

Measure for Measure

Shakespeare's play in the context of the
#MeToo Movement

- *Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; **and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.***
— The Sermon on the Mount
Matthew, Chapter 7, Verses 1 & 2
- *Haste still pays haste, and leisure answers leisure,
Like doth quit like, **and measure still for measure.***
— Duke, Act 5 Scene 1

Title

Map from *The Universal Traveller* by Thomas Salmon



Setting: Vienna

- ***The Story of Epitia***, a 1565 tragedy by the Italian dramatist Giambatista Giraldi, known as Cinthio
- Shakespeare was familiar with this book—it also contains the original source for *Othello*.
- The original story is **an unmitigated tragedy** in that Epitia is forced to sleep with Angelo's counterpart, but her brother is still killed.

1st Source

- ***Promos and Cassandra***, a two part play (a “closet drama”) by George Whetstone from 1578—adapted from Cinthio’s tragedy.
- Whetstone added the comic elements and the “bed and head tricks.”

2nd Source

Duke Vincentio
also disguised as
Friar Lodowick



Measure for Measure drawings by Byam Shaw (1872-1919) Folger Library

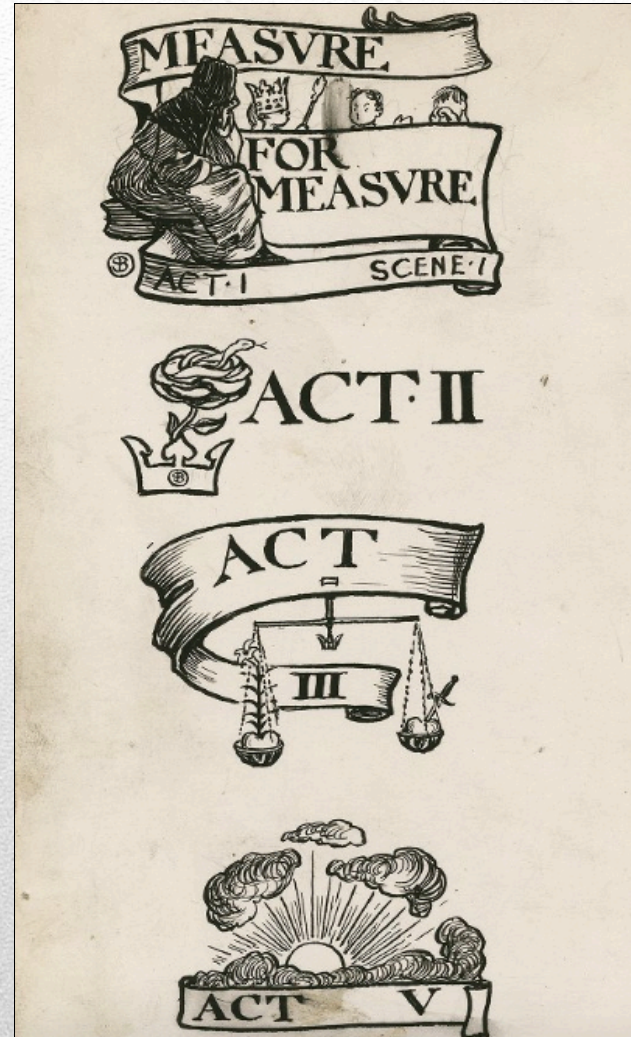
Angelo

the Deputy, who rules in the Duke's absence



Escalus

an ancient lord



Claudio

a young gentleman, brother to Isabella

Hear me, Isabel by Louis Rhead (1856-1926) Folger Library



Isabella

sister to Claudio, a novice



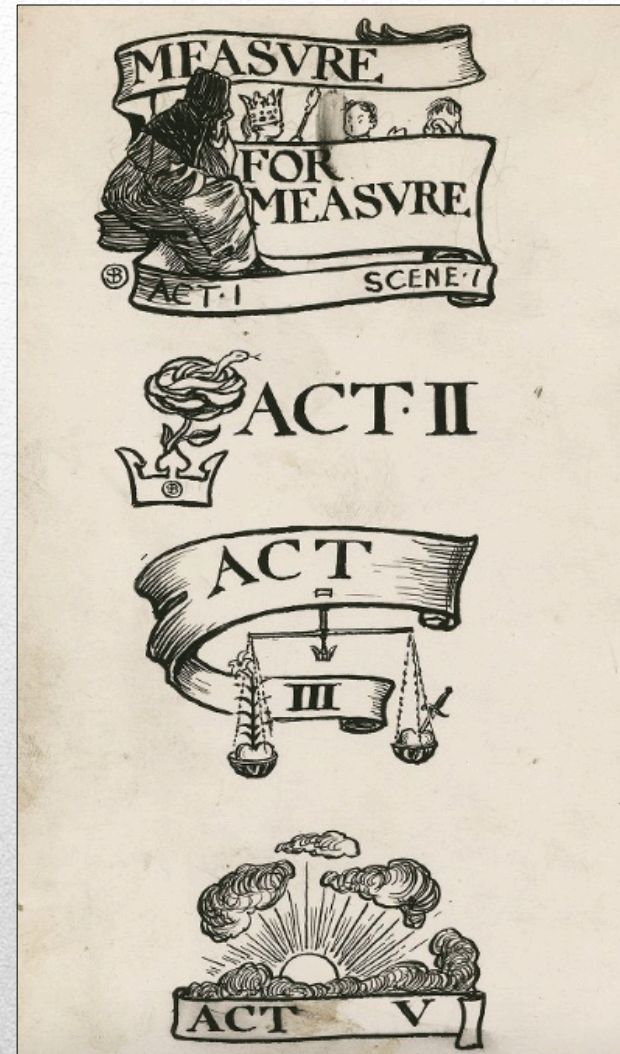
Mariana

betrothed to Angelo



Juliet

beloved of Claudio, pregnant with his child





Cast of Comic Characters

• **Justice**

Mortality and mercy in Vienna

Live in thy tongue and heart.

—Vincentio the Duke, Act I, Scene I

- **Morality** = Angelo
- **Mercy** = Duke

Main themes

- **The dichotomy between corruption and purity/right and wrong**

Some rise by sin and some by virtue fall.

—Escalus, Act 2, Scene 1

Main themes

- *All's Well That Ends Well*
- *Measure for Measure*
- *Troilus and Cressida*
also
- *The Winter's Tale*
- *Timon of Athens*
- *The Merchant of Venice*

The problem plays

- English scholar and critic **F. S. Boas** coined the term “problem plays” in ***Shakespeare and his Predecessors*** (1896) as typically representing conflicting points of view within a realistic social context.
- The plays are complex and ambiguous
- They shift between dark, psychological drama and more straightforward comic material
- The subject matter presents problems
- The characters are faced with problems

The problem plays

- Is the play a comedy or a tragedy?
- Is the Duke weak or strong?
- What gives a powerful man (Angelo) the licence to act corruptly?
- Does Claudio have the right to ask such a price of his sister?
- Is Isabella right to put her chastity above her brother's life?
- What makes Mariana and Isabella plead for a man who has profoundly wronged them?

The problem plays



Isabella Appealing to the Duke

Act V, Scene 1

By Frederick William Davis, 1906