I
N THEIR WAYS, All's Well That Ends Well and Measure for Measure have proved to be as perplexing to critics as has Troilus and Cressida. It is true that, unlike the latter play, they do not pose a problem concerning the genre to which they belong—comedy, comical satire, tragedy, or history—since they are clearly comedies. But in exchange they offer even greater resistance to critics in search of their design; there is always some refractory detail that does not fit into the proposed scheme. But these plays appear more unified as well as deeper in their significance, I believe, if one understands them as being concerned with a subject that fascinated Shakespeare during the period in which they were written: the difficulty of gaining self-knowledge in situations unusually complicated and distressing.

It must be granted, however, that the perplexities of All's Well are not quite of the same order as those of Measure for Measure. The former play, although somewhat simpler, has something undeniably inadequate in its dramatic conception and execution; it may well be an insufficiently revised play of Shakespeare's earlier period, perhaps the mysterious Love's Labor's Won. If so, Shakespeare may have decided to take up the story of Measure for Measure for dramatization because it allowed him to treat more successfully a pattern of self-knowledge he had attempted in All's Well. The two plays certainly do have similarities beyond their resistance to totally satisfying interpretations. Both have heroes who present to the world deceptive outsides, Bertram in his handsomeness, noble lineage, and martial accomplishment, Angelo in his judicial strictness and ethical rectitude. They are put in unusual and perplexing situations that test their moral fiber, and they fail, Bertram by first agreeing to marry and then rejecting the beautiful and deserving but socially
inferior and poor Helena, Angelo by first enforcing an unnaturally strict law, then violating it by his lust for Isabella and compounding his failing by hypocrisy and villainy. Bertram and Angelo prove, in the words of Shakespeare’s sonnet 94, that “lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.” Just as in this sonnet apparently ideal men, who “inherit Heaven’s graces,” are slowly and subtly revealed to be unsympathetic, so with mannerist indirection and irony Bertram and Angelo are shown to be inwardly rotten and corrupt. Both are regenerated, largely through their interaction with heroines who, although apparently superior to them morally, are yet difficult to evaluate. To some critics, they have seemed to be less than the unspotted lilies they appear. It is true, their virtue is tested in more dubious ways than is that of Shakespeare’s earlier and later heroines—in particular, their involvement in the “bed-trick” has offended some critics—but they also have character traits that have been found unattractive, such as the persistence of Helena—“predatory” it has been called—in pursuing her man, or the “coldness” of Isabella in being willing to see her brother die rather than surrender her chastity.

I shall not try to list all the similarities of the two plays that have been pointed out, but in my subsequent discussion of Measure for Measure I should like to glance now and then at All’s Well, for its indirect and ironic approach to the patterns of self-knowledge constitutes a significant new departure for Shakespeare. All’s Well, at least in the form we have it today, which may be a revision, appears to be an experiment in a dramatic mode that Shakespeare developed further in Measure for Measure. And what he did in the latter play, particularly by creating the characters of Angelo and the duke, points forward to the dramas of self-loss and self-discovery that were to come, most of all to Lear and to The Tempest.

Although self-knowledge is an issue in All’s Well, particularly through the education of Bertram—which is the central theme, if the play can be said to have one—the issue is only imperfectly developed. It is true Bertram does learn something about himself and his deceptions in the end as his friend and trusted advisor, Parolles, is revealed as a coward and traitor and as he comes to recognize the strength of Helena’s affection. But all this is rather perfunctorily handled. Bertram never sees himself, in the way we see him, as a young cad who may become a very odious old lecher and snob. We have to trust to Helena’s continuing strength and will power, of which we have had formidable demonstrations, that he will remain
Measure for Measure: Looking into Oneself

on the right path. Angelo, however, does look into himself deeply once, even though he turns his eyes away too quickly. But this look makes a great deal of difference.

If, as a very competent student of the play has suggested, it was the problem of self-knowledge inherent in the story of the corrupt judge that induced Shakespeare to write Measure for Measure, he decided to emphasize it by putting Angelo’s failure and regeneration in a larger frame. Angelo’s need to know himself is reflected in the similar, though less glaring, need of Isabella; it is paralleled, I should like to suggest, by a subtly hinted-at deficiency of the duke. At the end, not only is Angelo a better man, but Isabella is also more feminine and humane; and even the duke may have learned something about himself, although it is not what he set out to learn. And these patterns of self-knowledge evolve in a climate that poses fundamental questions, such as those of the price of chastity, the roots of self-discipline, the ethical bases of the law, and the ruler’s obligations to punish and to be merciful. Only in King Lear are there more far-reaching implications in the ethical imperative “know thyself.”

Shakespeare’s Angelo is, to all appearances, a man of honor and rectitude. But he is a puzzling, contradictory character, quite different from the uncomplicated judge in Whetstone’s Promos and Cassandra, on whom he is based. Promos is an ordinary, essentially decent, and apparently mature man with a clean record, who just happens to be overcome by lust; Angelo, though young, is reputed to be of such spectacular virtue and knowledge that everybody accepts him as a most appropriate substitute during the absence of the duke and as fit to translate the virtues he possesses into action. There is no sign that he assumes his great office with the excusable overeagerness of his prototype in Cinthio’s novella, which formed the basis of Whetstone’s play and was probably known to Shakespeare. Cinthio’s young governor, appointed to administer Innsbruck, was “more pleased with the office to which the Emperor called him than sound in the knowledge of his own nature.” Angelo, by contrast, accepts his responsibility with apparent humility and even diffidence: “Let there be some more test made of my metal, / Before so noble and so great a figure / Be stamp’d upon it” (I.i.49–51).

In the slow, gradual disclosure of Angelo’s nature, Shakespeare adopted a strategy quite contrary to his usual dramatic practice of firmly establishing the outlines of his major characters early, often immediately. Angelo’s heart of darkness, like that of Kurtz in Con-
rad's famous story, is, at first, no more than hinted at. There is an irony, hardly suspected by the subtlest of first-time readers of the play, in the duke's seeming commendation: "Angelo, / There is a kind of character in thy life / That to th' observer doth thy history / Fully unfold" (I.i.28–30). The duke, who has observed this history, does not disclose it until he tells, in the third act, the story of Angelo's perfidy to Mariana; but questions about the true nature of Angelo begin in the second scene, as Claudio wonders what the reasons for his judicial severity may be: whether it be the "fault and glimpse ofnewness," or whether Angelo intends to let people know that he can command by making them "straight feel the spur" (I.ii.150 ff.).

In the following scene, the duke reveals that he expects severity from Angelo, "a man of stricture and firm abstinence" (I.iii.12), and has purposely installed him as deputy to bring about a change from his own lax administration of the laws. Duke Vincentio, on this occasion, calls Angelo "precise"—the regular term for Puritan—and a man that "scarce confesses / That his blood flows" (51–52). Lucio, in the next scene, joins in by calling Angelo

a man whose blood
Is very snow-broth, one who never feels
The wanton stings and motions of the sense,
But doth rebate and blunt his natural edge
With profits of the mind, study and fast.
(I.iv. 57–61)

The general impression created by the Angelo of the first act is that of a virtuous, extremely disciplined man who is convinced that human nature can be controlled and that the affections can, Stoic fashion, be mastered by might. He is not the stage Puritan of the Elizabethans, murmuring pious phrases while pursuing a lustful or avaricious course of action. However, he does have some of the symptoms of the more dangerous, more inhuman elements of the Puritan syndrome, elements that, ignited, can lead to a dangerous explosion.

Angelo's legal absolutism arises from his conviction that his own mind is superior to that of others and can easily control his course of action. He has the kind of intellectual pride censured by Montaigne and the skeptical fideists. He thus rejects the argument of the older and wiser Escalus that mercy be applied to Claudio because
of man's general vulnerability to temptation: "'Tis one thing to be tempted, Escalus, / Another thing to fall" (II.i.17–18). The cool and studious Angelo does not convey the impression of ever having been really tempted; he never understood, as he later says, why men could be so foolish as to fall through passion. Angelo can therefore feel quite safe when, with dramatic irony, he declares himself willing to die should he ever commit the same fault as Claudio.

An audience trained to listen for dramatic ironies, as the Jacobean must have been, may have sensed a significance on this occasion in Escalus’s request that Angelo ask himself whether he would not have erred like Claudio at some time if circumstances had been similar. The irony of the hint becomes clear in Isabella’s later pleading that Angelo imagine Claudio’s fault his own (II.ii.136 ff.), for by now Angelo has fallen prey to lust. But not until the third act is the past deed revealed that counts most against him: his desertion of Mariana. Outwardly, this action resembles Claudio’s failure to marry Juliet. But Angelo’s breach of promise was a real act of villainy whereas Claudio’s was not: Angelo abandoned his betrothed, Claudio merely delayed marriage. On the other hand, Angelo could think himself legally justified; his contract with Mariana was evidently not the stronger de praesenti contract of Claudio and Juliet, but the weaker de futuro agreement, thought binding only when consummated, as is done later in the play. Despicable as his abandonment of Mariana was when she lost her dowry, he can reason that the conditions on which his promise was based have changed, and he can rationalize his villainy into an act of prudence. This exactly is his later defense (V.i.218). That he cast aspersions on her character when he deserted her makes him more odious, but does not seem to have dimmed his specious self-image as a man of virtue and temperance.

The image is shattered when he cannot resist his lust for Isabella. His two soliloquies, one immediately following his first conversation with her, the other preceding the second and decisive interview, show the change in his soul. Passion conquers the reason of which he prided himself, and he realizes now that the self-knowledge he imagined he possessed was merely self-delusion. He no longer knows himself: "What dost thou, or what art thou, Angelo?" (II.ii.173). It is the most fundamental question that any of Shakespeare's characters asks himself, and none had yet asked it in so direct and explicit a manner before Measure for Measure. Antipholus of Syracuse in
The Comedy of Errors came close to it; but for him the question was merely one of wonderment about the identity the Ephesians thrust on him. Richard II had looked into the mirror of self-knowledge, but vanity prevented him from looking beyond his grief deeply into himself. Brutus had overlooked the impurity of the mirror Cassius had held up to him. Hamlet had mystified and complicated the inquiry into the self by skeptically asking who he was and what man is. Troilus had altogether evaded the look into himself when his disillusionment through Cressida’s betrayal gave him the opportunity. None of Shakespeare’s tragic heroes had yet said simply, “what do I and what am I,” as does Angelo. Lear was later to ask the question again.

Not that Angelo’s answer is altogether clear and honest. In his first soliloquy, in which he poses the question, he tries to wriggle out of it by calling his temptation the work of the devil. Arrogantly, he thinks of himself as a saint baited by another saint. And there is a similar presumption in his second soliloquy when he regrets the loss of his gravity—the least of his losses—coyly remarking that he hopes nobody will hear him taking pride in his reputation for seriousness. Yet he cannot totally suppress the awareness that he, like others in high places, has lived with a lie:

O place, O form,
How often dost thou with thy case, thy habit,
Wrench awe from fools, and tie the wiser souls
To thy false seeming! Blood, thou art blood.
(II.iv.12-15)

The new Angelo is a man whose thoughts and prayers are at cross purposes. When Isabella appears for the second time before him, he speaks to her no longer in the clear, absolute idiom he used earlier, but he tortures her and himself with sexual allusions and innuendos. His attempt to trap her into accepting the act of lust as one of mercy for her brother and Isabella’s misunderstanding of his meaning produce moments of psychological subtlety and high comedy.

A kind of incipient self-knowledge comes to Angelo through his self-loss, through the experience of “blood,” that is, passion, in himself. Even though he now becomes worse, his evil is more accessible to cure. He is a conscious hypocrite rather than, as formerly, an unconscious one. Although he has fallen through passion, he has now
become capable of a cathartic human emotion: lust is related to love, the greatest and most beneficial of man's feelings. There is something to the seemingly absurd argument with which Mariana in the end eagerly pleads for his life: "They say best men are moulded out of faults; / And, for the most, become much more the better / For being a little bad" (V.i.437-39). To use a figure from All's Well, the web of Angelo's life is a mingled yarn and his faults whip his virtues. His ideal image of himself as a saint, specious as it is, is yet of assistance in his change, giving him an ethical and religious awareness of his fall and making his later penitence somewhat more plausible.

Angelo's regeneration, however, is brought about in a most unusual manner: it hinges on his sexual fall, caused by his lust, and its medium is Mariana, whom he believes to be Isabella. Thus Angelo's marriage is completed and Mariana's wrong righted. He is pardoned and forgiven. Incredible as the story is, Shakespeare makes it, in various ways, psychologically most intriguing, not least by suggesting that there is a connection between Angelo's sexual knowledge of Mariana and his acquisition of a greater knowledge of himself. Hints of a connection between these two kinds of knowledge are given. There is, at a critical moment of the dialogue between Angelo and Isabella, a pun on the cognitive and sexual meaning of "knowing":

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ISAB.} & \quad \text{I am come to know your pleasure.} \\
\text{ANG.} & \quad \text{That you might know it would much better please me} \\
& \text{Than to demand what 'tis.}
\end{align*}
\]

(II.iv.31-33)

The pun is repeated during the denouement just before Mariana unveils herself:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{that is Angelo,} & \\
& \text{Who thinks he knows that he ne'er knew my body,} \\
& \text{But knows he thinks that he knows Isabel's.}
\end{align*}
\]

(V.i.200-202)

Before getting to know himself, Angelo has unknowingly known (carnally, as Lucio says) the woman to whom he was engaged on a pre-contract; his marriage is ratified.
In giving a role to carnal knowledge in developing self-knowledge, *Measure for Measure* resembles *All’s Well*, where on two similar junctures there are puns on "knowing." Bertram harps on the word when he demonstrates his aversion to marrying the poor Helena (II.iii.111 ff.) and again when he accepts her if she proves to have been his partner: "If she, my liege, can make me know this clearly, / I’ll love her dearly, ever, ever dearly" (V.iii.309-10). But the passage also may be taken to imply that Bertram’s love and, with it, his continued improvement depend on Helena’s sexual power. If so, it raises the question whether a character change achieved by a fortunate fall into a bed can be lasting.

The idea that there was a connection between self-knowledge and sexual knowledge was playfully suggested by Ovid in *The Art of Love* (498-502). The Delphic Apollo here advises the lover that "only he who knows himself will love with wisdom and perform all his tasks according to his powers." The idea was apt to be moralized in the Middle Ages and Christian-humanist Renaissance, but it was also understood in its true cynical meaning by the new Ovidian poets. Shakespeare used it in his Ovidian *Venus and Adonis* —and here already its significance is uncertain—by making Adonis reject the importunities of the amorous Venus: "Before I know myself, seek not to know me" (525). In contrast to Adonis, Shakespeare’s problematic heroes, Bertram and Angelo, experience the knowledge of women—shall we say good or shall we say bad women?—before they discover whatever self-knowledge they gain.

It is not merely our overexposure to psychoanalysis that makes us speculate on the psychological significance of the events that occur in the dark chambers of Marseilles and Vienna. By drawing attention to the cognitive aspects of the bed tricks, Shakespeare prevents us from accepting them in the way some scholars say we should accept them, that is, merely as dramatized devices deriving from the romantic *novella*, in which they were used as a narrative convention. It has been pointed out that Elizabethan psychology allowed Shakespeare’s contemporaries to entertain more easily the idea that sexual consummation had a regenerative power because of the way they explained the act physiologically. In intercourse, they thought, men and women exchanged their seeds and mingled them in a manner analogous to the way Platonic lovers fused their souls on an ideal plane; the seeds, in turn, were believed to enter the bloodstream. Yet this explanation would not have given an Elizabethan audience the certainty that Helena’s and Mariana’s influence wins out because
the physiologists were at odds on the question whether a stronger woman could improve a weaker man in this fashion. Moreover, there is the question whether Helena and Mariana really are morally superior; their consent to the bed trick makes this a debatable issue. The puzzling Helena does not really concern us here, and Mariana is so slightly sketched that she does not emerge clearly as an improving influence on Angelo. Her idyllic life at "the moated grange" may suggest her romantic possibilities, and her ardent plea for Angelo's life may prove her kindness (or is it her sexual interest in him?). All this is very little.

We therefore had better turn to the other and more carefully drawn woman, who is an important agent in the accomplishment of the bed trick and in the pardon of Angelo. Isabella is more properly Helena's counterpart in Measure for Measure. At least she does not suffer from Helena's handicap of directly practicing the deceitful substitution (a handicap that Helena well realizes). But although Isabella is saved from having to submit herself sexually and from other strenuous business that requires Helena to exert herself, she is a problematic heroine. Like Angelo and because of him, she is subjected to an intricate test of her character, first by his lust for her and later by the problem of how his transgression should be judged.

Shakespeare complicated her test by making her a novice of the convent of Saint Clare. For the heroine of Whetstone's play, there is no problem of which is dearer to her, her chastity or her brother. She opts for her brother, which presumably Shakespeare's contemporaries thought was the right choice for her. Isabella, however, is at the threshold of the convent; she is about to dedicate soul and body to God and thus is in a dilemma for which there is no easy answer; hers is a case of extreme moral delicacy. One can have different opinions about what she should do. The critics who lay aside this vexed question and concern themselves not with the tightness or wrongness of her decision but with the way it is given appear to have a more promising approach to her character. It is notable that she never hesitates for a moment and that she rises to the challenge almost with gaiety:

Then, Isabel, live chaste, and, brother, die:
More than our brother is our chastity.
I'll tell him yet of Angelo's request,
And fit his mind to death, for his soul's rest.
(II.iv.184-87)
She is, as has been said, of the stuff of which martyrs are made; but it should make a difference to her that the martyrdom she accepts is not her own but her brother's. The test of her faith does not involve her soul only but also that of the human being closest to her.

Her reaction agrees with the impression she creates from the beginning. Her first eager question about the rules of the order of the convent of Saint Clare is motivated by her wish to live a life of even "more strict restraint" than prescribed by the austere order. She parallels Angelo's ascetic temperament, and she has something of his bent for legal and ethical absolutism, for dividing the world into white and black. The two absolutists consequently react to each other like flint and stone, but the flame they produce is divided into a holy and a profane one.

Isabella's stony purity makes her a strong but rather cold pleader for her brother's life. She has really no quarrel with the anti-fornication law—she and Angelo are the only characters that think it entirely just—and she admits from the beginning that in pleading for Claudio she is "at war 'twixt will and will not" (II.i.33). The allusion to Paul's account of the struggle of flesh and spirit indicates that she believes that the caritas that makes her plead has an element of carnality. Her inability to see the issue as one between law and justice leads her to highly abstract arguments on the magistrate's duty to be merciful—a concept as theoretical as is Angelo's of justice. But the religious intensity with which she demands that the mercy of man be brought in line with the forgiveness of God has been thought aesthetically pleasing; she burns, to use Walter Pater's famous phrase, with a hard, gemlike flame.

Pater, whose portrait of her forms a refreshing contrast to such Victorian sentimental gush as Mrs. Jameson's, admired her fiery eloquence that occasionally lights up in swift, vindictive anger. A famous example is when she turns her eyes upward toward heaven, pleading with Angelo not to judge more severely than God:

Merciful Heaven,
Thou rather, with thy sharp and sulphurous bolt,
Splits the unwedgeable and gnarled oak
Than the soft myrtle. But man, proud man,
Dress'd in a little brief authority,
Most ignorant of what he's most assur'd,
His glassy essence, like an angry ape,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
As makes the angels weep; who, with our spleens,
Would all themselves laugh mortal.

(II.i.114-23)

Isabella's speech is occasioned by Angelo's immediately preceding metaphor of the law as a newly awakened prophet, who looks into a mirror to see what future evils must have their instantaneous end before they come to life—an ironic figure in view of Angelo's imminent temptation. Isabella holds up a mirror of her own to Angelo and to judging man in general. Like Angelo's earlier soliloquy, her speech is fraught with nosce teipsum implications of the kind Shakespeare developed in Lear. The diminution Isabella discerns in the image of man when seen from a divine perspective resembles Lear's vision of the world as a great stage of fools. She contrasts the brief robe of authority man proudly wears with his ignorance of himself—the "glassy essence" of which he feels assured but which he fails to understand as his fragile soul.  

The image, however, has some implications for Isabella's own soul. The law is not alone in being angry—in fact, its earthly representative is, at present, in the throes of a different passion; Isabella also speaks in anger or, as she presumes, in a divine indignation. The mirror had a general symbolic value for the angry and a special one for simians, particularly female ones, and both are most appropriate for Isabella. In his essay "Of Anger" (II.xxxvi.1-3), Seneca took note of the suggestion that it was good for people to look at themselves while angry; but he refuted the idea for various reasons: the mirror does not reveal the whole man, the man who goes to the mirror generally is already a changed man, and sometimes angry people even like their fiery image. There can be little doubt that the spirited Isabella likes hers; she holds up the veritas mirror (with its particular implication for magistrates) to Angelo, but ironically she does not realize that she looks into the ira-vanitas mirror herself.

We may use an early seventeenth-century emblem to illustrate the simian symbol used by Isabella as it applies to her. The emblem is a few years too late to have influenced Shakespeare, but it is based on a tradition with which Shakespeare must have been familiar, perhaps as early as grammar school. The emblem pictures an ugly ape—female, as the context implies—looking into a mirror. The picture
banner explains that all are pleased with their own shape—an allusion to Ovid's *Art of Love* (I.614), where it is stated that every woman thinks herself lovable no matter how ugly her appearance. As the emblem motto explains, even the ugliest thinks of herself as a goddess.\(^{12}\) The accompanying explanation refers to such classical illustrations as the mirror of self-love in Virgil's *Eclogues* II.25, where the infatuated Corydon asks the offish Alexis, whose love he wishes to gain, to be the "judge" in confirming the beauty of his self-image in the sea. This passage was one of those which the humanists thought demonstrated how wisdom was often dissociated from love. The prime Ovidian passage for this purpose was the story of Polyphemus in *Metamorphoses* XIII; here Polyphemus fancies that he "knows himself" (*novi me*, 840) when he admires his hairy image in a clear pool. Polyphemus also boasts on this occasion of being bigger than the thunderer Jove (as does Isabella's man of authority). It is possible that, in expounding these passages, Shakespeare's schoolmaster would have made the point, as does the motto of the emblem, that an inward ugliness is more deplorable than an outward one and offends God. Some words on self-knowledge and on self-love would then have been also natural. But it does not matter how Shakespeare acquired the associations of the *vanitas* mirror; this was familiar material and he used it with masterful allusiveness to create a superbly ironic image of Isabella.

The angels surely weep about the assurance with which Isabella, god-like, holds up the mirror to judging man. If she looked into herself, she would see that she too judges, and that she does so with angry severity. Her sympathy with the brittle, glassy nature of man is limited. This point is also suggested, and again by ironic mirror imagery, in her second interview with Angelo. She finds women as frail "as the glasses where they view themselves, / Which are as easy broke as they make forms" (II.iv.125–26). She exempts herself, and, indeed, her frailty does not have the softness of the feminine complexion. But it does have a touch of that intellectual pride which stains Angelo, a pride that was the main reason for the skeptics to characterize man as a stupid and histrionic animal.

Strangely, she does subsequently bend in some fashion by lending herself (and, more directly, Mariana) to the duke's plan of "the substitute bride." Her legalism—after all, the trick does constitute a "marriage"—her subjection to religious authority, and a curious conception of charity all appear to play a role in her enthusiasm for
the questionable device. That the "image" of it pleases her is comical. The duke's rejoinder to her that this image "lies much in your holding up" (III.i.252) may indicate that we are to look upon this episode as merely preparatory for her later character development. There is certainly no bending here of the kind needed for self-knowledge.

It is the task of the duke, one of his several tasks, to bring about that change. Vincentio is himself a puzzling character, as changeable in his actions and psychological explanations as he is in his clothes. The play begins as his governmental experiment, an experiment, it appears, in which he will take no further hand. Yet from the third act on, his direction of events in the guise of a friar is powerful to a degree that he becomes something like the author of the play, the writer of its script, the director of the actors, and the main dramatis persona. The play proves to be what it did not appear at first, an intricate, controlled experiment, planned and supervised by the duke, or, more precisely, by Shakespeare through the duke.

In this respect, Measure for Measure resembles The Tempest. Duke Vincentio and Prospero are the two Shakespearean characters in whom even critics generally opposed to the biographical heresy have seen some measure of identification between the poet and his creature. But Prospero's purpose is made much clearer, and his resources are supernatural and incontestible. Duke Vincentio's plan is, by contrast, never stated, and its execution depends on his ethically questionable disguise as a friar, which gives him a peculiarly intimate acquaintance with the thoughts and feelings of Claudio, Isabella, and Mariana. He uses his power as a spiritual adviser to keep Claudio in agony about his imminent execution, to arrange with Isabella and Mariana the dubious bed trick, and to lead Isabella to believe that her brother has been executed when, in fact, he is still alive. His secretiveness and indirection make Lucio's slur of him as "the old fantastical Duke of dark corners" (IV.iii.154) not totally inappropriate. On the other hand, his benevolent vigilance also gives credence to Angelo's later observation that the duke watched over him "like pow'r divine" (V.i.367).

The duke is, it appears to me, the key figure in a strategy of indirect presentation and ironic revelation; it is a strategy for which mannerism is noted. The method is not unlike that of sonnet 94. Just as here the poet, by intimation and irony, slowly reveals the true nature of the unmoved movers, so the duke only gradually al-
lows us a look into his mind and heart. At first, it appears as if he had arranged a simple governmental experiment by putting in his place a man supposedly stronger than himself, a man who had inherited all of heaven's graces. No danger for him of becoming lax as has been the case with Vincentio! But then, the duke discloses that his deputy is a man whose self-control is dangerously taut, and the question arises what, if power change purpose, will our seemers be. Even as an answer comes to this question in Angelo's fall through passion, and he is exposed as a man that does not do the thing he most shows, the duke discloses that his experiment had another aspect or even a different direction: it is now to reveal that Angelo is a lily that smells far worse than a weed.

The political side of the experiment turns on a problem that Jean Bodin, theorist of absolutism, discussed in The Six Books of a Commonweal, which was translated in 1606, a few years after Shakespeare wrote Measure for Measure (1604?). In one of his chapters (IV.ii), Bodin dealt with the question "Whether it be convenient or expedient for the majesty of a sovereign prince to judge his subjects himself or be much conversant with them," and he came to the conclusion that, by and large, it was not convenient or expedient. Of course, in Measure for Measure, the question is bedevilled and made morally ambiguous by the fact that the duke's deputy is a dangerous character, a fact that may in part account for the surreptitious supervision and control Vincentio adopts. But even with a morally pure deputy, the experiment would smack of Machiavellism. As the duke explains, he sees in Angelo a convenient instrument to enforce laws that through his own fault have fallen into disuse. Angelo may "in th' ambush of my name, strike home, / And yet my nature never in the fight/To do in slander" (I.iii.41-43). Angelo thus becomes the duke's administrative tool—the figure of the ambush makes the idea particularly unpleasant—to enforce laws and let the duke escape the blame for them. This was exactly the method Gentillet's Contre-Machiavel, which was translated in 1602—not long before the play was written—accused Machiavelli of advocating as a maxim: "A Prince ought to commit to another those affairs which are subject to hatred and envy and reserve to himself such as depend upon his grace and favor." Jean Bodin, however, thought it entirely proper for the prince to reserve for himself the rewards, honors, graces, and favors and to leave to others the
"condemnations, fines, confiscations, and other punishments" so as to acquire and maintain the love of his subjects.\textsuperscript{15}

Vincentio is an exemplar of the theory and practice of political absolutism. In that surely lies the explanation for the resemblance he has to King James and for the parallels, mostly commonplaces, of some of his words and actions to passages in this monarch's \textit{Basili­con Doron}.\textsuperscript{16} A direct identification was hardly intended; that James would have considered it a compliment is doubtful. The similarities they have, such as their reluctance to show themselves to the people, can be most easily explained by their aura as absolute rulers. The wise prince, according to Bodin, "must but seldom times come into the sight of his subjects."\textsuperscript{17} The rhymed tetrameters in which Vincentio explains his governmental theory (III.ii.243 ff.) state in quite general terms the requirements and functions of the absolute prince, who must be as holy as he is severe and distribute justice by weighing "self-offences." He is a ruler who has to apply craft against vice because he has to deal with men like Angelo, angels on the outer side who hide the darkness within.

The theory of absolutism was posited on the skeptics' view of man as an unstable, inconstant, and deceptive creature who needed to be ruled by a prince who radiated an ideal self but actually adapted himself in some fashion to his environment. Vincentio's Vienna is not the organic medieval-Renaissance state of the England in \textit{Henry V}, but resembles the kind of late Renaissance state Charron saw as the norm, "wholly composed of lies, colored, counterfeit, and dangerous." In this state, it is required "of the sovereign, distrust, and that he keep himself close, yet so as he be still vertuous and just." A ruler of this kind, Charron says, expanding Machiavelli's serpent-fox metaphor, must in turns be a lion, a fox, a serpent, and a dove.\textsuperscript{18} There is a strain on the moral and psychic powers of a ruler who, like Vincentio, must frustrate a design of lust, save a condemned man, arrange a substitution of bedmates, and bring about conversions. There is also a strain on the credibility of a plot that allows all these manipulations to be successful. In the fifth act, this strain is almost unbearable when the duke turns from fox to dove and, intermittently, threatens to become a lion. And these protean changes seem a great deal of effort for exposing and improving Angelo, the main business of the act.

The climactic issue, the repentance of Angelo, is, however, much
better treated than the corresponding situation in All's Well. The final turn-about is prepared in the fourth act by Angelo's realization that he has fallen from grace (IV.iv.17 ff.). In the final scene, Angelo once more shows his hypocrisy and his unfitness as a judge when he allows himself to be put in judgment of Mariana and Isabella; also Vincentio proves his potential severity when he reveals himself in all his majesty. Now Angelo faces his transgression without blanching. In agreement with the judgment he ironically found just for a crime such as his, he begs immediate death. He does not support the pleading of Mariana and Isabella for his pardon. But, most important, he feels sorry, humanly sorry, for the grief he has inflicted:

I am sorry that such sorrow I procure;
And so deep sticks it in my penitent heart
That I crave death more willingly than mercy;
'Tis my deserving, and I do entreat it.

(V.i.472–75)

Isabella too is being tested and, I think, found improved. She has much reason to hate Angelo, and not only because of his lust for her; the duke has made her believe that Claudio is dead—the explanation he gives in soliloquy, that he will "make her heavenly comforts of despair," is characteristic of his strategy of indirection. When Angelo is exposed, we might expect Isabella, the ethical crusader, to burn once more in ferocious indignation. We are in dramatic suspense as Mariana, imploring the duke for her husband's pardon, appeals for her help. Will she overcome her ethical absolutism and become truly merciful? Will she plead for the man she assumes to be her brother's murderer even though she must believe it to be the duke's wish to make Angelo pay for Claudio, death for death? Mariana has to ask her twice; but then Isabella complies, kneeling down next to her, and pleads with the duke:

Look, if it please you, on this man condemn'd,
As if my brother liv'd. I partly think
A due sincerity govern'd his deeds
Till he did look on me; since it is so,
Let him not die. 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. Thoughts are no subjects;
Intents but merely thoughts.

(V.1.442-52)

For Isabella, the great debater, this is an almost unbelievably bad speech, "a string of palpable sophistry," as Quiller-Couch called it. Since it is bad logic, one can argue, of course, that it is an insufficient guide for human conduct (but, from a skeptic-fideistic point of view, all logic was exactly that). The very conspicuousness of her bad logic suggests that she is highly emotional in a new way. She has lost—permanently, one hopes—her old absolutism of standards; before now, she certainly never thought of anything partly. In granting Angelo sincerity, she is, of course, partly right. The contrast she makes between her brother and Angelo, however, is quite dubious. When she says that her brother had but justice, she sounds like the old absolute Isabella, but she does not set Angelo in any logical relationship to this statement; the metrically defective line "For Angelo" points to confused and conflicting ideas and emotions as she looks into herself. The excuse she makes for Angelo, that he did not actually execute his crimes (through no fault of his own!) is legalistic enough, but it runs counter to Christian ethics in which intention counts as much as execution. A reason for her forgiveness is needed, and she supplies it, a bad reason for a good act. What one remembers better than these half-truths—and what an audience cannot miss—is the cry of her heart: "Let him not die." It is a salutary change from the callous sentence she had earlier for her brother: "'Tis best thou diest quickly." Thus, her last speech is bad logic with a note of true compassion. To the duke's marriage proposal she says nothing, and that is better than a shout of joy. And Shakespeare hardly intended her to express her pleasure pantomimically as I have seen an actress do.

Yet the actresses' and the critics' difficulties with the role suggest that one should be somewhat tentative about all interpretations of her character. I do not think that this is because the workmanship of the scene is defective, but because the reverse is true. Too much certainty would be the wrong ending for a play that deals with such ambiguous situations and such complex and opaque characters. Isabella's is not the only notable silence in the end; we get no explana-
tions of their feelings from Angelo—except for the “quickening” in his eye—and from Mariana. The pardoned Claudio never speaks a word. All have been through distressing situations; Claudio, of course, has suffered most. These are silences of uncertainty and, one hopes, of self-knowledge.

The duke’s marriage proposal to Isabella is the second great surprise of the scene after the almost offhanded pardon of Angelo by the duke. (We shall pass by such minor surprises as the survival and pardon of Barnardine.) For Isabella, the proposal is a reward—unless we think she should have stayed in a nunnery. We may take it tentatively as an outward sign of her moral improvement and softened sensibility.

But the more important implications of the proposal may be those that concern the duke’s character rather than Isabella’s and the outcome of his experiment rather than her improvement. The duke’s decision to marry is certainly unexpected. One of the first statements he makes in the play, in a bantering conversation with a friar, indicates how far from his thoughts is the search for a wife; he rejects the idea that “the dribbling dart of love / Can pierce a complete bosom” such as his (I.iii.1-3), and he explains that he has other reasons for desiring seclusion. His preference for the life removed—in Shakespeare, generally a danger for a ruler—points not only to a realization that emotions are dangerous—that was good Renaissance doctrine—but also to a fear of using emotions for beneficial purposes. His reluctance to stage himself to the eyes of his people, good absolutist theory as it may be, yet may also be taken to corroborate his distrust of all emotional commitments. Vincentio, not unlike Angelo, has turned this deficiency into a self-acknowledged virtue by taking pride in his self-control; both suffer from a Puritanical suppression accompanied by the compensatory intellectual complaisance against which the skeptics warned. There is a slight comic touch in the duke’s wounded pride at hearing himself slandered as a lecher by Lucio. He promptly seeks reassurance from Escalus that his self-image as a man of all temperance is true; and that old and benevolent counselor characterizes him as “one that, above all other strifes, contended especially to know himself” (III.ii.218).

The duke’s marriage proposal, then, looks like an admission that self-knowledge requires him to become more human, just as Isabella has become more so. The embrace of a woman now seems more important to him than a certificate of temperance, just as an orgasm
has proved more important for Angelo than his reputation of probity. When Vincentio marries Isabella, it is in the realization of an unfulfilled need. There is, I think, an indication of this in his words as he unmasks Claudio and proposes to Isabella:

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.

(V.i.489-90)

Ironically, self-recovery, for Duke Vincentio just as for Angelo (and, for that matter, for Isabella), consists in becoming more like Claudio, the one character who has succumbed to a human impulse and, for that reason, has faced death. Thus, by marrying, Vincentio adds another stipulation to the conventional and stiff desiderata he had established for the ruler: he will not be only “holy and severe” and weigh others by “self-offences,” but he will also put aside the subtle pride in his armor against human affections. What he calls the “pattern in himself to know” will include a recognition that it is through their nobler emotions that men become brothers.

In recognizing the significance of human brotherhood, the ending of Measure for Measure has a faint resemblance to that of The Comedy of Errors. But there is also a marked difference, symbolized by the way one must visualize the processional exits. No longer is there a graded order, determined by a design inherent in the world, according to which Antipholuses and Dromios march out hand in hand. The absolute ruler now determines to whom he extends his hand. Much is left to his arbitrary reordering; and, of the future disposition of such matters as marriages, much is left to heaven. But one need not be cynical with Lord Byron. The ending does affirm the importance of human values and of building units, even though it does affirm both significances in a somewhat tentative way. But there is no longer the intense questioning and debilitating uncertainty that there is in Hamlet and Troilus and Cressida. Theoretical humanism is shown to be subject to revision, but practical humanism is affirmed.

However, we had better look at what the ending does to the disposition of the major issues of the play. The apparent outcome of Duke Vincentio’s experiment is certainly unexpected and ironic. The quest for self-knowledge has led him to measure his performance in
the administration of the law; perhaps his psychological interest or perhaps his awareness of the advantages of the choice of Angelo for his own reputation as a merciful ruler has led him to select a flawed man as his deputy and as a medium for his self-comparison. He has sought answers to the questions on the right way to govern, on the human qualities needed for the ruler, and on the proportionate relationship of justice and mercy. All this is an oblique and complicated way to search for the self—not quite as obviously wrongheaded as the quest of the knights of Navarre in Love's Labor's Lost, but more subconsciously weighted in favor of a success flattering to the ego, much like the experiments we generally undertake with ourselves in real life, subtly biased and with a hoped-for answer predicated. But it turns out—again in a subtle way that is only half-acknowledged by the duke—that he shares in some measure the deficiency of his experimental medium. He rectifies the problem by wholesale pardons and by a marriage proposal. What these actions imply for the nature and result of the governmental experiment is uncertain, and if one wishes to give a tentative answer, he must infer what he can from a few hints and from the general quality of the ending. That the play's title is ironic would be obvious even if the irony were not driven home by the duke when he threatens to punish Angelo: "Like doth quit like, and Measure still for Measure." But in what this irony, followed as it is by Angelo's repentance and pardon, consists, is not so certain. We can say that retributive justice, as the duke realizes and—it appears by his previous laxity and his selection of the strict Angelo—has always realized, is no preventive to sin and crime. But it does not appear that he thinks or that we ought to think that the solution is to give up judging altogether and to just forgive. If this were true, there would have been no reason for Vincentio to test himself by instituting the experiment. And, by pardoning Angelo, the duke does make a judgment based on the predication that Angelo's repentance augurs a permanent reformation. One can, of course, say that the play proves that man must judge not by giving measure for measure but by judging with measure and thus proves the need for the via media. But if so, it is strange that the ending puts more emphasis on mercy than on the moderation of punishment. One might even say that the play proves the difficulty of finding a via media, desirable as it would be to determine where it is. Nobody really seems to represent it. Escalus, wise man and old judge, is probably too easygoing. The duke, by his own confession, has
veered too far toward lenity in the past and may just possibly have made the same mistake again by pardoning Angelo and Barnardine. In demonstrating the difficulty of judging according to a just measure, Shakespeare agreed with Bodin that it is "a most hard thing for a sovereign prince fitting himself in judgment to keep a mean between too much lenity and severity." But Bodin thought such judgment possible, if difficult. Shakespeare appears to say that situations arise in which it is better to forget about judging and try to take up life as if it had a new beginning. It may even have occurred to Shakespeare, as it did not to Bodin, that absolutism, as the duke must practice it, does not really permit a true *via media*.

The play's last dialogue, that between the duke and Lucio, throws an ironic sidelight on the ethical and legal judgments debated and made in the last scene. Lucio is the only character who is not released into at least conditional happiness and the only one that is dissatisfied with the way measure has been meted out. For a moment it seems even as if the old reprobate, for whom we have acquired some liking because he has made us laugh, were to be punished severely by being forced to marry and by being whipped and hanged. The duke is spoofing, and he promptly remits Lucio's punishments except for the marriage. But, for Angelo and Claudio marriage is mercy; for Lucio it is not. As he says, establishing his own scale of what measure for measure means: "Marrying a punk, my lord, is pressing to death, whipping, and hanging" (V.i.520–21). Considering what we know of the lady in question—her name, Kate Keepdown, is symptomatic—he may be said to have a point if he feels punished rather than forgiven. Nor can his sentence be said to be correspondent to the nature of his crime: he is married to Kate not for fathering her child but for calumniating the duke. When the latter claims that slandering a prince deserves being punished by marriage to a punk, we might well wonder a little at the incongruity between punishment and crime. And as we compare Lucio's situation with that of the others, we experience a feeling for the relativity of all judgments: the same measure that offers the hope of a better life for Angelo, Claudio, and the duke threatens a dismal one for Lucio.

Thus, in a peculiar way, Lucio lives up to the symbolism inherent in his name: he brings some light to the play by showing in his own way how bewildering the human situation is. But if we sympathize with Lucio in his perplexing predicament, we do so only for a moment; then we laugh, and it seems all a little less painful. Of the
rotten commentators that help to make the worlds of the problem comedies more rotten, he is the least noxious and most amiable and humorous. Thus Lucio's name is appropriate in still another sense: he adds a touch of badly needed lightness to the play and particularly to the ending, which otherwise is rather solemn.

Lucio's treatment is an amusing example of the oblique and indirect way in which Shakespeare presented the major theme of Measure for Measure: the dilemma of man who judges and who is being judged. The play shows up the difficulty of gaining and preserving self-knowledge in either role. The major characters, like men in general, are sometimes in the stand of the accused and sometimes on the bench of the judge; they are most severely tested when they are in judgment of themselves. The play does tell us that man must judge and, most of all, must judge himself, although such verdicts are difficult and may bring uncertain and unexpected results. In judging himself, as in all other judgments, man may err in quantity or quality, fall below what is needed or exceed it.

Does the play, then, say anything at all about the connection between self-knowledge and the judgment of others? I think it does in some fashion. It indicates that the law is apt to be administered poorly by those who have not looked into themselves and that there is at least hope of justice—and, even more, of mercy—from the hands of those who have looked into themselves and become more human. And, indeed, were one to be judged by an Angelo, would it not be better to be judged by him after, rather than before, he has repented?