Commentators on Shakespeare's Measure for Measure, in addressing themselves to a variety of problems, have arrived at equally varied conclusions about the quality of the play. Behind all of these comments, however, whether favorable or unfavorable, lies one common assumption: that the play, on the surface at least, is not entirely satisfactory and therefore requires a somewhat exceptional elucidation. It is conceded even by defenders of the play that there are apparent moral inconsistencies which need to be resolved, that many questionable actions must be accounted for if the Duke and Isabella are to be saved as completely “good” characters. For example, attention is frequently called to the shifty delays and intrigues of the Duke, to Isabella’s self-righteous prudery which would at once sacrifice a brother—indeed would violently damn him for asking her to yield her virginity to save him—and sanction the substitution of Mariana for herself. Also there is some question whether the play conforms adequately to a legitimate dramatic genre. Shakespeare has been charged with taking the stuff of tragedy and forcing it into the mold of comedy by asking his audience to accept Angelo’s last-minute repentance and marriage to Mariana. Finally, there are certain apparent inconsistencies in the dramatic action, which suggest to some commentators a possible corruption of the text. For example, at the beginning of the play the Duke characterizes Angelo as without blemish; yet later he reveals that Angelo wrongly deserted Mariana before the start of the action. Similarly, Mariana states that she has often been comforted by Friar Lodowick (the disguised Duke), although we know that the Duke has just adopted this disguise.¹

It is with the three general categories of problems just mentioned that both the attackers and defenders of the play usually deal. Their proposed solutions also follow certain general patterns. Those who condemn the play often wish to spare Shakespeare while they attack his work, striving particularly to ensure that Shakespeare receive full credit for the passages of poetic brilliance. Thus they claim that the play breaks into two historically separate parts at the point where the Mariana plot is introduced, and that Shakespeare, in a hasty revision of his own work or, preferably,

¹ Meas. iv.i.8–9. The many students of the time-sequence of the play invariably cite this and similar problems to support their claims of textual abnormalities. For the various treatments of the problems summarized in this paragraph, see notes 2, 3, 4, and 6, below, and the discussion to which they refer.
of that of an inferior dramatist, had to allow the weaknesses to remain.\textsuperscript{2} The defense of the play has most commonly been placed on thematic grounds, with moral consistency being established in Christian terms by reference to Chapter Six of St. Luke, from which the title of the play is obviously taken.\textsuperscript{3} The play is thus treated as a moral-political thesis drama; and whatever ambiguities of meaning these treatments may hope to resolve, they largely ignore the problem of its effect as a play or, more specifically, as a comedy. Oscar J. Campbell, considering the play in terms of this problem, sees it as Shakespeare’s extension of the Jonsonian formula for realistic comic satire and insists that only by reference to the latter tradition can the incongruities of the play be explained; for Shakespeare’s additions to the formula, he claims, only succeeded in disrupting its self-consistency.\textsuperscript{4} William W. Lawrence argues for a somewhat similar duality, since he finds in the play a mixture of the romantic elements permitted by Elizabethan theatrical conventions and the social realism demanded by Shakespeare’s source\textsuperscript{5} and the nature of his theme.\textsuperscript{6} But his is an approval of the play, since he assumes the unquestioning gullibility of an Elizabethan audience in accepting the improbable elements which cause modern critics so much trouble.

Even the more favorably disposed commentators seem to be somewhat uncomfortable when confronted by the difficulties in the play. They all feel the need to explain away the two incongruous elements which somehow have made their home in a single work by our master playwright, whether these elements be seen as textual inconsistencies, as the conflict

\textsuperscript{2} Robert H. Wilson, “The Mariana Plot of Measure for Measure,” PQ, ix (1930), 341-350; J. M. Robertson, The Shakespeare Canon (New York, 1923), ii, 158-211; John Dover Wilson, “The Copy for Measure for Measure, 1623,” Measure for Measure, ed. Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch and John Dover Wilson (Cambridge, 1922), pp. 97-113; H. N. Fairchild, “The Two Angelo’s,” SAB, vi (1931), 53-59. While R. H. Wilson allows the revised play to have originally been Shakespeare’s, both Robertson and Dover Wilson, whose theories differ widely in other respects, insist that much of the play is the work of an inferior hand. Fairchild, while not rejecting the revision theory, does not choose between these alternatives.


\textsuperscript{4} Shakespeare’s Satire (New York, 1943), pp. 121-141.

\textsuperscript{5} George Whetstone, The Historie of Promos and Cassandra (1578).

\textsuperscript{6} Shakespeare’s Problem Comedies (New York, 1931), pp. 78-121. Lawrence believes that by tracing the Whetstone play back, via Cinthio, to an actual occurrence, he can reveal the essential realism in the story.
between moral meaning and dramatic effect, or as the clash between realistic satire and romantic melodrama. That they should so often reduce the central and crucial moral perplexities to such quibbles as, for example, those about the contemporary importance of betrothals, further indicates their uneasiness before the obvious aspects of the action. It is possible, however, that these studies have not fully utilized all that can be recovered about Shakespeare's dramatic intention, and that a further consideration of the play in relation to the kinds of comedy current around 1604 will clarify some of the problems which have provoked such diverse solutions. I propose, therefore, first to examine this context of Elizabethan comedy and then to see with what relevance it may be brought to bear upon the ambiguities of Measure for Measure.

The theory of comedy advanced by Elizabethan literary critics is clearly a neo-classical one. We can see by their references to authority two main sources of classical influence, both of which, however, emphasize the same precepts. The influence of the flourishing Italian literary theory of the mid-sixteenth century, with its emphasis on Aristotelian terminology (although its spirit seems rather to have been Horatian), joined with that of the simple formal definitions of such popular schoolboy-Latin grammarians as Donatus and Diomedes, to fashion the formulations of Elizabethan writers on poetics. Without here attempting any detailed summary of the various writers, it can safely be said that their conclusions all tend in a single direction. Their dramatic theories always begin with a distinction between genres, made with a view toward establishing the concepts of pure comedy and pure tragedy. Although these genres are united by the common principle which asserts the moral objective of all poetry, they are differentiated according to the particular means each is to employ in order to achieve this didactic end. And the means each genre employs are to be self-consistent, so that every aspect of the drama comes to be rigidly controlled (according to the principle of "decorum") by the initial choice of a comic or tragic effect to be produced on the audience. While they make many distinctions, I wish to consider here the one drawn between a comic and tragic action. Whereas the tragic action is to be great and terrible in order to arouse pity and fear and thus act as a moral purge, the comic must treat the familiar and domestic and by ridicule expose the follies which the audience is to avoid. As a result, death or even danger of death is reserved for tragedy; it would clearly be unfitting for the vices or follies handled in comedy to have any such serious implications.7

7 For a study of this field, see Joel E. Spingarn, A History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance (New York, 1920), especially pp. 60–74, 283–290, and George Saintsbury, A History of Criticism, II (London, 1928), Book iv. For Elizabethan critical statements, see
But, with the exception of such self-conscious classicists as Jonson or Chapman, comedy, thus rigorously defined by Renaissance critical theory, was not what was turned out by the Elizabethan dramatists. This was neither an unconscious departure from recognized rules nor a purely negative flight from restrictions which were too confining. While the non-classical playwrights did not construct an alternative critical theory, we can observe that they were aware on the theoretical level of the advantages their heterodox productions offered. If we turn to the statements made by many popular dramatists in their prologues and by their characters in their plays, we see that, fully aware of the classical limitations placed upon comedy, they claim that they do well deliberately to circumvent these limitations and create imperfect "mongrels." They usually justify themselves by referring to the demands of their audience. If the end of drama is to teach (and this much of the classical precept they seem to keep, perhaps because it coincides with the Morality tradition), and if the audience must enjoy a play in order to profit by its message, then, they conclude, all rules must be subordinated to the audience's approval of the work. And since audiences contain a mixture of serious and light-hearted temperaments, a play will best achieve its purpose if it presents material in which there are elements to suit all tastes. Thus these playwrights, aware of the implications involved in the kind of drama they advocate, sanction the neglect of formal perfection in favor of the attainment of popularity.8

In moving from Elizabethan dramatic theory to dramatic practice, we find, first, that the plays of the neo-classicists, of course, were dedicated to the classic ideal. The form of comedy which they established is the first of the various traditions I want to examine here. It is comedy completely controlled by the desire to hold folly up to ridicule. Thus it leads quite naturally to the comedy of "humours" in which every character is sharply defined and clearly "typed" so that the satiric implications of his folly are evident. The tradition seems to begin with Chapman's An Humourous Day's Mirth or Comedy of Humours (1597) or at

Sidney, Lodge, Puttenham, Harington, and Jonson in Elizabethan Critical Essays, ed. Gregory Smith (Oxford, 1904). For Italian critical statements see, for example, Trissino, Cinthio, Scaliger, and Minturno in Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden, ed. Allan H. Gilbert (New York, 1940). 8 Many quoted selections in support of this discussion may be found in David Klein's collection of such statements in his Literary Criticism from the Elizabethan Dramatists (New York, 1910). While, as a follower of Spingarn and a Crocean, he tries to show Elizabethan practice to be a romantic rebellion of the imagination against mechanical rules, the evidence he presents seems rather to point toward the more practical reason that I have indicated. For the best extant example of the dual consciousness of classical rules on the one hand and the kind of drama being successfully produced on the other, see Thomas Heywood's An Apology for Actors (1612). Here we have references both to Donatus and to popular practice.
least with Jonson’s *Every Man in his Humour* (1598). In the Chapman play, Lemot is a mischief-maker who manipulates all the characters in order to exhibit their folly. His principal aim, however, seems to be the joy he gets out of making trouble. In Jonson the formula is similar, if greatly refined. Even more accentuated here is the foolishness of those who are to be gullied, and the desire to expose this foolishness becomes more completely the motivation of those who do the gulling. When we move to Marston’s *Antonio and Mellida* (1599), *The Malcontent* (1604), and *Parasilaster or The Fawn* (1606), we find, in addition to these other ingredients, that here, even more than in Jonson, there is emphasized the element of moral corruption of which the gulls are examples and against which the intriguer rails. This branch of comedy would seem to fit the classical prescription. In every case the attention is centered on the exposure of folly which is to benefit the audience, and, except in some of Marston’s work, the comedy is domestic and free from any danger of serious harm befalling its characters.

These plays follow a similar pattern: we have the introduction of the gull or gulls along with the intriguer who may also be the moral commentator; the main action involves the successful perpetration of the intriguer’s plot to frustrate and expose the gull, ending in his cure or his being hooted off the stage. Character is stressed rather than plot, and the audience is forced to assume an objective attitude which frees it from any emotional involvement and allows it a detached aloofness from the fools they see displaying themselves.

But, as has been stated, the bulk of Elizabethan dramatists did not intend to pursue this kind of comedy. Since, unlike the classicists, they did not formulate a fully developed dramatic theory to which we may look for their comedies to conform, we must try to find plays with enough common elements to allow us to piece together this non-classical tradition which, we may assume, also had a certain focus and certain limitations. Perhaps the basis of this tradition is to be found in the pastoral dramas of the last two decades of the sixteenth century. And modern commentators have agreed that there is some kind of pastoral drama prior to the work of Daniel and Fletcher in the first decade of the seventeenth century. It seems clear that Elizabethan pastoral drama is two stages removed from classical pastoralism. The ancient poetic eclogue

9 The peculiar case of Marston will be discussed in another connection later in this paper.

influenced the origin of the Renaissance prose romance, which in turn seems to lie behind the Elizabethan pastoral play. That variety of pastoral play of which our earliest extant example in England is Peele's *The Arraignment of Paris* (1581–84), and which includes a few quite similar works by Lyly extending into the nineties, may seem at first to have been too loosely conceived, to have had too few defining qualities, for it to constitute an effective tradition. But actually it was developing certain uniform traits, and in the anonymous *Maid's Metamorphosis* (1600), if not earlier, we can clearly see the three main elements which had emerged to become the broad characteristics of the genre: the idyllic, simple life of the country (often opposed to urban corruption), the sophisticated manners of the court which intrude upon it, and the magic of mythology which manipulates the action. While few dramas closely adhere to this pattern in its entirety, the general conception of drama embodied in the pastoral does help to fashion many plays toward the end of the century.

In this connection it is especially significant to study the work of Greene, because he seems to have transformed certain basic pastoral attributes to formulate a kind of romantic comedy which in many respects resembles Shakespeare's. These pastoral qualities were natural to him, since he began as a writer of pastoral romances. In *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* (about 1590) and *James IV* (about 1591), Greene has modified the pastoral elements he employs. Magic, although it is not mythologically derived, is used in both plays, functioning as a major structural device in *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* and as a background to the action in *James IV*; in both plays rural virtues are extolled and courtly vice condemned, and disguised nobles add the courtly touch to the country scenes. These plays also incorporate several incidental features generally common to the pastorals. Like the pastorals, they are primarily concerned with the telling of a romantic and fanciful story. It is significant in this connection that both plays are called "histories" (that is, stories) and that only *James IV* is even secondarily called a comedy. Because of this exclusive interest in the story for its own sake, consistency of character is not taken very seriously, so that we never see the process by which a character changes his mind but rather are forced to accept such vacillation on the spot so long as it moves the plot interestingly along toward the desired ending. Since we are to become emotionally involved in the action, we are hardly to regard the characters objectively or ironically. Rather our attitude is to be one of sympathy toward them: we take seriously what they take seriously. Thus, concerned about the fortunes of the characters and heedless of their psychological consistency, we can accept improbabilities in keeping with our hope for all to turn out well.

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11 Greg (see n. 10), pp. 338–341.
In both plays we find certain parallels to many of Shakespeare's plots. (And we should note that in James IV Greene uses as his source the same Cinthio from whose work Measure for Measure eventually springs.) These parallels are particularly striking in Measure for Measure although, as we shall see, it differs from the Greene formula in many respects. Like Measure for Measure, each of these two plays of Greene is concerned with the theme of feminine virtue assaulted by male lust, and in each, again as in Measure for Measure, the would-be seducer repents.

It should be clear that the two lines of Elizabethan comedy we have traced are completely opposed to each other. In addition to their different attitudes toward such superficial structural principles as the three unities, there are two antithetical concepts of drama involved here. In one there is the primacy of character-consistency, in the other the primacy of fanciful plot. In one, no perilous element is allowed to obfuscate the purely comic effect; in the other even the most tragic possibilities may enter along the way, provided that all ends well. One demands from its audience an attitude of detachment, of disdainful superiority; the other demands so sympathetic a concern for the fortunes of its characters that the audience will tolerate anything so long as the obstacles to a happy ending are cleared away. While Shakespeare's comedies are commonly of the romantic variety and therefore close to Greene's, it must not be forgotten that the "humorous" comedies of Jonson, only recently originated, had attained great popularity by the time Shakespeare came to write Measure for Measure and his other so-called "dark comedies." And this new fashion may have been the influence which forced these comedies to be so different from his earlier ones.

It seems likely that the two conflicting varieties of Elizabethan comedy, that of Jonson and that of Greene, are combined in Measure for Measure, and that their incompatibility has caused the critical confusion which still exists about the play. Recognizing this duality, we also, like most of the commentators discussed earlier, would see the play as having two incongruous elements, but these would not be so easily separated at any one point in the action as they would have us believe. Rather Shakespeare seems to be doing two things at once throughout this work. Campbell, in his Shakespeare's Satire, has carefully examined the play in terms of the elements in it of the comedy of ridicule. He concludes, however, that the play fails because Isabella, who structurally is the Duke's device to gull Angelo, outgrows her function and, in outgrowing it, threatens to become the heroine of a serious play. It should be added to this analysis, I believe, that Isabella's development is not so much an accident or loss of control during playwriting as it is a manifestation of a clearly defined variety of romantic comedy which had its hold on Shake-
Shakespeare and which he could not or would not shake off even as he was introducing the currently popular Jonsonian characteristics. As a result, he tried to graft the latter elements on to the fundamentally different tradition of comedy to which he formerly was devoted, but failed to blend the two. Perhaps the two concepts, being too opposed, inevitably involved too many incongruities to allow an organic union or, for that matter, to allow anything more than an unintegrated superimposition of one on the other. Be that as it may, it is important, in returning to Isabella, that we see how she is shaped by both traditions. In addition to and simultaneously with the conventional satiric function attributed to her by Campbell, Isabella, as the supremely virtuous woman whose purity is threatened by a vicious ruler, is called upon to function as an equally conventional counterpart of Greene’s heroines. Using Campbell’s Jonsonian analysis on the one hand, but supplementing it continually by considering the influence of this other kind of comedy, we should see into the ambiguity of many key situations and characters in the play.

In light of Campbell’s presentation and in view of the fact that there are no pastoral elements as such in the play, one may say that Measure for Measure is farther from Greene and closer to Jonson than are Shakespeare’s earlier and more obviously romantic comedies. Nevertheless it is also evident that his earlier romantic characteristics are there constantly to battle the classical ones for supremacy. For example, the puritanical Angelo, Campbell states, is the Jonsonian gull, and the entire play is so constructed as to expose his hidden vices. On the face of it, this would indeed seem to differentiate him from Shylock or Don John, who are the purely romantic villains. But it must be noted on the other side that his vices take on a far more serious aspect than Jonson would permit, and that in this respect he shows a close resemblance to the Scotch king in James IV, as well as to Shylock and Don John. Consequently, at the same time as he is the gull, he is the conventional villain of romantic comedy whose defeat is necessary. And his final repentance has a similar duality about it. On the one hand there is evidence that he is purged of his vice in Jonsonian fashion; on the other hand he appears to undergo the unforeseen and unjustifiable change-of-heart that is characteristic of a comedy by Greene or an earlier one by Shakespeare.

If we add to this analysis of Angelo’s role the ambiguous function of Isabella as romantic heroine and as tool for the Duke’s plot—a point which has already been touched upon—the contradictory character of the play becomes clear. Seen in this light, the play reveals how complete a struggle it is between the two opposed patterns of comedy. The one has Angelo as the main character and gull, with Isabella as the means of gulling him (and would not Jonson rather use a courtesan, the classic
functional type?). The other is a story of romantic adventure presenting Isabella as the pure heroine and Angelo as the lustful villain who repents after he is overcome. And, as we have seen, our emotional response can hardly cope with such divergent demands. By studying the play in terms of the framework suggested here, we can also account for the many critical objections to Isabella's moral consistency. True to her romantic counterparts, she must withstand Angelo's advances at all costs and rebuke Claudio for pleading that she yield herself in order to save him. But as the instrument of Jonsonian intrigue, she must turn around and engineer the Mariana "bed trick." Thus the inconsistency of the play, as well as the difficulty of critics with it, does not, as it is commonly claimed, spring from a confusion of moral principles so much as it springs from a confusion of two technical patterns, each of which makes different moral demands. At their source, then, the problems are revealed as formal rather than thematic.

The Duke and Lucio seem to have more consistently Jonsonian functions than the others. From the outset the Duke has determined to test Angelo. And once Angelo has committed himself, the Duke directs all his efforts toward exposing him. Here, perhaps, is the clearest answer to those who become annoyed as the Duke persists in his intrigues and delays despite the fact that he can act at any time. Yet we need not explain his waywardness in terms of the prerogatives allowed the ruler in Elizabethan political tradition. The explanation would seem to lie solely in the realm of dramatic convention. For it is the essence of the comedy of ridicule to push the gull, by means of intrigue, as far as possible until his self-exposure is most painful. It should be noted that the Duke's continuous and assuring presence, demanded by his function as intriguer, does prevent the romantic element from involving too dangerous a situation; we see here how a Jonsonian device helps maintain the play as comedy.

The Duke also has some qualities which remind us of Malevole, hero of Marston's The Malcontent. For example, even while testing Angelo, his prize gull, he continually prods the other characters as well. But Isabella stands firmly merciful, Claudio is taught the proper attitude toward death, and only Lucio remains also to be gullied. In addition, the Duke, again like Malevole, moralizes from time to time about the vicious atmosphere which envelops the action. (This background of moral corruption would fit into both traditions of comedy: it is the courtly depravity about which Bohan laments in James IV and which is contrasted to rural virtue in all the pastorals, and it is the ugliness, personified by

12 This is Miss Pope's contention (see note 3, above).
the gulls, about which the satiric commentator complains in the comedy of ridicule.) It would seem, from the similarities between the Duke and Malevole, that certain consistent developments and alterations of the formula for realistic comedy were taking place and that less restricted horizons for political and moral dramatic satire were being revealed. Campbell suggests that Shakespeare was influenced by Marston in his use of the Duke as satiric commentator. But the dates of The Malcontent and The Fawn, in which the parallels are clearest, are probably later than those he assigns13 and rather suggest a reverse influence, if any. Therefore very possibly it was Shakespeare who added to the Jonsonian concept, so that when Marston takes it up it has certain romantic modifications, although Marston's objective remains much the same as was Jonson's. In any case, Shakespeare's mingling of the satirical elements with those descended from pastoralism seems to have obscured any possible single intention in his play.

Most of the critical discussions of Measure for Measure which were cited earlier resorted immediately either to Elizabethan social, religious, and political conventions or to highly speculative surmises about the text and its authorship.14 Yet the investigation of dramatic convention, a primary consideration in treating drama historically, places the problem in a somewhat different light. When viewed in the context of contemporary dramatic genres, Measure for Measure is seen to be an unsatisfactory product of conflicting fashions in dramatic construction. It is thus possible to establish more clearly the author's artistic intention and to estimate more accurately the relevance of the problems which critics have raised. There may be much to be said about the meaning of the play, if we choose to consider it a moral-political tract. But its unified significance as drama must elude us as, indeed, it may have eluded even Shakespeare.

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13 For the probable date of The Malcontent, see Harold R. Walley, "The Dates of Hamlet and Marston's The Malcontent," RES, ix (1933), 397-409. I am also greatly indebted to Professor Walley for innumerable suggestions in the preparation of this paper.
14 My criticism here certainly is not meant to apply to Campbell, whose point-of-view was so helpful to me in formulating my own. All I could further ask of him would be a fuller appreciation of the non-classical dramatic tradition as a positive and defined force.