere, over-emphatic, *fake* lower middle-class, and melodramatic. There is no quest for self-knowledge, none of the ironic Shakespearian sense of a ruler who abdicates to find out more about ruling, and zero generosity to his fellow-actors. He is all contrivance especially when feigning to be relaxed (Macauly 1994).

This shows that the Duke was not well received in this production. The Duke is seen as a hypocrite in this version of the play.

Compared to the two productions discussed, the latest production of *Measure for Measure* (May–September 1998), directed by Michael Boyd in Stratford-upon-Avon, presents an amazing creativity in its portrayal of the Duke and his entrustment of power to Angelo. The Duke is portrayed in the opening scene wallowing in self-recrimination with a bottle of alcohol beside him and the gramophone playing classical music. Then as someone starts to break the door in, he flees from the stage. Escalus breaks in to find a message for him and Angelo on the gramophone. The power exchange is not done in the Duke's presence but rather through an instrument. This device works just as well as the devices used in the previous two productions discussed, in proof that there are endless interpretations to Shakespeare. His plays and characters can be staged and presented in various ways. According to Kott: 'Each great Shakespearian

character has many aspects, and lends himself or herself, to more than one interpretation' (Kott 1967, 72).[11]

ISABELLA

The Duke may be seen as the most important figure in *Measure for Measure*, and the play may revolve around him, but the plot will not unravel without Isabella. Shakespeare's Isabella is a novice nun who has not been exposed to the crudity of life in Vienna. Yet the Isabella that is presented to us by Noble (1983) is quite different from the Isabella that can be imagined when the text is read. The character that is presented to us by Noble does not look like a nun, but more like a woman in mourning, because she is wearing a black dress. However, the dress is very provocative, because the material that is used to cover her shoulders and upper part of her bosom looks like sheer silk, and reveals more than it covers. The dress does not give her the austerity of a nun. The only indication of religion is the cross hanging from her neck. This is because Juliet Stevenson, the actress who played Isabella, came to an agreement with Noble that both wanted the audience to judge Isabella as a person, and not as a nun (Rutter 1988, 42). In fact, when Lucio goes to the convent to look for Isabella, he mistakes the nun for her. Both the nun and Isabella are standing in front of Lucio but he addresses the nun instead of Isabella when he says:

> Hail virgin, if you be – as those cheek roses
> Proclaim you are no less....
>
> (I. iv. 16–17)

This is a brilliant device that Noble (1983) uses: it strengthens the point that this production tries to make, that Isabella is not meant for the convent.

Compared to the Isabella of Noble's production, Stella Gonet's Isabella in Pimlott's *Measure for Measure* is a strange character. Like many directors who tend to cast against type, it is evident that Pimlott has indeed cast Gonet as such. It is amazing to witness such a mature woman being appalled at the idea of having sex in exchange for her brother's life (Doughty 1994). The surprise is due to the fact that this woman does not look like a novice nun; she looks like a worldly aunt. Yet it is amazing that she has problems in dealing with sex. Her physical appearance also raises questions in our minds as to why she has chosen the convent as her retreat.

Gonet does not portray a feminine and sexually attractive Isabella. Her first appearance on stage is in a long blue dress that is buttoned up to the neck, with a cross hanging around her neck. She also has her hair put up in a bun, unlike Juliet

Stevenson whose shoulder length hair is let loose. Gonet's costume makes her look like a woman who is afraid of her femininity and sexuality. Russel Jackson describes her as 'a mature thoughtful woman rather than an innocent with naive fundamentalist views' (Jackson 1995, 356). Although Gonet's Isabella can be read as a sexually repressed mature woman, she shows strength of character in the way she carries herself and in her voice, which always shows certainty even at moments of crisis.

Not only is *Measure for Measure* a difficult play to produce, it is plain that Isabella is also a very problematic character, so she is very hard to perform. Stevenson reads Isabella as a character who is not popular, because people assume that she is too conservative, always judging others by her own moral standards. He also sees her as using the convent to flee from her sexuality (ibid. 26). However, the actress herself does not see Isabella as a person who is afraid of her sexuality. She sees Isabella's retreat into the convent as something positive. According to her, Isabella is not running away from her sexuality. She only wants to control her passionate side (Ibid. 40–41). If the character is read as such, then it can also be said that Gonet's Isabella is not a sexually repressed woman; she only enters the nunnery to constrain her passionate side.

It cannot be denied that it takes a lot of strength for someone to renounce the world and live a very basic life. Many critics have commented on how Stevenson portrays a very strong Isabella through her performance. The Isabella that is performed by Stevenson is different from the Isabella that a reader imagines when he/she reads the text. This Isabella is strong and capable (Edmonds 1983). Logically speaking, if she was not strong, her brother Claudio would not have entrusted her with the mission of negotiating with Angelo for his life. She stands her ground even when Angelo is rather dismissive of her plight. This might be the reason for the attraction both Angelo and the Duke have for her. Her feminine beauty added to her strength of character leave perfectly clear why Angelo is tempted by a nun when he has never been tempted by anyone else. The audience only has to look at Isabella and listen to her in Adrian Noble's production to know the reason for Angelo's attraction.

Isabella is a victim who is thrust into a male world, taken away from her environment (the convent), and manipulated and betrayed by all the men she comes across, even her own brother (Rutter 1988, 29). The Isabella in Noble's production retaliates well against all that manipulation. In this version the audience is teased by glimpses of what is coming to them when Isabella sits in Angelo's chair as soon as he stands up (II. ii). It is clear that there is a power game going on in *Measure for Measure*. Power changes hands from male to female as the play goes on. Isabella says initially that she is powerless: 'Alas,

what poor ability's in me/To do him good!' (I. iv. 75–76) Yet she has the ability to change things (Ibid. 29). As the plot unfolds Isabella realises her potential through the Duke. Stevenson's Isabella gets very excited when the Duke suggests the bed trick to her (III. i), because she realises that she is not powerless, and in her excitement she plants 'an impulsive kiss on the Duke's cheek' (Jackson 1988, 19). The image that is conjured up in her mind gives her satisfaction, and tells her that this is the way to settle the score with Angelo for what he has done: 'The image of it gives me content already, and I/trust it will grow to a most prosperous perfection' (III. i. 260–261).

Initially Gonet's Isabella decides to battle with Angelo by using intellectual means. In her interview with him (II. ii), she opens the Bible and points to a verse in it, but Alex Jenning's Angelo is much too cunning for her because he turns the Bible to another page and duplicates her action. When she knows she is beaten she falls to her knees, but Angelo walks away from her. Yet Isabella does not give up. She goes to Angelo and puts her hand on his chest as she says:

> Go to your bosom,
> Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know
>
> (II. ii. 137–138)

This gesture plays a part in sparking Angelo's lust for her, because after this Jenning's Angelo utters these lines:

> She speaks, and 'tis such sense
> That my sense breeds with it
>
> (II. ii. 143–144)

However, her strength deserts her after Angelo's sexual proposition. She breaks down completely when Claudio is not sympathetic towards her and thinks that she should yield her virginity in exchange for his life, if that is the only way to save him:

> Sweet sister, let me live,
> What sin you do to save a brother's life,
> Nature dispenses with the deed so far
> That it becomes a virtue.
>
> (III. i. 133–136)

Gonet's Isabella becomes hysterical, starting to shriek and cry after she has pushed Claudio onto the floor. Because Pimlott's *Measure for Measure* is set in modern-day Vienna, the modern audience will not be able to understand why

Isabella will not sacrifice her chastity for her brother's life. To understand that, the audience 'must believe the passion of her faith' (Tinker 1994). This is always the problem with a modern setting. The audience tends to identify with the setting and the players. It is not in a distant land or in another time; it is here and now. Why should the people on the stage have different moral values than those who are watching them?

According to Pope (1982), the modern reader [or in this case audience] 'may find it difficult not to echo' Angelo's question (Pope 1982, 68):

> Were you not then as cruel as the sentence
> That you have slandered so?
>
> (II. iv. 109–110)

'Why after all her talk of charity and forbearance, should Isabella not only decline to save her brother's life by an act of generosity, but condemn him so unsparingly for begging her to do so?' (ibid: 68). According to Rossiter, Isabella's stance when she says: 'More than our brother our chastity' should not trouble anyone. He argues that 'the line makes sense...if you see that Isabella is just as terrified as Claudio'. He further defends Isabella by saying that 'Scared souls are small souls; and as she leaves Angelo, Isabella's soul is scared – to a tiny rod of iron principle which is all she can think' (Rossiter 1961, 160). Therefore, in whatever setting *Measure for Measure* is performed, be it Pimlott's modern-day Vienna or Noble's elegantly powdered 18th century Vienna, the question of why Isabella is reluctant to sacrifice her virginity in order to save her brother's life should not arise. Any woman, be she a novice nun or an ordinary one of any age, would be appalled at Angelo's proposal. His intention is to rape her, although he glosses it with, 'Plainly conceive, I love you' (II. iv. 140). If this were to happen in real life today it would be labelled as attempted rape or, put more gently, as sexual harassment. So rather than labelling Isabella as a *prig* or the unmerciful sister, her *scared soul*, which Rossiter (1961) refers to, should be taken into consideration, and she should be empathised with.

THE ENDING

Very early in this paper it was said that the Duke in *Measure for Measure* is a manipulator who manipulates the lives of his subjects. Yet, Stevenson's Isabella is not a victim of the Duke's manipulations. In fact in some parts of the play it is evident that Isabella is enjoying herself, and falls in with the Duke's plans with an open heart. Stevenson presents to the audience an adventurous side of Isabella. It has been stated that not only does she get excited at the scheme of the bed trick suggested by the Duke, but she is also bold enough to plant an impulsive kiss on

his cheek (Jackson 1988, 19–20). The Isabella that is presented is not a nervous and high-strung virgin, but a very relaxed and confident woman. Noble (1983) gives Isabella a perfect setting to explore her other self in the moated grange scene, presented in this production with two big umbrellas placed on a floor also strewn with rugs and cushions... She lounges nonchalantly against the cushions, facing the Duke; this action does not depict a very shy or reserved woman. This is a device that the director uses to make the union of the couple seem natural at the end of the play, because critics have criticised Isabella's acceptance of the Duke's marriage proposal in most productions as too abrupt. Rossiter commented in 1961 about the ending of *Measure for Measure.* He finds the '"conventional" comedy ending'[12] problematic, and he regards it as a weak excuse for the Duke and Isabella to marry. Rossiter also views the Duke's proposal as 'made without any dramatic preparation', which makes it difficult for both actress and critics (Rossiter 1961, 162). It is obvious that Noble is sensitive to and aware of this type of criticism. Therefore, this production represents Isabella and the Duke not as two separate entities but as a team.

Apparently the decision that Noble (1983) made to bring the Duke and Isabella closer together was based on his proposal to her in Act 5, although there is nothing in the text that suggests a romance between them. Massey states that 'there is not one vestige of a syllable, line, or comma, even, until 5.1.491 to suggest that there is anything between them at all' (Massey 1988, 19). It cannot be denied that Noble is successful in creating the ending that he wants. The main reason for bringing Isabella and the Duke together was because Noble 'wanted it to end as a comedy ... comedy as defined by a resolved ending' (Rutter 1988, 51). The conventional ending of a comedy works in this production of *Measure for Measure* because the Duke and Isabella do not come together abruptly; rather, their affection is built gradually. Some critics may argue that Isabella and the Duke are always together. However, two people being in contact with each other does not mean necessarily imply anything romantic. It has been argued that the text does not suggest romance between this pair until the last eighty lines of the final scene. Therefore, the director's duty was to make the romantic ending seem natural and acceptable to the audience. In order to achieve this effect he had to create the *romance* by making use of certain devices such as the actors facial expressions, body language and gestures. This is clearly evident in IV. iii., when the Duke and Isabella embrace and he plants a kiss on her forehead. When Lucio arrives they spring apart, each of them looking guilty, 'and, in a long look across the stage at each other, ... much seemed to be accomplished' (Massey 1988, 19). It would not be wrong to say that the audience would have felt the romance as well as the emotional turmoil that went on between the Duke and Isabella. In the end when he proposes to her, she gently touches his face and they kiss, and it is

clear that everything is resolved. These two people who have a shared experience will get married.

The ending of this production does not pose much of a problem to the audience for two main reasons. Firstly, it is unproblematic due to the fact that Noble had decided earlier on to bring the Duke and Isabella together gradually. Secondly, the ending is made less complicated by the period setting – 18th century Vienna. Eighteenth century values were quite similar to Shakespeare's time, because like the Jacobeans the Romantics perceived God as an important part of their lives. Because of the remote time and place in which the play is set, modern audience members do not identify themselves with the characters since everything that is happening is taking place in another time. Therefore, they accept their values no matter how eccentric or decadent they may seem to be.

Unlike Noble, Pimlott does not build a gradual relationship between the Duke and Isabella. There are glimpses of the Duke's attraction towards Isabella, as Jackson notes: 'The...Duke was clearly fascinated by Isabella' (Jackson 1995, 356). However, these moments are not developed further. Feast's Duke is too involved with his plotting and planning, and with rushing from one place to the other to have time to delve into his romantic feelings. The lack of development in the Duke-Isabella relationship may also be due to the fact that Pimlott wanted to create a difference. The difference between these two productions is clearly evident in the directors' choice of actors. While Noble (1983) sticks to the traditional mode of casting Shakespeare by choosing all white actors, Pimlott has a mixed cast of black and white actors. In this production there is a black actor who plays the part of Pompey (Derek Griffiths), and the actress playing Mariana (Tanya Moodie) is also black. The choice to cast a black actress as Mariana is quite interesting and significant. The bed-tricks in Shakespeare are based on the idea that all women are the same in the dark, or as Alexander Legatt puts it: 'All cats are grey in the dark' (Leggatt 1989, 347). It is clear that in its choice of actresses this production tends to agree with this theory and stretches it further. However, Boyd's 1998 version seems to be a little sceptical about this theory. This is obvious in IV. i. where Isabella is entrusted by the Duke to relay the bed-trick plan to Mariana. She takes Mariana by the hand, and both women disappear behind the curtains. Later they appear together, but they have exchanged costumes. The director of this production does not take Angelo to be a fool. Rather he is stating that although the meeting will be carried out in the dark, it is better to be watchful.

The 1994 RSC production did not have a tightly wrapped conclusion. The happy ending in Noble's (1983) production is expected, because it is clear that he builds towards it. However, Pimlott's is too experimental, not only in its choice of

actors, but also in the themes that it portrays. One of the predominant themes in *Measure for Measure* is the issue of a sexually promiscuous society.[13] Nevertheless, this production not only reflects the *traditional* sense of promiscuity between man and woman; but there is also a homosexual theme. This is evident in II. i. where Pompey is walking off stage after his interview with Escalus. Before he exits he goes to Elbow, and kisses him on the mouth. Another scene in which this theme is evident is when Lucio is leaving the Duke-friar after he slanders the Duke in III. ii. In this scene he squeezes the Duke's bottom in a licentious manner before he makes his exit. This is not the only production that reflects an underlying homosexual theme. The RSC 1998 production also has this theme, but it is not as obviously portrayed as it is in Pimlott's production. The audience is teased with the idea of homosexuality when Abhorson kisses Barnardine on the mouth in IV. iii. In the last scene of this production the audience is also presented with an underlying idea that Barnardine has been sexually assaulted by Abhorson while in prison, because there is an instance when these characters get into a fight. It is as if Barnardine is releasing his anger towards Abhorson. Nevertheless, in depicting the idea of how low the morals of the Viennese society are, Pimlott goes even further than the other productions discussed, by insinuating that paedophilia is one of the sexual vices rampant in Vienna. This is the interpretation that can be made when Pompey brings a 'prepubescent girl for [Mistress] Overdone's approval' (Leggatt 1989, 347).

The ending of Pimlott's *Measure for Measure* does not follow the traditional ending of a comedy. The last scene is another experiment that Pimlott presents to his audience. He recruits about fifty people from Stratford-upon-Avon to present themselves as the high society of Vienna. These people have been dubbed 'an assembly of the Establishment' and they truly seem to be this because when Isabella pleads her case against Angelo (V. i.) they show their allegiance towards him by jeering and laughing at her (Ibid. 356–357). However, in the last scene Isabella is also differently dressed from the Isabellas that we normally see on stage. This Isabella has discarded her long prim gown for a man's suit, and the idea behind this change reflects her decision of dealing with the men present 'on their own terms' (Ibid. 356). Her will to fight them is further emphasised when she turns around and shouts a very powerful 'No!' at the jeering and laughing crowd. Isabella's masculine attire also strengthens the idea that she is trying to run away from her sexuality.

The ending not only emphasises the idea of Isabella's denial of her sexuality, but also further develops the Duke's eccentric and uncouth nature. Part of it is reflected in his costume in the final scene, when he comes on stage dressed in a 'ridiculous Ruritanian dress uniform' (Ibid. 357). His mode of dressing suggests that he is the kind of man who goes overboard in whatever he does. If his

clothing is not proof enough, then his treatment of Isabella in this scene should leave no doubt in the audience's mind.

His first proposal to Isabella reflects that he is a person who is high-strung and selfish, because he proposes to her in the midst of her reunion with her brother Claudio. He does it without acknowledging the emotional turmoil and relief that she must be going through at finding her brother who was presumed dead to be alive. The Duke proposes to Isabella while she is mid- embrace with her brother. She just turns around to look at the Duke for a moment and without acknowledging his proposal she turns her attention back to her brother. Yet, the Duke does not give up. He proposes to Isabella for a second time, and she answers this proposal first with a slap on his face, and then by pulling him towards herself and planting a passionate kiss. As suddenly as she kisses him she ends the kiss, and bursts into tears while she turns her back to him. Pimlott ends the play here with the Duke and Isabella standing apart on the stage as the lights are dimmed. This ending does not reflect a happy conclusion where there is a procession of all the happy couples to the ducal palace.

This is not the first time that *Measure for Measure* has been concluded with an unresolved ending. In 1970, John Barton directed a performance of *Measure for Measure* that had quite a similar finale. The Isabella in this production is said to have appeared too shocked to accept the Duke's proposal (Williamson 1975, 169). The first time the Duke proposes to Isabella, he says:

> If he be like your brother, for his sake
> Is he pardon'd; and for your lovely sake
> Give me your hand and say you will be mine.
> He is my brother too: but fitter time for that.
>
> (V. i. 488–491)

She ignores him and falls into her brother's arms. His second proposal, "What's mine is yours, and what's yours is mine" (V. i. 534), comes from a very nervous man because he is trembling when he proposes. It is met with silence from Isabella, and when he can stand the silence no longer he utters "'So", put on his glasses, and departed with all the others, leaving a bewildered Isabella alone on stage looking out at the audience' (Ibid. 169).
The portrayal of the Duke and Isabella, and the ending of *Measure for Measure* in the productions discussed convey the idea that Shakespeare's plays are not static although hundreds of years have passed since they were first written and performed. According to Brown (1969), 'Drama holds a mirror up to the life we live because it communicates through more than words or puppets, or music, or visual design; its expression involves human actors who are as complicated as we

are' (Brown 1969, 9). That is what Shakespeare's plays are all about, and their performance even today succeeds in holding a mirror up to the current society who sees a little of its own life and values presented.

CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed the idea that *Measure for Measure* is a difficult play to perform because it has problematic themes, especially the theme of sexuality, that clash with the way of life and thinking of contemporary society. Therefore, any director who chooses to stage it must consider these difficulties and how to present them in a natural manner without making the audience feel that the whole production is contrived. The directors of the two major productions discussed in this paper have tried their best to present a *Measure for Measure* that would be acceptable to the current society. It is evident that there are many interpretations of the Duke and Isabella's characters and also of Isabella's reaction to the Duke's proposal at the end of the play. It can be concluded that no interpretation is wrong because each actor or director brings with him his own reading of the play, and every reading has been influenced by other performances and textual criticisms. Since *Measure for Measure* is a thematically rich play, it should not be confined to a single interpretation. The different performances of *Measure for Measure* have proved that theatre is experimental as well as ageless. Because it is a brilliant play with a myriad of interpretations, *Measure for Measure* will not cease to be a favourite for directors in times to come. It is not wrong to predict that the fans of Shakespeare in general and of *Measure for Measure* specifically can look forward to many more productions.

NOTES

1. Richard David, *Shakespeare in the Theatre* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978) also expounds in the preface of his book on the idea that to compare Shakespeare's plays or different productions with each other generates wider discussions of Shakespeare's work and also of theatre in general.

2. Michael Scott in his book *Renaissance Drama and a Modern Audience* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1982) states that although *Measure for Measure* is a difficult play to perform it seems to be very popular with directors, actors and audiences. He observes that the post-war period has seen many *Measure for Measure* productions, especially in the 1970s, 61.

3. According to A. P. Rossiter, *Angel with Horns and Other Shakespeare Lectures* ed. by Graham Storey (London: Longman, 1961), 109, the label 'problem-play' was formulated by F. S. Boas in his book *Shakespeare and his Predecessor* (1896).

4. The source of all subsequent references from *Measure for Measure* will be from this edition: J. W. Lever, *The Arden Shakespeare. Measure for Measure* (London & New York: Methuen, 1965).

5. A. P. Rossiter in *Angel with Horns and Other Shakespeare Lectures* ed. by Graham Storey (London: Longman, 1961), 122, states that 'In the first half it (*Measure for Measure*) moves swiftly towards tragic calamity, twisting deeper and deeper into the quick; the observer Duke turns Deux ex machina, and the puppet-master makes all dance to a happy ending, with a lot of creaking'.

6. Jane Williamson, 'The Playwright and Performance' in *The Triple Bond. Plays Mainly Shakespearean*, *in Performance* (University Park, London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1975), 150, states that Peter Brook's *Measure for Measure* is 'The most widely discussed and applauded revival of the play since Tyrone Guthrie's...1933' *Measure for Measure*. Brook's production has "sparked an increased theatrical interest in *Measure for Measure* which has continued for two decades...(and) it resulted, on the one hand, in numerous comments from theatrical reviewers suggesting that the problems raised by the scholars in the study seemed to disappear on the stage and, on the other hand, in renewed interest and scrutiny by those in the study, the scholars and literary critics".

7. The research for this paper has been carried out in numerous ways. Other than reading textual criticism, the author used the library at The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust at Stratford-upon-Avon to view videos of the 1983 and 1994 productions, and referred to prompt books of the productions as well as photographs of each production. Newspaper reviews and journals were also looked at. Other than that the latest production of *Measure for Measure* directed by Michael Boyd, performed by the RSC at Stratford-upon-Avon until 3 September 1998, was also seen for comparative purposes.

8. The Royal Shakespeare Company was begun in the eighteenth century when it was thought that there should be a memorial theatre for Shakespeare at his birthplace at Stratford-upon-Avon. A jubilee celebration was staged by David Garrick in 1769, and in 1879 the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre was built at Stratford-upon-Avon. However, the company did not take the name of The Royal Shakespeare Company until 1961, although it already had a Royal Charter since 1925. A more detailed information about the company's history is available in Trevor R. Griffiths & Carole Woddis ed., *Bloombsbury Theatre Guide* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Limited, 1991) and Sally Beauman, *The Royal Shakespeare Company, A History of Ten Decades* (Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

9. According to Peter Holland in his book *English Shakespeares. Shakespeare on the English Stage in the 1990s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 21, the RSC still dominated Shakespeare productions in England even at the end of the 1980s. The Royal National Theatre only produced two Shakespeare plays a year. Major touring companies like the Cambridge Theatre Company and Cheek by Jowl produced Shakespeare occasionally, but the cost of touring, which in the case of Shakespeare involves a large number of actors, does not give them the opportunity to produce many Shakespeare plays. The only competition that RSC has is from the English Shakespeare company, but it does not pose much of a challenge. Therefore, according to Holland "Shakespeare in England still substantially meant the RSC".

10. Some of the critics who have interpreted the play as a Christian allegory are G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire. Interpretations of Shakespearean Tragedy with Three New*

Essays (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1949) and Elizabeth Marie Pope, 'The Renaissance Background of *Measure for Measure*' in *Aspects of Shakespeare's 'Problem Plays'. All's Well That Ends Well, Measure for Measure, Troilus and Cressida* ed. by Kenneth Muir and Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

11. John Elsom wrote a later book that is in a way a reply to Jan Kott's *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*: John Elsom, ed. *Is Shakespeare Still Our Contemporary* (London & New York: Routledge, 1989), 4. In the introduction Elsom states that Shakespearean plays are flexible because his work "can be stretched in many directions before...[it] snaps". Shakespeare's interpretation according to him vary between the ages and actors.

12. According to Aristotle in his *Poetics*, "it is in comedy that those who, in the story, are the greatest enemies...are reconciled in the end, walk off the stage as friends, and no one kills anybody". This is the way Shakespeare must have ended *Measure for Measure*, and if it is assumed that *Measure for Measure* is a comedy then it is natural in the end for Isabella and the Duke to walk off the stage together, hand in hand. The translation of Aristotle's work that is referred to is Aristotle, *On Poetry and Style* trans. by G. M. A. Grube (New York: The Bobbs Merril Company Inc., 1958), 26.

13. G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire. Interpretations of Shakespearian Tragedy with Three New Essays* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1949), 74. Knight states that "The play's attention is confined chiefly to sexual ethics: which in isolation is naturally the most pregnant of analysis and the most universal of themes. No other subject provides so clear a contrast between human consciousness and human instinct; so rigid a distinction between the civilised and the natural qualities of man; so amazing, yet so slight, a boundary set in the public mind between the foully bestial and the ideally divine in humanity".

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