INTRODUCTION

Date

An entry in the Revels Account Book records a performance of the play on 26 December 1604. Other pointers indicate that the play's first performance was probably in the same year. In the case of *Measure for Measure*, a play in which allusion to specific events and persons has been recognised, and which also seems to have links to certain closely contemporary plays of which the date of first performance remains uncertain, the discussion of the date is really inseparable from the discussion of the sources. I have therefore presented the full discussion of factors relevant to dating the play along with all the rest of the discussion of the sources at pp. 6–23 below.

There is a possibility that the text as it stands in the Folio includes changes made at a time later than of the first performance, and this is discussed, along with the question of the scribe and conjectures about authorship, in the Textual Analysis, pp. 202 ff. below.

Puritanism, political allusion and censorship

Shakespeare's title announces an idea – measure for measure – and he twice pointedly refers to it in the dialogue. This is in contrast to his sources Cinthio and Whetstone and to his own usual practice. *Measure for Measure* alludes to a famous passage in the New Testament of the Bible, Matthew 7.1–2 – 'Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgement ye judge, ye shall be judged, and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again' – and it takes up issues from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 and Luke 6 concerning retribution, justice and mercy. St Matthew's version of the Sermon on the Mount alludes to the proverbial concept of retribution as 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' (5.38). In Shakespeare's *3 Henry VI* (2.6.55) the head of the Duke of York, which had been stuck by Clifford on the city gates, is exchanged for the freshly severed head of Clifford himself because 'Measure for measure must be answered'; but Christ taught that instead we should love our enemies (Matthew 5.44). If mercy is invoked to render justice temperate (another sense of 'measure') then retribution in turn will be limited to a not-to-be-exceeded measure. If great cruelty is answered by a free outpouring of love, however, the transformation that results is immeasurably joyful.

The passages from St Matthew and St Luke would have been so well known to most Elizabethans that very probably they would have taken the play's title to refer in the first place to those Gospels. Religious issues were sensitive, so such a title would probably arouse some suspicion, not only from religious extremist groups but also from the authorities. The royal proclamation of May 1559 had prohibited stage plays from dealing with 'either matters of religion or of the governance of the estate of the

common weale', and this seems to have been interpreted as meaning 'forbidding direct treatment in plays of current public issues or the representation of important living persons'.[1] Topical allusions in the play[2] seem deliberate and obvious; at the same time, however, the mode of allusion is equivocal. In the play itself Shakespeare does emphasise the name of the location as the city of Vienna, a long way away from London, and the religious robes worn in the play are Catholic, which might have been intended to deflect any accusations that the play breaks the law. Shakespeare nevertheless does not allay suspicion that he is making covert allusion to current events, nor apparently does he wish to do so. Thus in 1604 Vienna, the play's setting, would be associated with the efforts of the Holy Roman Emperor to suppress Protestantism in nearby Hungary, and with the successful rebellion of the Protestants there.[3] In this sense therefore the play's emphasis on Vienna is an emphasis on religious extremism, though the oppressors are (perhaps conveniently for Shakespeare) Catholic. In Elizabethan England, on the other hand, it was now mainly Puritan extremism that expressed religious intolerance. The list of English Protestant martyrs collected by Foxe is long – there had been some three hundred during the Catholic Queen Mary's reign – but there were also some two hundred English Catholic martyrs under the Protestant monarch Elizabeth.

Measure for Measure's various plots focus on a law – capital punishment for fornication – that seems the stuff of fantasy and folk-tale, until one recalls not only the historical excesses of many fanatical religious regimes but the fact that in the sixteenth century some extreme English Puritans did indeed advocate the death penalty for fornication, and later, in 1650, during the Commonwealth, the death penalty for incest and adultery was for a short period actually introduced. It was a concession to a century of pressure from Puritan extremists.

Characteristic of this extremist vein in Puritanism is the pamphleteer Philip Stubbes, who, concerned with the general question of order in the state, sees threats everywhere, though in the over-simple terms of ascribing all problems to individuals and their neglect of religious teaching. He proposes in his *Anatomy of Abuses* (1581) that those who commit whoredom, adultery, incest and prostitution should 'tast of present death', though he remarks that his contemporaries are all too likely to be more merciful 'than the Author of mercie him selfe'. Stubbes is unhealthily excited by what he reviles, sadistically urging that those convicted of these sexual crimes should at least 'be cauterized, and seared with a hote yron on the cheeke, forehead, or some other parte' where all could see that they had been branded. Stubbes deplores the laxity of magistrates in this respect: they 'wincke at [fornication] or els as looking thorowe their fingers, they see it, and will not see it' (sig. H6^{r}). These are terms like those Shakespeare's Duke uses when confessing to his previous lax rule of Vienna, and we are again reminded of the Duke when we read Stubbes's survey of rampant vice in sixteenth-century English society, seen as the product of lax upbringing of children: 'give a wild horse the libertie

[1] Cited by Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages*, 3 vols., 1959–81, II, part 1, p. 75.
[2] See my discussion of these at pp. 20–2 below.
[3] It is curious that Hamlet names Vienna as the location for *The Mousetrap* (the play performed before Claudius). He ironically says to the king that *The Mousetrap* cannot give any offence since it does not touch any local personalities, being merely 'the image of an action done in Vienna'.

of the head never so litle, and he will runne headlonge to thyne and his owne destruction also . . . So correct Children in their tender yeres' (F7 v). This recalls *Measure for Measure*:

> We have strict statutes and most biting laws,
> The needful bits and curbs to headstrong weeds,
> Which for this fourteen years we have let slip . . .
> Now, as fond fathers
> Having bound up the threatening twigs of birch
> Only to stick it in their children's sight
> For terror, not to use – in time the rod
> More mocked than feared – so our decrees,
> Dead to infliction, to themselves are dead,
> And Liberty plucks Justice by the nose,
> The baby beats the nurse, and quite athwart
> Goes all decorum. (1.3.20–2, 24–32)

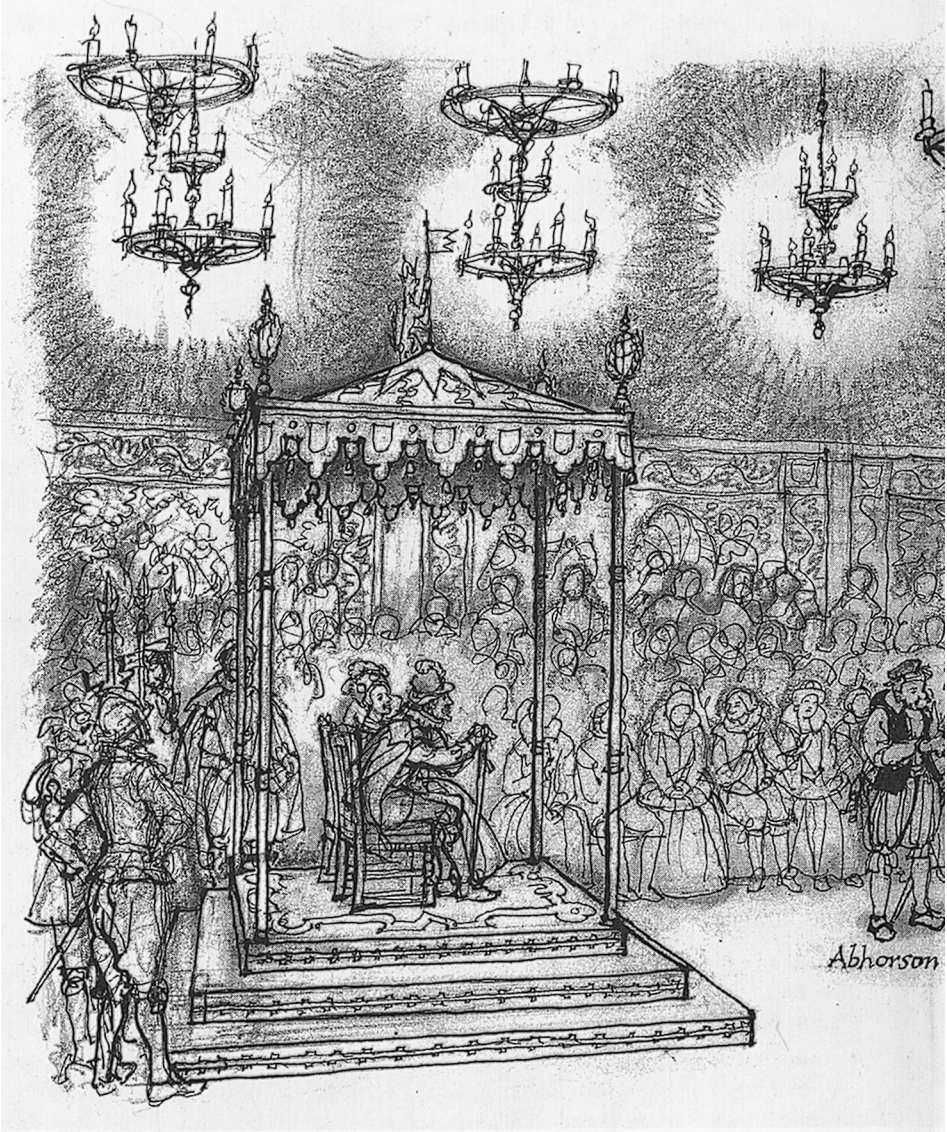
Stubbes voices the notorious extreme Puritan hostility to all customary social festivals and entertainments, which he claims only license 'swilling, gulling and carousing', being the occasion for gluttony and drunkenness, riot and sexual misbehaviour. Extreme Puritans believed acting plays to be an offence against religion. Stubbes says stage plays should be condemned and ought to be prohibited: 'If they be of divine matter, than are they most intollerable, or rather Sacrilegious, for that the blessed word of GOD, is to be handled, reverently . . . not scoffingly' (sig. L5 r). Furthermore interludes and plays 'paint' before the spectators' eyes examples of all kinds of sin and mischief. Shakespeare, whose sense of the complexities of social structures and relationships is far ahead of extreme Puritan views, evidently had such Puritan invectives ironically in mind when designing and composing the complex debate of *Measure for Measure*. Stubbes may deliver threats: 'beware, therfore, you masking Players, you painted sepulchres' (sig. L5 v), but Shakespeare reverses this in *Measure for Measure*, where public figures treat the world as a stage for their maskings, and the Puritan, Angelo, explicitly confesses his moral hypocrisy when likening himself to a painted sepulchre (2.4.1–17).

In his eloquent *Anatomie of Absurditie* (1589),[1] Nashe had mocked extremist Puritan pamphleteers like Stubbes and illustrated the chief features by which extreme Puritanism was recognised at the time. Shakespeare seems always to have taken the closest appreciative interest in Nashe's work, and here Nashe's objections to Puritan extremism could well have been recalled to mind by Shakespeare when he was composing *Measure for Measure*.[2]

Nashe objects to the way such Puritans distort scripture: they make extremist polemic against life itself, declaiming against gluttony as if they themselves did not eat food,

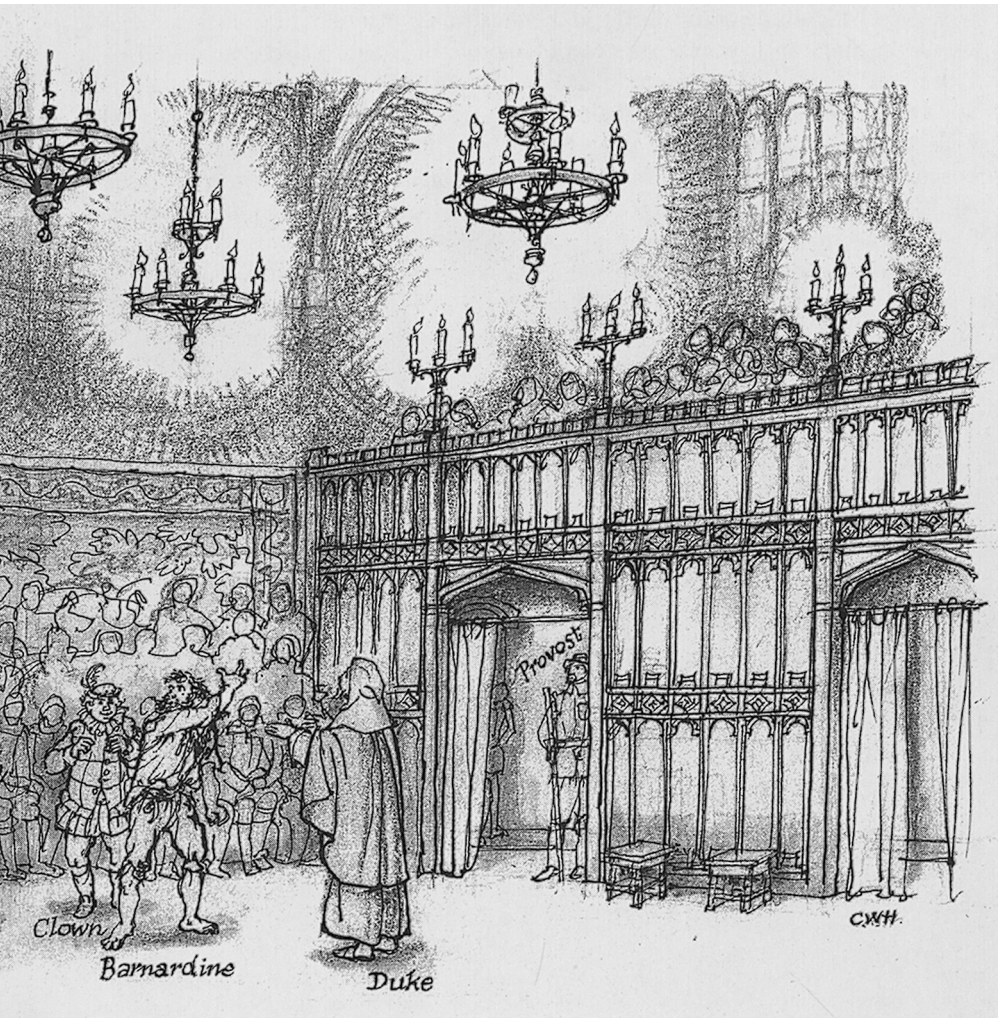
[1] Quotations are from Nashe, *Works*, 1, pp. 20–2. J. J. M. Tobin has noticed a number of suggestive verbal parallels from *Pierce Penilesse*, some of which he has published in 'Nashe and *Measure for Measure*', *N&Q* (1986), p. 360.

[2] Especially, perhaps, in the language and ideas of Pompey, and the verbal quickness of Lucio, although neither of these characters reflects the essential moral probity and humanity of Nashe.



against drunkenness 'as though they had beene brought uppe all the dayes of their life with bread and water', and against whoredom 'as though they had beene Eunuches from theyr cradle, or blind from the howre of their conception' (p. 20). Despite all this they enquire into 'every corner of the Common wealth, correcting that sinne in others, wherwith they are corrupted themselves' (p. 21).

Nashe compares them to actors adopting their stage roles; he turns Stubbes's obsession with attire and clothes, and the theatre, against him: 'the cloake of zeale, should be



1 Barnardine: 'I swear I will not die today for any man's persuasion.' Act 4, Scene 3: a reconstruction of the court performance at Whitehall, 26 December 1604, by C. Walter Hodges

unto an hypocrite in steed of a coate of Maile; a pretence of puritie'. Extreme Puritans are ham actors: 'It is not the writhing of the face, the heaving uppe of the eyes to heaven, that shall keepe these men, from having their portion in hell. Might they be saved by their booke, they have the Bible alwaies in their bosome, and so had the Pharisies the Lawe embroidered in their garments' (p. 22). All Nashe's writings were banned in 1599 by official decree; another irony for Shakespeare to accommodate.

Moves were also intermittently made throughout the period to suppress plays, arrest actors and playwrights, and close theatres. The city authorities associated theatres with

public disorder; the court was suspicious of plays because of their potential for political comment. Shakespeare personally, and his own plays (apart from *Richard II*), seem to have escaped punishment,[1] but Shakespeare and his company of players often needed the protection afforded by aristocratic sympathisers and patrons at court and in the Privy Council. Certainly it is clear from the trouble over *Sejanus*[2] (in which Shakespeare acted), and over the riskily topical *Tragedy of Gowrie*,[3] that in 1603–4 topical political allusion in plays was a serious matter. *Measure for Measure*, as a play no less concerned in its own way with the state and its government, and following in the same playhouse both *Sejanus* and *The Malcontent*, might well arouse the suspicion of the authorities. Perhaps it was for this reason that the threat to Lucio of execution for slander (and his last-minute reprieve) comes so very prominently right at the end of the play, a sign of the commended temperance, but also firmness, of the ruler.

Shakespeare does place obvious compliments to James I in *Measure for Measure*,[4] but it is worth noticing that they are incidental to the play's action, and the play's force does not depend upon them. Queen Elizabeth in 1586 had pointed to the power – and also the danger – which the public role of monarch had in common with that of the actor: 'We princes, I tel you, are set on stages, in the sight and view of all the world' (see 1.1.68 n.). Shakespeare seems nevertheless to have contrived penetrating questions in this play about the Prince and the State,[5] force and fraud, about the actor and the ruler, even if he did also practise self-censorship.[6]

The sources and their shaping

Measure for Measure is based on folk-tale materials of an ancient and common European stock: these are the stories of the corrupt magistrate and the infamous bargain,

[1] Nevertheless, seven years before *Measure for Measure*, in 1597, the London authorities had made major moves against the players. One occasion was the performing at the Swan theatre by Pembroke's Men of the play *The Isle of Dogs*, which was held to contain lewd and seditious matter. Its part-author, Thomas Nashe, was forced to flee London. His co-author, Ben Jonson, and Thomas Kyd were thrown into gaol. In another move the mayor and aldermen of the city induced the Privy Council to prohibit plays within the city and for three miles outside in the County of Middlesex, and two playhouses, the Theatre and the Curtain, were ordered to be pulled down. On 22 June 1600, the Privy Council order allowed that acting plays was 'not an evill in ytselfe' and might indeed 'with a good order and moderation be suffered in a well governed estate'. They conceded to city pressures in ordering some playhouses to be pulled down, but directed that two should be allowed. For the censorship of the deposition scene of *Richard II*, and a perfomance associated with the Essex rebellion of 1601, see the New Cambridge edition: Andrew Gurr (ed.), *R2*, 1984, pp. 6–7.

[2] Jonson had to answer a charge of treason for writing *Sejanus*. See p. 22 n. 4 below.

[3] This play was suppressed in 1604, apparently as a direct result of royal displeasure. Chamberlain speculated in a letter, referring to the play, that the reason was because 'it be thought unfit that princes should be plaide on the stage in theyre life time' (see p. 22 n. 4 below).

[4] See the discussion below, pp. 20–3.

[5] The use of the term 'Prince' in *Measure for Measure* may be intended to be recognised as an allusion to the treatise *Il Principe* (*The Prince*), a study of the science of power and the art of secular government by Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527). *Il Principe* was first published in 1513. Machiavelli's comedy *Mandragola*, with its equivocal friar-confessor and ironic story, first appeared in print in 1513 also.

[6] On this speculative topic see the recent study by Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation*, 1984.

of the disguised ruler, and of the substituted bed-mate. These stories each have the characteristic moral and emotional charge of primitive folk-tale. By the time he came to write *Measure for Measure* Shakespeare was already familiar with the sophisticated and psychologically realistic versions of such tales in the Italian novelle of Boccaccio and his followers.[1] He could confidently plan to combine several such stories by modifying their respective tone and force.

CINTHIO

the chief source for *Measure for Measure* is G. B. Giraldi Cinthio's *Hecatommithi* (1565, reprinted four times and then again in 1593, translated into French in 1583–4 and Spanish in 1590). The story of the corrupt magistrate and the infamous bargain is central to Shakespeare's play, and it is helpful to begin with Cinthio's version, even though it is not the earliest known,[2] because Cinthio brings out its complex intellectual and structural tension, and gives it a detailed naturalistic setting.

Cinthio's story[3] is set in Innsbruck (not, as in Shakespeare, Vienna). Juriste, the equivalent of Shakespeare's Angelo, is sent to rule Innsbruck by Maximilian, the Emperor of Rome, whose close friend he is. Juriste is warned by the emperor that he cannot hope for pardon if he offends justice, but (as Cinthio observes) Juriste, though pleased with the appointment, is not a man who rightly knows himself. Still, Juriste rules Innsbruck well for a long time, until he decrees that a young man accused of rape be beheaded (by contrast in Shakespeare Angelo is not seen ruling well and the pace is very quick). The young man's sister comes to plead for him. (This part of the story runs parallel in Shakespeare.) The sister is eighteen, beautiful, sweet-voiced, eloquent, and has been educated in philosophy. Her name is Epitia. She pleads that her brother is young – only sixteen; that he loves the woman he wronged and is ready to marry her; and that anyway the law is drawn up to strike terror rather than to be enforced. Juriste, she says, should apply equity and show himself merciful, not harsh. Juriste is impressed only by her beauty. He agrees to a stay of execution but privately determines to satisfy his lust for Epitia. She goes to her brother in prison, who asks her to plead for him once more. When she visits Juriste again he rejects her plea – unless she gives herself to him. She answers that her brother's life is very dear to her, but even dearer is her honour. (This corresponds to Shakespeare.) Juriste then says that if she does give herself to him, he might marry her. He tells her she must decide by the next day. Epitia goes to her brother in prison and begs him to prepare for death, since

[1] Seven novelle by Boccaccio and his successors provide major sources for Shakespearean plots. Bandello is a source for *Romeo and Juliet* (1595) and *Much Ado* (1598); Ser Giovanni for *The Merchant of Venice* (1597); *Othello*, written very close to *Measure for Measure*, probably in 1603, also uses Giraldi Cinthio, and *All's Well*, probably later but possibly as early as 1603, uses Boccaccio. For a discussion of Shakespeare's whole concern with novelle, see the discussion by Leo Salingar, *Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy*, 1974, pp. 298–325.

[2] Bullough, in the section on *Measure for Measure* (II, 399–524), prints an analogue from St Augustine and another from Thomas Lupton's book *Too Good to be True* of 1581. A number of historical parallels have been suggested, among them an interesting one in a letter from Vienna of 1547 printed by Lever in an appendix. For a discussion of such analogues, see Lever, pp. xxxv–vi and nn., and Eccles, pp. 387–92.

[3] This following summary is based on the translation by Eccles, pp. 378–87.

she cannot sacrifice her honour. He appeals to her on the grounds of natural feeling, their blood kinship, their personal affection for each other, and says it is certain that Juriste will marry her because she is so beautiful and gifted. Epitia then agrees to give herself up to Juriste's bargain and brother and sister embrace in tearful reconciliation. (In this and the following events Shakespeare differs.) Next day she tells Juriste her decision and he promises her brother will be saved. Then, after dining with Epitia and before taking her to bed, he secretly gives orders for the brother to be beheaded. Next morning he lets Epitia go home and promises that he will send her brother home to her.

The gaoler has the brother's body placed on a bier with the severed head at its feet, covered in a black cloth, and sent to Epitia, who, shocked and stricken with grief, but steadied by philosophy, pretends she is resigned to the situation; as soon as she is left alone she expresses her grief, and then meditates vengeance. Recalling the emperor's reputation for justice, she resolves to complain directly to him. She puts on mourning and travels alone and in secret to Maximilian. At the climax of her tale to the emperor she gives so great a cry and her eyes so fill with tears that the emperor and his lords stand 'like men pale as ghosts for pity'. (In the final phase there are close parallels to Shakespeare.) Juriste, without knowing why, is summoned and confronted suddenly with Epitia. The emperor sees Juriste is stricken by conscience and dismay, trembling all over. Epitia repeats her accusation, weeping, and calls on the emperor for justice. At first Juriste tries to flatter her but Maximilian rebukes him; then Juriste declares he had her brother beheaded to uphold the law. Epitia replies that Juriste has committed two sins where her brother committed one. Juriste pleads for mercy, Epitia for justice. Maximilian decrees that Juriste marry Epitia. After the marriage Juriste supposes his troubles are over, but Maximilian now decrees that he must suffer execution since he had her brother's head cut off. Now Epitia, who has been so inflamed against Juriste, suddenly has a change of heart – she decides that having accepted him as her husband she cannot now consent to his execution because of her. The emperor is deeply moved and the goodness he sees in her persuades him to grant her plea. So Juriste's life is saved and, recognising her generosity, Juriste lives with Epitia henceforward in love and happiness.

Cinthio then puts this exemplary tale in perspective: there is an audience, a group of ladies, who then discuss it. They find it hard to decide whether the justice or the mercy pleases them more; at first they would be happy if the rape of Epitia were punished, but it seems no less praiseworthy that her plea for mercy for Juriste should succeed. The more experienced conclude that mercy, in tempering punishment, is a worthy companion to royal justice, and leads to a certain moderation in the minds of princes.

There are two other novelle in Cinthio's *Hecatommithi* which should be noted; novella 52 tells of a governor who fails in his attempt to blackmail the wife of a merchant and dies confessing his corruption, and in novella 56 a tailor's wife, under the same kind of pressure from the judge, appeals successfully to the duke, who condemns the judge. Both these women, it will be noticed, refuse to surrender, unlike Epitia – but like Shakespeare's Isabella.

Cinthio later wrote a drama,[1] *Epitia*, on the subject, in neo-classical form, and made some significant changes to the story: he added a sister of Juriste named Angela who pleads for Juriste's life at the end, and there is a captain of the prison who disobeys Juriste's sealed letter commanding the beheading and saves Epitia's brother's life by substituting the head of a murderer who resembles him. These features are closer to Shakespeare. It is the revelation that her brother's life has been saved that changes Epitia's heart and makes her finally plead for Juriste's life.

Both Cinthio's versions of the Epitia story, though containing horrific events, atrocious cruelty and shocking surprises, show a lively intellectual interest in the arguments for and against mercy, and these arguments are related to the social and psychological factors influencing the protagonists; moral judgement is tempered by equity, or to put it another way, the general principle is shown to be in need of scrupulous modification by the particulars of a given case. Shakespeare's treatment of the story is in these respects like Cinthio's.

WHETSTONE

by contrast when we turn to *Promos and Cassandra*, the early Elizabethan treatment of the Epitia story by George Whetstone (1578), a tone of Puritan authoritarianism is struck right at the beginning in the play's supplementary title: 'Devided into two Comicall / Discourses. / In the fyrst parte is showne, the / unsufferable abuse, of a lewde magistrate: / The vertuous behaviours of a chaste Ladye: / The uncontrowled leawdenes of a favoured / Curtisan. / And the undeserved estimation of a pernici / ous Parasyte. / In the second parte is discoursed, / the perfect magnanimitye of a noble Kinge, / in checking Vice and favouring Vertue: /'. Whetstone's dramatisation[2] applies the presentational conventions of Morality drama to give an essentially typical, external account of character and situation, but in being designed for practical performance on an Elizabethan stage, Whetstone's play did present Shakespeare with a model providing many ideas for dramatising and staging the narrative; it may well be that a number of scenes in *Measure for Measure*, especially those of public ceremony, were influenced by Whetstone. Whetstone emphasises his demonstration as showing 'the confusion of Vice and the cherising of Vertue', justifying the comic elements he adds to the story since 'with the scowrge of the lewde, the lewde are feared from evill attempts'. The play is dedicated to Fleetwood, the Recorder of London, whose duties involved him in trying to clean up the London underworld – an exasperating business, as the frequent tone of complaint in Fleetwood's letters shows.[3] Whetstone shows little curiosity about the social or psychological aspects of criminality, but his additional characters exhibit a

[1] In 1573; it was published in 1583 after his death.

[2] *Promos and Cassandra* was apparently not performed. Whetstone got it published as he was leaving on a long voyage; he was aged 28. He later published a novella version of the same story in his *Heptameron of Civill Discourses* (1582, reprinted in 1593 with the title *Aurelia*).

[3] See the letters of Fleetwood in Thomas Wright, *Queen Elizabeth and her Times*, 1838, e.g. pp. 164–6. G. Blakemore Evans quotes some vivid letters from Fleetwood in his anthology, *Elizabethan-Jacobean Drama*, 1987, pp. 8–9, 238. Fleetwood thought that the existence of theatres was the cause of much of the civil disorder he had to deal with day after day. He seems not to have been mollified, in the long run at least, by having Whetstone's play dedicated to him.

vitality and humour which constitute a stronger challenge to Puritan attitudes than he apparently recognises. Furthermore, in accepting the structural conventions of English stage comedy of the time, Whetstone transmits the effect of counterpoint between the main plot concerning noble characters and sub-plots of trickery and low comedy, so that the comic episodes not infrequently give an ironically critical reflection of events in the main plot. A vivid instance of this is the sexual bribing of the corrupt official Phallax by the Courtesan abetted by her servant Rosko (a prototype for Shakespeare's Pompey), which parallels the bribe Promos offers Cassandra – that he will save her brother and perhaps marry her if she gives herself to him.

Promos the Deputy does not simply enforce the law – he revives a law that a merciful magistrate has allowed to fall into neglect. The condemned young man Andrugio has not committed rape but anticipated marriage, sharing a love relationship with his partner, who is here given a speaking part and a name. Shakespeare follows Whetstone here. At the opening of *Part 2* she has a solo scene before the supposed tomb of her beloved in the temple, expressing her grief and melancholy in an emotional speech and a mournful song. This gives an additional focus of sentiment to the story which Shakespeare may have thought valuable. The young man she mourns is saved by a sympathetic gaoler who substitutes a head, but (unlike that in *Epitia*) it is mutilated beyond recognition. Shakespeare again follows Whetstone. The young man then departs to hide disguised as a hermit in the woods. Only on learning of his sister's distress at her new husband Promos's impending death does he return.

Whetstone makes important additions of conventional Elizabethan kinds, in sub-plots and characters, to extend the themes of justice and government, which possibly influence Shakespeare. Whetstone's visualisation, in terms of Elizabethan staging, of these episodes of city life, prison, and the Royal Entry, could well have influenced Shakespeare and may indicate the kind of detail with which *Measure for Measure*'s setting was realised in performance in 1604. He features the city's mayor, sheriff, aldermen, and upright officers, and directions call for the sword of justice, the keys of the city, the mace, royal letters patent, a proclamation, citizens' petitions, perhaps even the executioner's axe (*Part 2* 5.518). Recalling the Tudor interlude Vice, a favoured officer of Promos called Phallax perverts justice and develops a blackmail and bribery racket. Phallax is in turn sexually bribed by the Courtesan, who has been put out of business by Promos's strict rule. She is eventually arrested by officers of the law in the wake of the king's return and Phallax's downfall.

Whetstone makes the heroine Cassandra's first interview with Promos take place in the presence of the Sheriff, and follows it with a scene in which Phallax dispatches his henchmen as spies to detect likely citizens as targets for blackmail. Soon follows a partly comic macabre prison scene with the hangman, 'a great many ropes about his neck', commenting on his increased work-load under the Deputy. Then a procession of bound prisoners, including a woman and a gipsy, enters on its way to execution, led in a penitential hymn by a 'Preacher'. These dramatic emphases are taken over by Shakespeare, though his treatment differs very distinctly in particulars. Promos himself, in the final act of *Part 2*, is shown led by