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CHAPTER I

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

The play Measure for Measure by William Shakespeare has possibly suffered more abusive criticism than any other play by Shakespeare with the exception of Hamlet. The important thing to be considered in this matter is not the tremendous quantity of criticism but the almost infinite diversity of opinion which is contained in the machinations of critics since the early eighteenth century. The diversity of opinion is so great, and threatens to become even greater, that it has created an artificial situation in which the interest no longer lies in the play itself but is now concentrated in the idea of finding a solution to the labyrinth of ideas which surround the play. The criticism of the play, or the interest in the criticism, has now actually superseded the interest in the play itself. That is, it is rare today that the play is considered worthy of production. It has been relegated to the closet with the idea in mind that it best serves as a means to an end. It serves as a stimulus to critical speculation.

The controversy which rages about the play may be demonstrated easily if only a few of the problems, which lie both in the play and external to it, are investigated. It can be seen that critics have touched almost every facet of the play, and to present some of them here will serve not only to demonstrate the nature of some of the problems but the diversity of

treatment and of approach which has been used by the critics of the last two hundred years.

These critics have found a rather startling diversity of themes to be gained from the play. Some critics have gone to extremes in their denunciation of the intention of the play. An example of this can be seen in a comment of J. A. Heraud, who in 1865 said,

> Measure for Measure illustrates Papal tyranny in Europe that would cultivate only the spirit and destroy the natural man. The Duke's marriage to Isabella unites Church and State.[1]

Some critics such as A. W. Schlegel have found a much kinder message in the play but a message no less complex in its demonstration. Schlegel asserted in 1808 that "The true significance of Measure for Measure is the triumph of mercy over justice,"[2] and he bases his judgment, ultimately, on the axiom that he who is without sin may throw the first stone. Another definite critical opinion can be interpreted from the following comment by R. H. N. Hudson:

> Chalmers had the sagacity to discover also a sort of portrait-like resemblance in the Duke to King James the First. As the King was indeed a much better theologian than a statesman or ruler, the fact of the Duke's appearing rather more at home in the cowl and hood than in his ducal robes certainly lends some colour to the story.[3]

Denton J. Snider in some ways agrees with Heraud and Schlegel

1. Augustus Ralli, A History of Shakespearian Criticism, I, 315.
2. Ibid., p. 119.
3. R. H. N. Hudson, Shakespeare: His Life, Art and Characters, p. 399.

when he states that

> The play, however, is not an abstract treatise on the virtues, but concrete as history itself. In fact, it introduces the historical phases which embody these two principles of mercy and justice--namely, Church and State.[4]

H. S. Bowden, among others, thinks that the play is a kind of discussion of the penal code.[5] Charles D. Stewart declares that the play deals with the nature of government.[6] H. N. MacCracken and F. E. Pierce go to another extreme in their interpretation:

> The play is a trenchant satire on the evils of society. Such realistic pictures of the things that are, but should not be, have always jarred on our aesthetic sense from Aristophanes to Zola, and Measure for Measure is one of the most disagreeable of Shakespeare's plays.[7]

This critical theory is supported, in some part, by a critic of such renown as Mark Van Doren.[8] One of the most interesting comments and one which has aroused indignation and interest among other critics is that of George Brandes:

> What attracted Shakespeare to this unpleasant subject was clearly his indignation at the growing Pharisaism in matters of sexual morality which was the outcome of the steady growth of Puritanism among the middle classes.[9]

It may be said that these comments are all of one type, or at least there is a similarity expressed in them. They are all directed toward one idea--the totality of the theme

4. Denton J. Snider, The Shakespearian Drama, p. 430.
5. H. S. Bowden, The Religion of Shakespeare, p. 349.
6. Charles D. Stewart, Some Textual Difficulties in Shakespeare, p. 27.
7. H. N. MacCracken and F. E. Pierce, An Introduction to Shakespeare, p. 176.
8. Msrk Van Doren, Shakespeare, p. 218.
9. George Brandes, William Shakespeare, p. 401.

of the play. Many more examples could be listed equally different as these, but the opinions noted here will serve to demonstrate the variety of ideas which surround just one small facet of the interpretation of Measure for Measure. If this diversity is considered just a little further it can be shown that some critics, such as Charlotte Lennox, refused to find any merit in the play at all.[10] Others, such as F. Kreyssig, recognize merit but are extremely slow in making any positive statement of it.[11] At the other extreme of this idea is the encomium of Measure for Measure by John Masefield:

> The play is a marvelous piece of unflinching thought. Like all the greatest of the plays, it is so full of illustration of the main idea, that it gives an illusion of an infinity like that of life. It is constructed closely and subtley for the stage. It is more full of the ingenuities of play-writing than any of the plays. The verse and prose have that smoothness of happy ease which makes one think of Shakespeare not as a poet writing but as a sun shining.[12]

Just as these critics have dwelt on the theme as a whole, others have isolated elements from the play and considered them as major problems. Each character, each action, each scene, and many individual speeches have become sources for critical analysis. If only the character of Isabella is considered, the extreme diversity of opinion is easily recognized. The view of Charlotte Lennox illustrates unfavorable interpretation of Isabella's character:

10. Ralli, op. cit., p. 27.
11. Ibid., p. 409.
12. John Masefield, William Shakespeare, p. 174.

> Isabella is a mere vixen, an affected prude in her virtue; she should have reconciled Claudio to death by arguments from the religion and virtue she professed so highly. The whole is a riddle without solution.[13]

Other critics have not been so hard on Isabella, but they in turn have abstracted some element of her nature or character and expanded it to fit their needs. H. S. Bowden, for example, amplifies the womanliness of her character:

> Yet hers is no spectral figure, devoid of human feelings. She is not a spirit, but a woman, and her natural affections are intensified because purified by her supernatural love; and she undertakes the advocacy of Claudio, 'though his is the vice she most abhors.' The nature of true love is seen in the choice made between her honour and her brother's life.[14]

Mary G. Clarke represents another extreme of the critical attitude toward Isabella. She says of her:

> As Isabella advanced in girlhood, her childish innocence became scarcely less a part of her nature; but it took the form of ideality, that made her seek communion with things above this world. She had still that look of spirituality which distinguished her as a child. Her very garments appeared to have a property of clearness and purity, as if no soil or blemish could attach to them. White-robed, spotless, she looked and moved, a virgin saint.[15]

Some critics have spent themselves on consideration of the exact date of the first performance of the play. They have generally determined from Edmund Tilney's account of the Office Books of the Masters and Yeoman of the Revels that a play called Mesur for Mesur by Shaxberd was performed at

13. Ralli, op. cit., p. 27.
14. Bowden, op. cit., p. 25.
15. Mary C. Clarke, The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines, p. 159.

court on December 26, 1604, and as Francis Meres fails to mention the play in his Palladis Tamia, a record of literary productions which was published in 1598, 1604 is the commonly accepted date of the first performance of the play.[16] Other critics trace the source of the plot of Measure for Measure to Promos and Cassandra, a play published by George Whetstone in 1578, and then they trace both Shakespeare's and Whetstone's work to one of the tales of the Hecatommithi, which was published in 1565 by Giovanni Battista Giraldi, who is referred to as Cinthio.[17]

At certain times critics have considered only textual problems in an attempt to produce a clear version or a working copy of the text of the play. Another interesting theory which has appeared any number of times is that which attempts to relate Measure for Measure to All's Well that Ends Well, Troilus and Cressida, and Hamlet in order to establish the mood in which the play was written.[18] Some have attempted to establish unique relationships which will solve the meaning of the play. An example of this can be drawn from Frederick Boas' statement:

> It can scarcely be a mere coincidence that Julius Caesar immediately follows the Earl's [Essex] tragic end, and it is remarkable that most of the plays which with more or less warrant may be assigned to the last three years of Elizabeth's reign contain painful studies of the weakness,

16. Charles Knight, editor, Shakspere, p. 262.
17. Hazelton Spencer, The Art and Life of William Shakespeare, p. 299.
18. Hamilton Wright Mabie, William Shakespeare, p. 315.

> levity, and unbridled passion of young men. This is especially the case with All's Well that Ends Well, Measure for Measure, Troilus and Cressida, and Hamlet.[19]

Some critics have refused to admit that Shakespeare could have produced such a play as Measure for Measure which contains so much irregular matter. They have gone to extremes to prove that Shakespeare either collaborated with others in producing the play or that the manuscript was tampered with after it left Shakespeare's hand. Granville-Barker for one suggests such a problem.[20]

It would be both impractical and impossible to list all of the problems concerning Measure for Measure and to give examples of each because of the limitations of this thesis. Those examples cited are typical and demonstrate to anyone making an examination of the play the immense amount of material to be covered.

This critical material, however, will accept three qualifications. It can be naturally divided into three categories depending upon the intention or the approach of the critic. These categories are the ethical, the aesthetic and the ethico-aesthetic. The first of these is somewhat difficult to visualize because it can hardly exist in its pure form. A few critics, however, have attempted to isolate purely ethical considerations. One such critic is G. Wilson

19. Frederick C. Boas, Shakespeare and His Predecessors, p. 345.
20. H. Granville-Barker, A Companion to Shakespeare, p. 268.

Knight, who attempts to demonstrate that Measure for Measure has a unique relationship to the Gospels.[21] The second category, the aesthetic, is also, with this play, difficult to find in its isolated form. Some critics have treated the aesthetic nature of the play, but, generally, this form is limited to the eighteenth-century critics, who concentrated their efforts on the textual problems which arose from the various corrupt versions of the play which appeared in their period. The third category, the ethico-aesthetic, is without doubt the most important of the three. This criticism, specifically, deals with that aspect of the ethical criticism which affects the aesthetic interpretation of the play. The vast majority of critics have exercised their craft in this vein. They have sought to measure the play and to apply to each of the points or problems which they have discovered a relative standard of ethical judgment which has colored the aesthetic appreciation of the play. They have, as Robert M. Smith has pointed out, attempted to force a definition on the play:

> Somehow critics feel that if only they can sign up Shakespeare as a good Catholic, or as a good Methodist, or as a good Presbyterian, or what not, all will be well, and they labor mightily in the vineyard to achieve the security; just as new critics now insist upon the paradox that 'holding liberal-democratic progressive views with any connections makes one incapable of appreciating imaginative literature at all.'[22]

21. G. Wilson Knight, The Wheel of Fire, pp. 80-106.
22. Robert M. Smith, "Interpretations of Measure for Measure," The Shakespeare Quarterly, I (October, 1950), 218.

It is possible to expand this comment somewhat further and to demonstrate that since Samuel Coleridge critics have attempted to label both Shakespeare and the comedy Measure for Measure. Each distinct group of literary critics has judged the play by the canons which it established and which have varied from group to group and from age to age. One may collect the various extremes of critical opinion and determine from the collected matter a definite pattern of critical opinion. The critical opinions of Measure for Measure have, since the beginning of the nineteenth century, gone through six distinct transformations; that is, there are within this time six separate and distinct periods in which the attitude toward Measure for Measure has changed, depending upon the critical standards which each of these distinct periods produced. R. W. Battenhouse indicates this problem and suggests the specific area of this thesis in the following comment:

> Before examining the play afresh it will be well to note that controversy rages concurrently on two closely related yet distinguishable fronts. Both as art purely considered, and as a philosophy of life mirroured in art, the play refuses to fit easily the usual canons of measurement. By classical standards its art form is neither pure comedy or pure tragedy but an unorthodox blending of the two. To give the play a category, critics resort to various labels--'tragi-comedy,' 'problem-comedy,' 'dark-comedy,' perhaps closest technically to the classical 'comedy of intrigue,' though Miss Bradbrook insists the play has 'an allegorical nature' and kinship with the morality type.[23]

This thesis, then, is concerned with the ethico-aesthet-

23. R. W. Battenhouse, "Measure for Measure and Christian Doctrine of Atonement," PMLA, LXI (December, 1946), 1030.

ic criticism of Measure for Measure, and an analysis of that criticism since Coleridge will demonstrate that the criticism itself went through six stages. Four of these stages were sustained for distinct periods of time and two were transitional stages which marked the passing of the criticism from one period to the next. That the ethico-aesthetic criticism actually passed through these stages is evidenced by the fact that the critics labeled the play, through their interpretations, with such terms as "Dark-Comedy," "Tragi-Comedy," "Bitter-Comedy," and "Problem-Comedy." These terms, as they were applied to the play, are significant of both the critical attitude which each period had toward Measure for Measure, and, to a certain extent, the method which the critics of each period used in analyzing the play. These methods, of course, were determined by the distinct critical standards which were produced by the varying ethical and aesthetic attitudes of each age.

It is necessary to consider one additional aspect of the problem in order to limit this matter to thesis form. In order to establish a common denominator or focal point to the heterogeneous material which has been collected, it is necessary to limit the scope of the thesis to the ethico-aesthetic criticism which involved the character of Isabella. This is a particularly important point, because the attitude of the critics toward Isabella is the barometer by which the whole of the criticism of each age may be judged. Even in those periods in which Isabella is, for all practical purposes,

ignored, she still may be used to demonstrate the transition in critical temperament.

It must be understood that there is no absolute pattern in such ethico-aesthetic criticism. The major periods of criticism of Measure for Measure may be established, but as critical ideas or theories are not the property of any age or period, terminology in the criticism of the play is not so easily limited. Consequently, a certain fluctuation in the use of terms can be noted. The term "Tragi-Comedy" may be found in the age in which the term "Bitter-Comedy" is prevalent, and the term "Problem-Comedy" appears in the period in which the term "Tragi-Comedy" was generally used. On the whole, however, enough examples can be cited to demonstrate that one dominant term belonged to each distinct age.

The bulk of the thesis is concerned with the period from Coleridge to the present with the eighteenth century critics and editors of Shakespeare serving as background material for reasons which will be demonstrated in the body of the thesis. By presenting an analysis of the criticism for a period of roughly one hundred and fifty years two ends can be seen. The first is demonstrated in the examples of the diversity of critical opinion which have already been cited. The point is that a relative standard of criticism has been used to evaluate Measure for Measure, and the objective standard which should determine the merit of the play has been cast into the background. It is relative in the

sense that each age used a separate ethical and aesthetic rule in judging the play and that these rules changed roughly six times in the period considered. The play has suffered from this unstable criticism not only in written interpretation but also in actual production.

The second point to be considered is that once the pattern of criticism has been established it is possible to determine the variations in the critical pattern and to note those periods which deviated from an acceptable interpretation. Thus in any future interpretation it may be possible to escape that error which, as Robert M. Smith has pointed out, has engulfed so many critics. Mr. Smith possibly holds the key to the errors in the interpretation of Measure for Measure in the following comment:

> What is most apparent, however, is that these writers (as we all do) discover in Shakespeare what they most desire to find, generally the mirror of themselves; for they do not escape what philosophers call 'the ego-centric predicament.' Before they are through they find, of course, ample warrant for their views of the plays and poems, and are strongly convinced at the same time that theirs is an absolutely 'impartial study of Shakespeare.'[24]

The "ego-centric predicament" will partially provide the core of this thesis, for the thesis depends upon the demonstration of the "ego-centricity" of the distinct periods of criticism which have been noted. The value of the thesis lies in formulating a principle of judgment which may be used to insure escape from the qualifications of the "ego-centric predica-

24. Robert M. Smith, op. cit., p. 218.

ment." This principle must be formed if there is to be any end to the confusion fostered by the continuous analysis of the play and if there is to be any positive appreciation or understanding of Measure for Measure.

CHAPTER II

THE PERIODS OF COMEDY AND "DARK-COMEDY"

The beginning of the eighteenth century marks a low ebb in the fortunes of Measure for Measure. The play was still suffering from the abusive liberties of a few who sought to revise the plot in the late seventeenth century, and it was to suffer still more abuse in the years which were to follow.

The Restoration proved an unlucky time for Measure for Measure. The play neither inspired critics nor fared too well on the stage. The general attitude toward the play may be gauged from the patent granted to Davenant licensing him "to reform and make fitt for the Company of Actors appointed under his direction and command" Measure for Measure and other of Shakespeare's major productions.[1] Davenant's idea of "making fitt" eventuated in a play entitled The Law Against Lovers (1662), with the usual major structural changes from the Shakespearean original common to the period. Among other changes in this new version of Shakespeare, which included much of the material from Much Ado About Nothing, are the omission of the Mariana episode, the insertion of a plea by Angelo that he has only been trying Isabella because of his love for her, and a reorganization of Claudio's relation-

1. George C. Odell, Shakespeare From Betterton to Irving, I, 24.

ship with Isabella. In this new version Juliet begs Isabella to submit to Angelo, instead of the original scene in which Claudio asks for his life. Isabella emerges in this version in a hue far different from that of the original.[2] An interesting thing to note is that Pepys saw a performance of this play on February 18, 1662, and that he liked it very much.[3] Judging from his comments about some other Shakespearean productions which he saw, the revisions which Davenant made in the play must have had some appeal for his audience.

Although Davenant is actually beyond the scope of this thesis it is interesting to note his version here, for Charles Gildon opened the eighteenth century with a production in 1700 of Measure for Measure which was called Measure for Measure, or Beauty the Best Advocate, which he claimed to be Shakespeare's "to the letter."[4] Both Gildon and his audience must have been aware of the liberties which had been taken with the structure of Measure for Measure, and there must have been some conscious desire to revert to the original text to necessitate such a comment. But Gildon failed in his attempt to reproduce the original version of Measure for Measure, since he added, among other major changes, a masque and a marriage for Angelo and Mariana. Isabella again emerges in a new setting.[5] Actually, Gildon's

2. Odell, op. cit., I, 26.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p. 73.
5. Ibid.

reproduction with its music, dances, scenery, stage machines and singing was only an attempt, as Odell comments, "to operatize" the comedy.[6]

Although Gildon effected the major revision of Measure for Measure in the eighteenth century, several other versions were produced. John Rich brought what is reported to be Shakespeare's Measure for Measure to Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1720.[7] The text of the play which was used by Rich is no longer available, but his reputation for the use of operatic and pantomimic productions makes it, at best, only probable that the original version of Measure for Measure was used.

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, about 1773, John Bell produced another version of the play in which he attempted to eliminate much of the low comedy detail. Among other changes were the omission of the character Mrs. Overdone and a curtailing of the Froth, Elbow, Pompey material. The last two scenes of Act IV are omitted, including a rather important Isabella-Mariana episode.[8] John Kemble, during his reign at Drury Lane and Covent Garden, had still another revised version of the play produced in 1794 and again in 1806. He inserted into the play much of the material which Bell had cut from the text, but it was still a corrupt play.[9] At the beginning of the nineteenth century W. Oxberry employed a

6. Odell, op. cit., p. 195.
7. Spencer, op. cit., p. 304.
8. Odell, op. cit., II, 24.
9. Ibid., p. 60.

a text similar to that of Kemble, but he mutilated one of the scenes of Isabella and Angelo by cutting the text.[10] In the years between the Gildon version and the Bell version, Measure for Measure did enjoy some small success on the stage. It was produced in 1736 and 1738 during the Cibber-Wilkes-Booth reign at Drury Lane and again in the Garrick period in 1742, but the text which was used is doubtful.[11]

In the whole of the eighteenth century Measure for Measure suffered as much at the hands of the major editors of Shakespeare as it did at the hands of the various producers. A tremendous controversy raged throughout the whole of the century over the text of the play. Nicholas Rowe opened the century with an edition of Shakespeare in 1709.[12] Alexander Pope challenged that edition and answered it with his own edition which was published in 1725. Pope accepted some of the revisions made by Rowe and introduced almost one hundred and sixty more revisions dealing mostly with the metric structure.[13] Lewis Theobald published another edition in 1733 in which he made still more revisions, although he accepted ninety-four of those made by Pope.[14] William Warburton produced a version in 1747 in which he attempted to correct the text,[15] and Samuel Johnson answered Warburton with his own

10. Odell, op. cit., p. 126.
11. Odell, op. cit., I, 223, 285, 338.
12. Ralli, op. cit., I, 12.
13. Thomas R. Lounsbury, The Text of Shakespeare, p. 527.
14. Ibid., p. 528.
15. Ralli, op. cit., I, 23.

edition of Shakespeare in 1765.[16] George Steevens embodied Johnson's ideas in the Johnson-Steevens edition of Shakespeare of 1802.[17]

There are two important things to note in considering the eighteenth century versions of Measure for Measure. The first of these is that the eighteenth century audience rarely, if at all, witnessed a true presentation of Measure for Measure as Shakespeare wrote it. There was absolutely no continuity of theme in the perverse versions of the play that were produced. This could be the cause of the extreme lack of interest in the play by the eighteenth century critics. It is understandable that a play produced at irregular intervals of sometimes ten or twenty years would not draw interest, and it is also understandable that the play, or the perverse versions of the play, with the major changes introduced by the playwrights of the period would not have the strength for any sustained production.

The second point to be noted in considering the versions of the play which were produced in the eighteenth century is that virtually all the changes are concentrated about the character of Isabella. These changes modify the character either directly or indirectly. The direct changes are those which affect the part of Isabella by either addition to or deletion of the part. An example of this type is the change made at the end of Gildon's play, in which Isabella does not

16. Lounsbury, op. cit., p. 538.
17. Ibid., p. 550.

marry the Duke.[18] The indirect changes are those made in the parts of characters other than Isabella which affect the part of Isabella. An example of this is the marriage of Angelo and Mariana in Gildon's version which allows Isabella to escape any censure because of the bed trick.[19]

Almost all of the changes which were made by the producers of the play for stage productions may be classified as ethico-aesthetic; that is, they nearly all are concerned with actions in the play about which specific ethical problems might revolve. These revisions result in the preservation of the character of Isabella in that they allow Isabella to escape the ethical involvement. Preserve Isabella at any cost might well have been the guiding thought which prompted the changes. However, it is difficult to determine precisely the reason why these changes were made, because the critics of the eighteenth century, with few exceptions, did not apply themselves to character analysis or the dramatic considerations of the play.

The reason for the lack of interest in this aspect is evident in a comment by Samuel Johnson:

> There is perhaps not one of Shakespeare's plays more darkened than this by the peculiarities of its Author, and the unskillfulness of its Editors, by distortion of phrase, or negligence of transcription.[20]

Because of the fact that the play was not published during

18. Odell, op. cit., I, 73.
19. Ibid.
20. Walter Raleigh, editor, Johnson on Shakespeare, p. 75.

the life-time of Shakespeare and that it appeared in the folio of 1623 in a somewhat mutilated condition, and because of the many corrupt versions which appeared in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the critics of the eighteenth century concentrated their talents on determining or resolving the many textual errors which appeared in the play. In addition to the major editors of Shakespeare of this period who have been mentioned, other critics, such as John Monck Mason, William Richardson, The Other Gentlemen of Lincoln's Inn and even, to a certain extent, Charlotte Lennox, speculate on the textual errors which appear in the play.[21] Their interest in the play, as contrasted with that of the producers of the play, is largely mechanical, but there are, however, some indications of ethico-aesthetic criticism in their work.

On the whole, with the exception of Charlotte Lennox, the critics who have been mentioned here give only slight consideration to the problems which are to be treated in detail by critics a hundred years hence. Johnson could not understand why Isabella pleads for Angelo. This fact seems to violate his sense of ethics, and after Angelo is spared he is even indignant. He says of the whole issue:

> I am afraid our Varlet Poet intended to inculcate that women think ill of nothing that raises the credit of their beauty and are ready, however virtuous, to pardon any act which they think incited by their own charms.[22]

Charlotte Lennox is by far the most harsh and the most direct

21. Ralli, op. cit., I, 26, 89, 91, passim.
22. Raleigh, op. cit., I, 80.

of the eighteenth century critics. She is the first to isolate specific ethical actions and to criticize them out of context of the play. She says of Angelo:

> Angelo's treatment of Mariana proves him a bad man; but towards Isabella his manners are not those of a hypocrite but a good man overcome by temptation. It is the crime which troubles him, whereas hypocrites are concerned with consequences only; yet he kneels, prays, and expostulates himself.[23]

With regard to the eighteenth century critics one point has to be made. They praised or condemned the play, but they always considered the play a comedy. Some of them, such as William Richardson, imply that the play approached tragedy, but they never went to extremes and labeled the play anything but a comedy.[24] Such is not the case in the nineteenth century.

The beginning of the nineteenth century marks a change in the critical attitude toward Measure for Measure. The period which is to be covered here extends roughly through the Romantic, Early and Middle Victorian periods of English literature, or from Coleridge to Pater. It is here that the first of the categorical definitions which critics applied to Measure for Measure appears. It is the period in which the term "Dark-Comedy" is applied. The period actually begins when Coleridge states that the play is the only painful part of Shakespeare's genuine works.[25]

This comment by Coleridge is the key to the critical at-

23. Ralli, op. cit., I, 27.
24. Ibid., p 101.
25. Samuel Coleridge, Lectures and Notes on Shakspere, p. 299.

titude towards the play as a whole. The major part of the ethico-aesthetic criticism centers around the "painful" aspects of the play. For Isabella, however, this period is the time of her "canonization." No other group of critics will revere her as these do. But, on the other hand, no other group of critics is going to isolate the same aspect of her character.

Essentially, then, the criticism of Measure for Measure in this period was directed toward two ends. It was directed toward Isabella and toward the nature of the play as a whole. It is interesting to note that the two ends are not joined by the critics. They consider the nature of the play one thing and Isabella another. Very seldom do they really consider Isabella in relation to the play. She is set apart, or, as some critics of the period have stated, she exists apart. She has, for them, an entirely different being. The attitude which was held toward Isabella can best be interpreted from the following comment by Mrs. Jameson:

> Isabella is distinguished from Portia, and strongly individualized by a certain moral grandeur, a saintly grace, something of vestal dignity and purity, which render her less attractive and more imposing; she is 'severe in her youthful beauty,' and inspires a reverence which would have placed her beyond the daring of one unholy wish or thought, except in such a man as Angelo.[26]

This is the essence of Isabella. She has to be isolated from the text of the play. Even those critics who dare to consider her as a character in the whole of the play hold her

26. Mrs. Jameson, Shakespeare's Heroines, p. 25.

almost in awe. Only Coleridge and William Hazlitt even suggest that all is not perfect with Isabella. Coleridge stated that Isabella "contrives to be unamiable."[27] Hazlitt carries on that suggestion, but he too allows a legitimate escape for the saintly Isabella. His interpretation of the character is that

> The only passion which influences the story is that of Angelo; and yet he seems to have a much greater passion for hypocrisy than for his mistress. Neither are we greatly enamoured of Isabella's rigid chastity, though she could not act otherwise than she did. We do not feel the same confidence in the virtue that is 'sublimely good' at another's expense.[28]

As can be seen, both of these men are trying to apply a relative standard of ethics, and both, it would seem, recognize the inconsistency of such a position. They, along with other critics, such as Thomas Campbell, Nathan Drake, and G. G. Gervinus, seem to have an odd attitude toward Isabella.[29] They are as one in condemning the nature of Measure for Measure, but they convey the idea that she, in some way, cleanses the plot of the play or at least makes it bearable. They have, if it is possible to describe her position in the play, an almost reverential attitude toward Isabella.

As vigorously as these critics defend Isabella, they look for a cause for the moral structure of the play. It would seem that their real dislike of the play is a nebulous thing. They have a vague idea that the play is distasteful

27. Coleridge, op. cit., p. 532.
28. William Hazlitt, Characters in Shakespeare's Plays, p. 245.
29. Ralli, op. cit., I, 159, 280, 338, passim.

or at least should be, but they have difficulty in actually pinning their dislike to any one thing. Hazlitt gives an excellent example of this type of criticism in his interpretation:

> This is a play as full of genius as it is of wonders. Yet there is an original sin in the nature of the subject, which prevents us from taking a cordial interest in it. 'The height of the moral argument' which the author has maintained in the intervals of passion or blended with the more powerful impulses of nature, is hardly surpassed in any of his plays. But there is a general want of passion; the affections are at a stand; our sympathies are repulsed and defeated in all directions.[30]

Charles Knight supports Hazlitt and his comment takes the same general turn.[31] Other critics follow, but they develop a new idea. They actually do not try to understand the situation. They do not consider the play a true comedy, and instead of determining the nature of the comedy, they seek to determine the nature of Shakespeare. They begin a period of autobiographical speculation which is to last until it is exhausted by the contemporary critics. They attempt to combine the nature of the man with the nature of the play. Henry Hallam is one of the first who directly and deliberately attempts to analyze Shakespeare in an attempt to solve the problem which his own powers of reasoning set up. He has reached a dichotomy and attempts to resolve it by saying:

> After the greatest tragedies we see Shakespeare struggling with the overmastering power of his own mind most in Measure for Measure. His characters step aside from the dramatic path to utter their

30. Hazlitt, op. cit., p. 245.
31. Ralli, op. cit., I, 295.

creator's deep, subtle and religious thoughts.[32]

Other critics quickly, as though inspired by the boldness of Hallam's comment, extended his theme of criticism and sought to correlate the theme with both actions and characters of the play. Thus Verplanck comments that

> The dark picture of moral degradation, guilt, remorse, is not relieved, as elsewhere in Shakespeare by descriptive beauty . . . or tenderness. Only Isabella's severely beautiful character and fervid eloquence provide a contrast. The theme, though disagreeable, produces the kind of pain which excites such intellectual interest as all true and gloomy pictures of life excite.[33]

Verplanck even becomes stronger and more pointed in other comments. He goes so far as to say that Shakespeare "breathes through a repulsive subject the strong emotion of his own soul."[34] At times he even suggests that Shakespeare's plays to a certain extent are the products of a personal cause.[35] David Masson later interprets the whole theme of the play in the light of this idea.

> A dramatist is the Providence and Judge of his little world, and therefore reveals his moral view of things, his philosophy of life and history; e.g. mercy and mutual forgiveness run through Measure for Measure like a golden thread. Shakespeare's sympathy is always for what is good and lovely and honourable; though crime and strife exist in his world, happiness predominates.[36]

These later Romantic critics have one thing in common. They are establishing a trend, actually anticipating a trend

32. Ralli, op. cit., p. 189.
33. Ibid., p. 271.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., p. 270.
36. Ibid., p. 312.

of the later Victorian period, which when adopted by later critics becomes the source of a major error in the literary criticism of Shakespeare's productions. They have first isolated ethical actions in the play which seemed to contradict the established ethical pattern. They then proceed to criticize these ethical actions not by any absolute ethical standard but by a relative standard of expediency. The thus criticized ethical action created aesthetic contradictions which in turn produced even more ethical contradictions. Seeking a solution to the aesthetic problem, which they, the critics, had created, they sought the answer not within the proper bounds of the play but outside the play. They sought to substantiate their ethico-aesthetic interpretations by using an autobiographical approach to the author. They do not, as later critics will do, attempt to prove that Shakespeare went through some trying emotional upheaval or some crisis which affected his soul at the same time as this play was produced. They did anticipate this type of criticism by suggesting that the deficiencies of the play, as they saw them, could be traced to the peculiarities of its author. If either idea was used, the consequences are obvious. If the aesthetic interpretation were allowed, then the ethical, the relative ethical standard which they had created, would also be substantiated. Thus, their interpretation was labeled as "painful," and thus the term "Dark-Comedy" was produced by their analysis of the play in relation to Shakespeare and not by direct analysis of the play itself. They had fallen victim to ego-in-

volvement in that they saw in the play what they wanted to see. They were anticipating the Victorian critics, and this is the important aspect of the production of the term "Dark-Comedy." They, the critics, merely supplied the means or the methods to the later critics who were to produce such terms as "Tragi-Comedy," "Bitter-Comedy," and, indirectly, "Problem-Comedy."

CHAPTER III

THE PERIODS OF "TRAGI-COMEDY" AND "BITTER-COMEDY"

In the dying years of the Victorian era of English literature and in the beginning of the contemporary period, the ethico-aesthetic criticism of Measure for Measure passed through three distinct stages. There was no sharp break between the later Victorians and their predecessors. There was no revolution in critical taste. The theme of the ethico-aesthetic criticism of Measure for Measure continued; but about 1876 it passed through the first distinct, marked transitional period. The critics prior to this time, those who represented the attitudes of the late Romantic, early and middle Victorian periods, established an approach to the ethico-aesthetic problem of Measure for Measure which was to be extended and modified. They had a completely romantic view of the play, and their interest was in Isabella. They isolated her from the text of the play and proceeded to idealize her, while they used an entirely different method of criticism for the whole of the play. They sought to determine the nature of the play, and in order to solve the artificially created problems which such a method of criticism produces, they looked to Shakespeare for some key which might resolve all of their problems. This is, to some extent, an autobiographical approach to the play, but not the extreme mode of criticism which attempts to attribute the problemat-

ic nature of Measure for Measure to some emotional upheaval or crisis suffered by Shakespeare. This is simply an attempt to impute the nature of this play to the peculiarities or genius of its author.

The critics of this transitional period, which lasted from about 1876 to about 1885, sought, in part, to reject the method or approach to the play of their predecessors. No longer was the chief interest in the play in the romantic idealization of character. No longer were critics content to laud the virtue of Isabella and condemn the villainy of Angelo, for a new note of caution was introduced into the criticism of this transitional period. Even in such matters as consideration of the date of the first performance of the play did this note of caution appear. This note is suggested by R. H. N. Hudson who says:

> We have no authentic contemporary notice of the play whatever, till it appears in the folio of 1623. I say authentic, because the item which some years ago Mr. Peter Cunningham claimed to have found among some old records preserved at Somerset house, and which notes the play to have been acted at Court in December, 1604, has been lately set aside as fabrication.[1]

While continuing the investigations which had been started, they sought solutions to different problems. They directed their attention to the ethical and aesthetic natures of the play. They began to analyze the situation which surrounded the play and began to formulate a new set of opinions

1. R. H. N. Hudson, Shakespeare: His Life, Art and Characters, p. 398.

as to the merit of the play and as to the dislike of the earlier critics and audiences of the play. The general trend of the new approach to the play and the extent of the problems which were now being considered can be seen in the analysis of the play fostered by Dr. Hermann Ulrici.

> The reason the Measure for Measure enjoys so little approbation--in spite of its wealth of profound thoughts and its life-like, sharply-delineated and well-developed characters (which are as important as they are original), and in spite also of its perfectly Shakespearian language and composition--does not, I think, lie so much in the subject-matter of the action, which is certainly repulsive and offensive to our more delicate, perhaps only the effeminate state of our feelings, as in the peculiar colouring of the piece.[2]

If this comment by Ulrici is contrasted with the bulk of the earlier criticism of Measure for Measure several things can be seen. This transitional critic is using somewhat of a more logical approach to explain the created problems in the play. It is more logical in the sense that he is looking in the play itself for the explanation and is not going to exterior sources for his solution. On the other hand, he is attempting to analyze Measure for Measure by Victorian standards. This, perhaps, may be seen better if more of the passage is examined. Ulrici continues:

> I mean to say it is a fault in the drama, that the pharisaism and the various vices which are contrasted with it are exhibited in colours too glaring and in outlines too sharp, hence in an almost revolting manner; that, in the struggle with the enemy which it attacks, the drama becomes offensive, sharp, and bitter; that it tries to arouse

2. H. Ulrici, Shakespeare's Dramatic Art, p. 163.

> our disgust, and to engage our whole soul against this enemy, and thus, as it were, invites us to give our assistance in combatting it, to engage in real action in ordinary life, in place of raising us above the latter into the ideal spheres of art.[3]

Several things can be interpreted from this comment. The transitional critic has not lost the earlier attitude toward the moral actions of the play. The attitude toward the moral action has not only continued, but it has been extended by this critic to a more natural, a more personal objection based upon, from all indications, a theory of participation in art. Ulrici has denied the value of the comic element of the play and has substituted a new didactic element. Thus, instead of searching for a solution outside the play as the earlier critics had done, Ulrici has inserted a solution. The solution is based upon what is supposed to be a moral condemnation of the vice and corruption of Elizabethan society by Shakespeare. Ulrici's analysis which has determined that the condemnation is too real has affected the aesthetic interpretation of the play. This has interesting complications which are brought out in the next period of criticism of Measure for Measure.

Not only has Ulrici become too subjective in his individualization of the ethico-aesthetic problems of the play, but he turns his criticism to a new vein. In the light of ethico-aesthetic interpretation he cannot determine the play to be either a comedy or a tragedy. This is a major point in

3. Ulrici, op. cit., p. 163.

his consideration, for as has been said, he has denied the element of comedy to Measure for Measure, but he has not asserted an element of tragedy. This leaves him in a somewhat nebulous state midway between comedy and tragedy. He is not willing to postulate the tragi-comedy definition of the play, for he says,

> Shakespeare does not seem to have known, or not to have cared to adopt this title, perhaps from a right feeling that--from an aesthetic-artistic point of view--great objection might be raised against the propriety of such an intermediate species between tragedy and comedy, which seemed rather like a hybrid production.[4]

He does state that the difference or the diverse elements which are indicated in the term "Tragi-Comedy" are evidenced in Measure for Measure for Measure in both subject and character, but he will not regard it as a distinct species of drama.[5]

There is one other aspect to the ethico-aesthetic criticism of Measure for Measure which is pertinent to this thesis. It has been seen that the characters of the play, with the exception of Isabella, have, for the most part, been ignored. Isabella has been the essence of the value of the play. Up to this point only she has been appreciated as a character, and as a person abstracted from the play, but now, with Ulrici, this attitude wavers. Not only do Angelo and the Duke arise as entities in their own right, but the appreciation of Isabella begins its decline. This, of course, is not too pro-

4. Ulrici, op. cit., p. 154.
5. Ibid., p. 154.

nounced, but it can be seen in the implications of the following interpretation by Ulrici:

> The chief characters are the Duke, Angelo and Isabella. The first two are so clearly and sharply delineated, the fundamental features of their natures, the motives of their actions so distinctly brought forward, that they do not stand in need of any further explanation. It is equally clear that they represent the two poles of the contrast, the reconciliation of which is the subject in question; the Duke is clemency and forbearance, forgiveness and mercy; Angelo the severity of the law, the rigour and the pride of virtue and self-righteousness. More difficult is the understanding of Isabella's character, for although it is developed with great care, both as regards delineation and colouring, it nevertheless has been interpreted and judged in very different ways.[6]

Ulrici still has the appreciation of Isabella, but it is no longer spontaneous or unquestioned. He is, in fact, leading criticism from the pure appreciation of Isabella to the analysis of both Angelo and the Duke. The reason for this is the implication which is to be found in his ethico-aesthetic interpretation of the character of Angelo. By examining Angelo he has set up a contrast between Angelo's action and Isabella's response. Thus he is forced to apply the same analysis to Isabella which he applied to Angelo. His criticism becomes almost an apology for Isabella's virtue.[7] This, by its very presence and by the fact that it was considered necessary, has a secondary implication. That is, it implies that there is a question in the ethico-aesthetical analysis. The way is opened for further analysis.

6. Ulrici, op. cit., p. 158.
7. Ibid., p. 159.

This is, in reality, the most important point to be derived from these transitional critics. The virtue of Isabella is now open to dispute, and this carries with it certain dramatic complications. These are inferred by F. E. Halliday[8] but are brought down to specific issues by R. H. N. Hudson. Hudson supports Ulrici in his approach to the problems concerning the ethico-aesthetic relationships of Measure for Measure, but he also takes a cue from Ulrici and extends the implications of the question of her virtue and the moral interpretations of some of her actions. The indications of this can be seen in the following comment:

> It is not to be denied, indeed, that Isabella's chastity is rather too demonstrative and self-pronounced; but this is because of the unblushing and licentiousness of her social environment.[9]

Ulrici, Hudson, and others have opened to other critics the moral implications of the "bed trick" so far as Isabella accepts this action. This in turn opens the way for critical investigation of other actions--notably, Isabella's marriage to the Duke and her position as a Novice. These implications are seized not only by the critics of this transitional period but are taken and amplified by critics up to the contemporary era.

The gifts, then, of these transitional critics to their successors were the speculations on the nature of the play as a comedy or tragedy and their speculations on the moral impli-

8. F. E. Halliday, Shakespeare and His Critics, p. 162.
9. Hudson, op. cit., p.416.

cations of Isabella's actions.

The critics of the last of the Victorian period, those from Denton J. Snider to Sidney Lee, did not ignore these gifts. They not only seized them, but they carried them to extremes. The most notable point to be found in this period is the application of the next categorical definition, which was "Tragi-Comedy." This definition is the key to the ethico-aesthetic speculation of these critics.

An analysis of the application and of the nature of the term tragi-comedy as used by these later critics leads to some rather interesting revelations. The first of these is that the nature of the approach of these critics to the interpretation of Measure for Measure can be seen in their use of this specific term. These critics denied that the play was either a comedy or a tragedy, and they postulated that there was a third form of drama midway between comedy and tragedy which in part could employ the separate devices of each form. They further postulated that Measure for Measure either belonged to this form or should belong to it.

That this new form cannot be a pure form such as tragedy or comedy is recognized by these critics when they examine the nature of the play in terms which depend on tragedy. This is demonstrated in the comments of several critics, among whom is Denton J. Snider, who stated that

> We are now to begin a new group of four plays, which we have called the ideal Tragi-comedies, in distinction from the real ones, which have already been considered. That is, there is still mediation through an ideal world in some form, but we

> leave the light comic sport of the group that has just preceded--the realm of foible , folly, absurdity--and pass into a dark tragic world of sin and guilt.[10]

George Brandes gives a similar interpretation to the play but is somewhat more emphatic in describing the comic scenes as being broad and realistic pictures of the dregs of society which give no support to the painful theme or to the criminal nature of the actions.[11]

As these critics attempted to determine the form of Measure for Measure, they revealed a somewhat new approach to the play and to the problems which had been created by critical analysis. They were interested in the form of the play. They were not only interested in the mechanics of the form but in the form itself as it gave expression to art. F. S. Boas partially indicates this and strongly condemns the criticism of Coleridge when he asserts:

> Such criticism, besides entirely passing over the most wonderful technical skill which has smoothed away most of the difficulties in peculiar stubborn materials, is grossly unjust to the spirit of the play. Such epithets as 'disgusting' and 'horrible' can only be fairly applied to scenes which violate aesthetic decencies from sheer love of the foul or the barbaric.[12]

Boas, however, is not completely appreciative of the form or style of the play, for he goes on to say that it lacks the "perfect balance between thought and language" of the historical plays and has a compressed style which "makes the rhythm

10. Denton J. Snider, The Shakespearian Drama, p. 428.
11. George Brandes, William Shakespeare, p. 402.
12. Frederick S. Boas, Shakespeare and His Predecessors, p. 359.

harsh and the sense obscure."[13] In addition to the comments on the form of the play Boas indicates in his criticism another aspect of the approach to the play by the critics of this period which will be developed later in the thesis. On the whole his theme is consistent with that of Denton J. Snider, who claimed that the play belongs in the class of "mediated" dramas and has tragic depth and earnestness.[14] Sidney Lee, on the same idea, states that in Measure for Measure Shakespeare proves his artistic ingenuity by giving "dramatic dignity and moral elevation to a degraded and repellent theme."[15] Lee goes even further and couples the play with Othello in its tragic theme.[16] Bernard Ten Brink,[17] William Rolfe[18] and Walter Pater are all consistent with this idea, but Pater is its principal exponent. Pater states that Measure for Measure is almost as much as Hamlet a demonstration of Shakespeare's ability.[19]

There is one very distinct element which can be seen in the comments of these and other critics of this age. These critics are allowing their aesthetic determination of Measure for Measure or their interest in the form of the play to be controlled by ethical interests. The whole of their aesthetic theory has an almost unique relationship with morality. This somewhat nebulous relationship allows art to be both

13. Boas, op. cit., p. 357.
14. Snider, op. cit., p. 434.
15. Sidney Lee, A Life of William Shakespeare, p. 245.
16. Ibid., p. 243.
17. Bernard Ten Brink, Five Lectures on Shakespeare, p. 88.
18. William Rolfe, A Life of William Shakespeare, p. 366.
19. Walter Pater, Appreciations, p. 173.

autonomous and closely dependent upon morality. The morality which influences their aesthetic interpretation seems to be not an absolute ethical standard but a relative standard based upon the function of art. Their appreciation of Measure for Measure and of Shakespeare is based, in the final analysis, not upon the art form itself but upon Shakespeare's ability to adapt "sordid" material to the form of art. This point is formulated in the comments of the critics just mentioned, especially Sidney Lee and Walter Pater. An example of what was considered the material with which Shakespeare worked is given in the following comment by Hamilton Wright Mabie:

> In the great tragedies we breathe an air which is charged with fate, and feel ourselves involved in vast calamities which we are powerless to control; in the plays which have been named we breathe an atmosphere which is fetid and impure, and human nature becomes unspeakably mean and repulsive.[20]

The ability with which Shakespeare could conform this material to the limitations of drama and the appreciation which his conformation could evoke is demonstrated by F. S. Boas:

> In Measure for Measure, though undeniably strong meat is served up, the most repulsive details all have their place in the general scheme, which is undisputably noble, while numberless lustrous shafts of poetry and thought pierce the sombre atmosphere in which the action moves.[21]

This aesthetic criticism as it was determined by the ethical standards and as it was used by the critics of this

20. Hamilton Wright Mabie, William Shakespeare, Poet, Dramatist and Man, p. 315.

21. Boas, op. cit., p. 359.

period developed into an ethico-aesthetic criticism which was directed towards specific characters of the play. The focal point of this criticism again was Isabella as she was affected by various actions which carried ethical considerations. The form of this ethico-aesthetic analysis of Isabella took two courses. It was primarily directed toward Isabella as a character, but it also allowed for the analysis of other characters as they affected the character of Isabella. Isabella as a character in the play, or as a person abstracted from the play, no longer was the only interest of the critics. As the transitional critics opened the way for speculation by introducing to ethico-aesthetic analysis the characters of Angelo and the Duke, these later critics extended the analysis.

Before examining the critical speculations of the critics of this period one more point must be taken into consideration. The critics directed their ethico-aesthetic criticism of the major characters of Measure for Measure towards these characters as they reflect society. Society formed the ethical basis for their analysis. The problem can be stated as being that these later Victorian critics analyzed the major characters of Measure for Measure with an aesthetic theory based on a relative standard of ethics. This standard of ethics was derived from the existing social pressures of this period.

This qualification can be seen if the various criticisms of Isabella, Angelo and the Duke, the major characters of the play, are examined. The ethico-aesthetic analysis of Isa-

bella undergoes in this period a change from that of the preceding period. The appreciation of both the character and the woman does reach extremes at times. H. S. Bowden is suggestive of the Romantic critics when he says:

> Isabella in 'Measure for Measure' is the most perfect type of true love. Votarist or Postulant of St. Clare, she is, 'dedicated to nothing temporal.' 'By her renouncement' she had become, even in the eyes of the licentious and scurrilous Lucio, a 'thing enskied and sainted,' an immortal spirit.[22]

On the whole, the appreciation of Isabella's virtue is not as extensive as Bowden's. In fact, the majority of the criticism of Isabella is not directed toward the person insofar as she possesses virtue but toward the person as she reacts to the various actions of the play which contain ethical considerations. She is treated almost always in relation to one of the other major characters. Thus Bowden says of her as she rejects her brother's proposal that she submit to Angelo, "she had rather be scourged and flayed than yield her body 'to such abhorred pollution.'"[23] Denton J. Snider directs a major portion of his criticism to Isabella insofar as she accepts the offer of the Duke in the last scene.[24] Walter Pater is considerably attentive to the relationship of Isabella to Angelo, whom he terms as "pure evil."[25] F. S. Boas is concerned with Isabella's relationship to Mariana insofar as the trick of substitution is affected.[26] F. C.

22. H. S. Bowden, The Religion of Shakespeare, p. 25.
23. Ibid.
24. Snider, op. cit., p. 442.
25. Pater, op. cit., p. 177.
26. Boas, op. cit., p. 358.

Sharp considers in his criticism Isabella's relationship with Claudio.[27]

Thus it can be seen that Isabella is related through moral interpretation to each of the other major characters and to the actions of each of these characters. The action of the other characters determines the actual value of Isabella.

The point to be considered in treating the ethico-aesthetic analysis of Isabella by these critics is that the appreciation that they have of her is based on a point of virtue. Isabella is not respected by the critics of this period because she possesses virtue, but because she demonstrates courage in the face of existing social pressures. Fortitude has replaced temperance as the dominant virtue behind chastity. This is, in fact, a reflection of the social pressure which has produced the ethics behind the ethico-aesthetic criticism of the period. Thus when Denton J. Snider analyzes Isabella and calls her "the embodiment of this element of female virtue," he is both paying homage to courage and at the same time implying that the action of Isabella was, to the Victorian critic, a little unusual according to his concept of the Elizabethan world.[28]

The tremendous influence of various Victorian social concepts on the ethico-aesthetic criticism of Measure for Measure is further demonstrated in this very problem of Isa-

27. F. C. Sharp, Shakespeare's Portrayal of the Moral Life, p. 67.
28. Snider, op. cit., p. 441.

bella's rejection of Angelo's proposal. When Isabella rejected Angelo she was almost idealized by the Victorian critic, but as the action progresses a contradiction in her character is established. It is not a real contradiction, but it is recognized by these critics, and it produces some rather abusive criticism of Isabella. The contradiction lies in the fact that Isabella allows the substitution of Mariana in the agreement with Angelo. This is a point which arouses bitter indignation in these critics. F. C. Sharp comments on this point and states that Isabella does not allow her loathing of sin to prevent her from carrying out her instructions to allow Mariana to go to Angelo.[29] Boas calls the device repulsive.[30] William Rolfe treats the point in a slightly lighter vein,[31] but Denton J. Snider is very pointed when he questions the worth of an act in which the object is good but the means bad.[32] The general attitude toward Isabella on this point is implied in a statement by F. C. Sharp, who says:

> . . . Isabella declares herself willing to die but not willing to lose her soul in order to save her brother's life. And while this of course does not represent her real motive for refusing the infamous offer of Angelo, it is certainly a consideration that appeals to her as reasonable.[33]

The other point which constitutes the contradiction in the character of Isabella for these critics is her proposed marriage to the Duke at the end of the play. Isabella is

29. Sharp, op. cit., p. 67.
30. Boas, op. cit., p. 358.
31. William Rolfe, A Life of William Shakespeare, p. 101.
32. Snider, op. cit., p. 433.
33. Sharp, op. cit., p. 11.

dedicated to what is "pure." In leaving the convent and marrying, she is, to these critics, sacrificing her dedication. Both she and Shakespeare are brought to task for this "scandalous proceeding." Snider and Boas are shocked at the action, and it is ultimately the cause of much speculation on the symbolic relationship of the Duke as a friar and Isabella as a nun.[34]

There are other ramifications in the ethico-aesthetic criticism as used by this group of critics with its basis in the social order. One, as has been stated, directly involves Isabella as a character. Another indirectly involves her as it is directed towards the theme of the play. This second ramification involves the term "Tragi-Comedy" in that it is an examination and condemnation of the Victorian concept of the Elizabethan world as it is evidenced in Measure for Measure. This element of the criticism is stated in somewhat nebulous terms, which indicates that the concept itself, as held by the Victorians, is somewhat vague. This is the one aspect of the criticism of the period which gives evidence to the evangelical basis for their ethical order. This element is best shown in a comment by Denton J. Snider.

> Man has perished through guilt, but now he is to be saved through repentance. If the tragedies unfold Justice as the deep foundation of the world order, these tragi-comedies reveal Mercy as the still deeper foundation of the world order. Penitence, on the one hand, forgiveness, on the other, are here the profoundest notes of the Poet's art; fate is

34. Snider, op. cit., p. 451.

now met by a mightier power, and is subjected to love.[35]

This is, simply, an indication that the Victorian critic considered the Elizabethan world as somewhat of a social shock. The points toward which they directed their criticism are not points which can be justly criticized. The "bed trick" can be explained as having a logical solution, and the marriage of Isabella violates no ethical principle. The critics of this period, however, refuse to recognize these factors. They are interested in condemnation simply because the various actions violate Victorian prudery rather than ethical principles. Thus the summation of the criticism of this period can be formed by stating that the critics of the later Victorian period attempted to insert Victorian culture and customs into an Elizabethan world. The contradictions which arose from this action were judged not by real aesthetic standards but by Victorian ethical standards. Thus the term "Tragi-Comedy" signifies not only the approach these critics employed in examining the play, but it is significant, insofar as the term tragic is used, of the Victorian view of Elizabethan culture. Thus they have not escaped the predicament of "egoeentricism." By becoming involved in the predicament, they violate primary considerations of literary criticism. They are not treating Measure for Measure objectively but subjectively, for they are using the play as a demonstration of Victorian ethical considerations.

35. Snider, op. cit., p. 428.

The late Victorian period was relatively short-lived, dying shortly after the turn of the century. There was no revolution in critical taste, but a short transitional period which coupled the Victorians to the next major period of criticism of Measure for Measure. This transitional period is somewhat shorter than that which effected the transition from the period of "Dark-Comedy" to the period of "Tragi-Comedy." It is not quite as important as the first period, but it is marked by several important critics. It lasts, roughly, from 1905 to 1913, and it contains a definite fluctuation in critical taste.

One of the most noticeable considerations of this transitional period is the lack of the vehemence of the Victorian critic. This has been replaced by a more sophisticated attitude reflected in the comments of critics who appreciate some elements of the play and condemn others. There is little wholehearted acceptance of the play, but John Masefield proves to be an exception to this. He calls Measure for Measure "a marvellous piece of unflinching thought."[36] On the whole the criticism of the play follows the comment of F. H. Ristini who states that the play "is stripped of the real theatrical effectiveness of tragi-comedy . . . ."[37] Brander Mathews follows these critics with:

> The theme is repugnant, but it is not uninteresting. The most conscientious of playwrights could not make a really good play on the subject of 'All's Well,' whereas it is possible that the subject of

36. John Masefield, William Shakespeare, p. 179.
37. F. H. Ristini, English Tragi-Comedy, p. 100.

> 'Measure for Measure' might be worked up into a fairly coherent plot, even if Shakespeare himself fails to do this.[38]

These critics are, actually, following the dictates of the Victorian critics. The influence of the Victorian critic in this transitional period is wavering, for at the other extreme of the fluctuation in this period is the beginning of a new type of criticism. There are hints of this new critical taste in Brander Mathews.[39] It is best expressed by E. K. Chambers who remarks that Measure for Measure reflects "the singularly interesting record of a particular phase in the poet's shifting outlook upon humanity . . . ."[40] In these statements there are a rejection of the Victorian principle of criticism and indications that there is a new form or new approach to the ethico-aesthetic criticism being formed.

There are several other elements present in the criticism of this transitional period which should be noted. One of them is the shift in the critical attitude toward Isabella. Whereas the Victorians were harsh on Isabella, these critics reaffirm her goodness. She is again called "a light shining in corruption,"[41] and, in part, is again made the focal point of the play.[42] The Duke, however, does not fare as well. Whereas the Victorian critic tolerated him as one tolerates the aged, the transitional critics are quick to condemn him.[43]

38. Brander Mathews, Shakespeare as a Playwright, p. 226.
39. Ibid., p. 103.
40. E. K. Chambers, Shakespeare: A Survey, p. 210.
41. H. N. MacCracken, An Introduction to Shakespeare, p. 176.
42. Mathews, op. cit., p. 229.
43. Sharp, op. cit., p. 221.

The other element to be noted in the criticism of this transitional period is the initiation of a more objective criticism. Prior to this time the ethico-aesthetic criticism of Measure for Measure has been almost wholly subjective. Now, with A. C. Bradley and E. K. Chambers, there is an indication of a totally different approach to the problems of Measure for Measure. Chambers implies the new approach in the following comment:

> Many honest readers quite frankly resent the very presence of Measure for Measure. They have formed a conception of the poet as a great idealist; as one who, although he has indeed sounded the heights and depths of experience, has kept unspotted his romantic soul; as one with whom they may be sure of breathing the ampler ether and diviner air, and who, through whatever searching of heart he may lead them, may always be trusted in the long run to present and vindicate the eternal laws of righteousness.[44]

A. C. Bradley is more specific in his criticism, for he observes that if there are defects in the play, they are not what Shakespeare considered as defects.[45] These are the embryos of ideas which have been ignored in the past and which will prove to be ignored for almost forty years to come.

The points then to be considered in this transitional period are the rejection, in part, of the methods and approach of the Victorian critics, the shift in the attitude toward characters and, finally, the introduction of a new method of approach to the created problems of Measure for Measure.

44. Chambers, op. cit., p. 208.
45. Bradley, op. cit., p. 76.

This transition led to another major period of ethico-aesthetic criticism of Measure for Measure. This new period, lasting from about 1913 to 1937, is characterized by the application of the term "Bitter-Comedy" to the play. It is a period which proceeds logically from its predecessors in that the ethico-aesthetic criticism produced at this time employs elements found in both the period of "Dark-Comedy" and the period of "Tragi-Comedy."

The critics writing in this period of "Bitter-Comedy" employ two forms. They adopt the romantic qualities of the period of "Dark-Comedy" and they couple them with the auto-biographical-sociological aspects of the period of "Tragi-Comedy." This new form which has been determined from the other periods is demonstrated in the term "Bitter-Comedy." Actually, the new term is a misnomer, for there is nothing comic in Measure for Measure for these new critics. The play has become for them empty and hollow, and the humor that it contains is the humor of the dregs of society--of the base elements of Shakespeare's tragic world.

The term "Bitter-Comedy" was fostered by E. K. Chambers in the transitional period, although there are indications of it far back in the later Victorian period. Chambers, though, employs the term and demonstrates the approach used by the critics employing the term when he reflects upon a group of three of Shakespeare's plays, Measure for Measure, All's Well and Troilus and Cressida. Of these he says:

They are all unpleasant plays, the utterances of a

> puzzled and disturbed spirit, full of questionings, skeptical of its own ideals, looking with new misgivings into the ambiguous shadows of a world over which a cloud has passed and made a goblin of the sun.[46]

The critics of this period of "Bitter-Comedy" accepted the fact that Measure for Measure was produced by "a disturbed spirit," and they directed their ethico-aesthetic analysis to Shakespeare in an attempt to find the cause of the disturbance.[47] Shakespeare, according to Granville-Barker, was concerned with an investigation of the "horrors of life" during the time of the production of Measure for Measure.[48] This investigation produced a bitter period of Shakespeare's life, and Measure for Measure is a demonstration of this effect. G. G. Gervinus says of this demonstration:

> And so we pass into another and a very different world, in which laughter sounds ironic, and Comedy itself becomes grim,--the world of tragedy. Much that had once appeared important is seen to be trivial is found to involve tremendous consequences.[49]

As these critics used the psychoanalytic techniques to determine the cause of the bitterness of the play, they found a sociological aspect towards which they directed a major portion of their criticism. This sociological aspect which they found was a reflection of the "horror" which Shakespeare had investigated and which these critics determined to be a social

46. Chambers, op. cit., p. 210.
47. Stopford A. Brooke, Ten Plays of Shakespeare, p. 142.
48. Harley Granville-Barker, A Companion to Shakespeare, p. 260.
49. Godfrey Fox Bradby, About Shakespeare and His Plays, p. 56.

system which abounded in bawds and the like. Shakespeare makes this social system a sub-plot in Measure for Measure, and it is this point which causes the greatest objection for these critics. Joseph Quincy Adams speaks of the low-comedy detail which reveals this social system as a reflection of the sordid aspects of human nature.[50] Neilson and Thorndike speak of the same material as arising from a "city seething in moral corruption."[51] Stopford A. Brooke describes this city as being "eaten to its core by fornication."[52] George C. Odell is even willing to abandon the play because of this element.

> I believe that the sub-plot was necessary to round out Shakespeare's scheme, but I cannot alter that on the stage it is exceedingly offensive. In fact, I am not sure that Measure for Measure should be acted if its rendition necessitates the retention of much, or indeed any of the Froth, Pompey, Elbow, Mrs. Overdone material.[53]

This psychoanalytic-sociological approach to the problems of Measure for Measure is extended to include the major as well as the minor characters. The critics, however, who are using this approach only employ the major characters as they reflect the initial theory. Isabella is considered pure, but she is considered as an addition to the play to contrast with the sordid element.[54] Angelo is treated as a product

50. Joseph Quincy Adams, A Life of Shakespeare, p. 363.
51. William Allan Neilson and Ashley Thorndike, The Facts About Shakespeare, p. 83.
52. Brooke, op. cit., p. 141.
53. George C. Odell, Shakespeare From Betterton to Irving, p. 23.
54. Brooke, op. cit., p. 141.

of this corrupt society.[55] Mariana is treated as an element of the society.[56] The Duke is treated as being a somewhat callous but unimportant addition to the whole picture of a social system.[57]

It can be seen from the treatment of these critics of the major characters of Measure for Measure that they were interested in the social aspects of the play. This is, in fact, merely an extension of the Victorian standard of criticism.

Essentially, the critics who employ the term "Tragi-Comedy" directed their interest in Measure for Measure to two extremes. They had isolated almost the same problems in the play as did the Victorian critics. These problems were only recognized as problems, because they had been treated with an aesthetic theory derived from a relative standard of ethics which in turn was derived from the existing social pressures of the day. The critics who used the term "Tragi-Comedy" were attempting to find the solution to these created problems not within the play itself but in the personal life of Shakespeare. They had determined that Measure for Measure was a reflection of the Elizabethan social picture as seen by Shakespeare. They attempted to demonstrate that the effect of this social picture on Shakespeare caused a bitter or cynical period in his life. This period was the time of the production of Measure for Measure. Thus, by examining ethi-

55. R. M. Alden, Shakespeare, p. 298.
56. Brooke, op. cit., p. 144.
57. Logan P. Smith, On Reading Shakespeare, p. 175.

cally the social picture itself, they could understand or solve the problems of Measure for Measure. The two extremes in their criticism were, first of all, going to Shakespeare's life for a solution, and secondly, attempting to examine the ethical structure of Elizabethan society with ethical concepts gained from a contemporary society. Thus, these critics have not escaped the "egocentric predicament." They saw in their examination of Elizabethan society what they wanted to see. As the low-comedy detail of the play itself was painful to them, so too it must have reflected a painful element of Shakespeare's society.

CHAPTER IV

THE PERIOD OF "PROBLEM-COMEDY"

As the period in which the term "Bitter-Comedy" was applied to Measure for Measure comes to an end about 1937, a new period of ethico-aesthetic criticism almost immediately arises. This new period is rather unique in the history of the criticism of Measure for Measure, for it is by far the most prolific in the production of ethico-aesthetic criticism, and the scope or diversity of this criticism is so great that it encompasses almost every critical theory which has ever been applied to this play. It is somewhat of a new style of criticism which is based on the fact that so many variations appeared in previous critical theories, and this new approach, compared to those which had previously been used with Measure for Measure, is in some aspects, almost entirely different from the previous theories. Essentially, the theory behind this new criticism can be seen in the use of the term "Problem-Comedy." Actually, this is not a new term. It appeared as early as 1892 when it was used by Frederick S. Boas to describe All's Well that Ends Well, Measure for Measure, Troilus and Cressida, and Hamlet,[1] but the nature of this term as it is applied to Measure for Measure by the contemporary critic introduces a new distinction. It is applied to the

1. Frederick S. Boas, Shakespeare and His Predecessors, p. 344.

play in recognition of the tremendous diversity of criticism which surrounds the play, and it is applied to the nature of the play itself; that is, the play is treated by itself without the influence of any previous criticism, and the criticism which the play has fostered is treated as another element--another problem--which belongs to the general problem of the play. Thus there are two major categories to be treated in this period from 1937 to 1952, the play itself and the previous criticism of the play.

The techniques of the critics who employ the term "Problem-Comedy" are based, primarily, on the fact that they recognized the differences of critical opinion which surround Measure for Measure; they were becoming intensely aware of the need for organizing this speculation. This recognition provided these critics not only with a starting point for further critical speculation, but it also provided the material for speculation.

The first point to be considered in the examination of this new critical investigation is the fact that the critics of this period accepted the problems which previous critics had established. There are, ultimately, no new problems formulated in this period. There are, to be sure, some critics--such as R. W. Battenhouse,[2] Elizabeth Pope,[3] and Clifford

2. R. W. Battenhouse, "Measure for Measure and Christian Doctrine of Atonement," PMLA, LXI (December, 1946), 1030.
3. Elizabeth Pope, "The Renaissance Background of Measure for Measure," Shakespeare Survey, edited by Allardyce Nicholl, II, 66-82.

Leech[4]--who concentrate on and extend old problems with a slightly new approach, but, in reality, those parts of Measure for Measure which had evoked so much speculation in the past are accepted as problems. These critics noted that there were roughly eight points which previous critics had used for their critical studies. These eight points concern the nature of the play, the theme of the play, the dramatic structure, Isabella, Angelo, the Duke, secondary figures such as Mariana and Claudio, and minor figures such as Elbow and Pompey. These eight points serve as the starting point for the contemporary critics.

The second point to be considered is the fact that the critics of this period correlated the previous criticism which had appeared with the eight categories. They recorded the possible variations in the criticism which appear in each of the classifications.

This recognition of criticism and its subsequent classification is directed towards finding out what has happened to Measure for Measure. Why has this play produced so much criticism? Is the criticism just? What are the problems which evoke this criticism? How were these problems formed? Do we have an acceptable critical interpretation of the play? What has to be done to insure an acceptable interpretation? These are the questions which the contemporary critics proposed and for which they sought answers.

4. Clifford Leech, "The Meaning of Measure for Measure," Shakespeare Survey, III, 66-73.

As they sought the answers to these questions they proposed the term "Problem-Comedy," which is indicative of both the general attitude which they had toward Measure for Measure and the aspect of the play which held their primary interest.

It is interesting to indicate here that E. M. W. Tillyard refuses to accept the term "Problem-Comedy" on the grounds that it is too vague.[5] Tillyard refuses to use the term "Problem-Comedy" because, although it can be applied to Measure for Measure, All's Well that Ends Well, and Troilus and Cressida, it cannot be applied to Hamlet, which must be grouped with these plays on the basis of matter.[6] Tillyard compares these four plays and draws an analogy to problem children. Hamlet and Troilus and Cressida are like the problem child who is interesting in that he is complex, but All's Well that Ends Well and Measure for Measure are similar to another type of problem child--the type that has "something radically schizophrenic" about him.[7] He says of this distinction:

> Hamlet and Troilus and Cressida are problem plays because they deal with and display interesting problems; All's Well and Measure for Measure because they are problems.[8]

Tillyard proposes the term "Problem Play," but he warns that there are qualifications which must be noted about the term as it is distinct from the term "Problem-Comedy." He says

5. E. M. W. Tillyard, Shakespeare's Problem Plays, p. 1.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., p. 2.
8. Ibid.

that

> The warning is the more necessary because 'problem play' can mean something definite. L. J. Potts in his forthcoming book on comedy says of the problem play that it 'treats the situations that arise in society simply as moral or political problems, in the abstract and without reference to the idiosyncrasies of human nature . . . .'[9]

Actually, Tillyard's use of the term "Problem Play" is merely the result of carrying the idea of "Problem-Comedy" to its logical consequence. It reflects the extreme of the idea of viewing the play as a problem. Tillyard is not introducing a new term, but he is extending the use of the term "Problem-Comedy" and is establishing a canon of criticism. As he is followed in the use of this term by Richard David,[10] it may be possible that he is creating a new trend in the use of the term, but for the purposes of this thesis his criticism is treated as falling under the term "Problem-Comedy."

This period, then, becomes a period primarily interested in the mechanics of literary criticism. There is no movement to abstract Measure for Measure from the closet and to consider it as a play worthy of production. This is the period in which literary canons are established, and it is the first period in which the speculation done in conjunction with the application of the term "Problem-Comedy" is directed toward specific points in the evaluation of the play; that is, this is the first period which attempts to isolate systematically the specific elements of the play which are controversial.

9. Tillyard, op. cit., p. 1.
10. Richard David, "Shakespeare's Comedies and the Modern Stage," Shakespeare Survey, IV, 129.

For the first time there is an attempt to establish standards of evaluation. Thomas M. Parrott establishes an ethical and an aesthetic distinction which must be employed to insure an objective analysis of both the play and the previous criticism of the play.[11] This canon is implicit in Parrott, and it is simply the admission that there are certain actions in Measure for Measure which are based on ethical principles and which have been interpreted by ethical principles. These ethical actions and their subsequent criticism and interpretation affect the aesthetic nature of the play. The recognition of this fact demands that the principles which previous critics used for their analyses be analyzed themselves. Indications of this are evident in many critical works, among which is that of Robert M. Smith:

> Equally askew are Roy W. Battenhouse's recent tortuous endeavors to squeeze this play into a serious morality illustrating the Christian Doctrine of Atonement, and Mr. Wylie Sypher's attempt, on the other hand, to prove Shakespeare a casuist.[12]

Another example of the same principle is found in a work of R. W. Chambers:

> Now mark how Shakespeare treats this barbarous story. According to Professor Dover Wilson, at the same time when he wrote Measure for Measure, Shakespeare 'quite obviously believed in nothing; he was cynical as Iago, as disillusioned as Macbeth, though he still retained, unlike the first, his sensitiveness, and, unlike the second, his hatred of cruelty, hypocrisy, and ingratitude.' According to Sir Edmund Chambers, in Measure for Measure his 'remorseless analysis probes the inmost being of man, and strips him naked.'

11. Thomas M. Parrott, Shakespearian Comedy, p. 356.
12. Robert M. Smith, "Interpretations of Measure for Measure," The Shakespeare Quarterly, I (October, 1950), 208.

> Prepare then to shudder as you observe William Iago Torquemada Shakespeare at work.[13]

This, then, is a demonstration of the first principle of the critics of this period. Operating with it, the contemporary critics classify the previous criticism of Measure for Measure, analyze and reject this work on legitimate grounds.

The interesting thing to note about this technique is the fact that, for the most part, these critics, after analyzing and rejecting the previous critical theories of Measure for Measure, fall victim to the same error as did their predecessors. They re-propose, in different terms, the exact critical theories which they had rejected. In attempting a solution to the play and even being conscious of the fact that literary criticism demands objectivity, these critics introduce almost every critical theory which has appeared since Coleridge. If the first three categories--the nature, theme and dramatic structure of the play--are considered as one unit, a simple investigation of the studies of just a few of these critics will demonstrate this fact.

H. B. Charlton, who places this play with the "Problem-Comedies," rejects that critical theory which suggests that Shakespeare was cynical, and then proceeds to apply an ethico-aesthetic interpretation which is based on a sociological view similar to that which was found in the late Victorian period.[14]

13. R. W. Chambers, The Jacobean Shakespeare and Measure for Measure, p. 31.
14. H. B. Charlton, Shakespearian Comedy, pp. 208-16.

In considering the nature of the play, Charlton remarks that

> Its very setting is a hot-bed of immorality; Vienna and its suburbs stink. Lucio and Froth, Pompey and Mistress Overdone, are its sewage. Their talk is a scurvy bawdry; their jests are mere syphilitic hysteria. And above these is a Duke who lacks the backbone to govern, and a deputy whose puritanism collapses into sheer bestiality and crime.[15]

Charlton goes on to extend his analysis to include speculation on the effects of goodness, mercy, kindness, _et cetera_, on humanity. This is the sociological consideration of his ethico-aesthetic interpretation. He uses society as a basis for his criticism, and in this he is merely rejecting one theme of criticism for another. He is actually extending the Victorian conception of the play.

Tucker Brooke, who delves less into the history of the criticism of the play, also places it among the "Problem-Comedies," although he describes it as a "dark-comedy." Brooke indicates a type of criticism which was prevalent in the earlier nineteenth century when he states:

> The satirical and contemptuous attitude was not normal with Shakespeare; and though in the dark comedies just mentioned he went for a time with the crowd, as he had so often done, the great effect upon him of the Jacobean disillusionment was to induce reflections upon the nature of evil which crystalized into a nobler and deeper poetry than he had yet written.[16]

Brooke later states that the problem of the play--the theme of the play--centers about city government and the police court.[17]

S. C. Sen Gupta follows Charlton with a sociological ap-

15. Charlton, _op. cit._, p. 212.
16. Tucker Brooke, "The Renaissance," _A Literary History of England_, edited by Albert C. Baugh, p. 534.
17. _Ibid._

proach to the play and is rather vehement in denouncing Shakespeare. He says of Shakespeare that he seems "to revel in opening the dirty, disgusting sluices in human society . . . ."[18] Thomas M. Parrott, who establishes one of the first attempts towards objective criticism, later asserts, in interpretating the play, that

> The central theme is repulsive; the characters are for the most part unsympathetic, the background is of an unwanted sordidness. The apparent problem, whether a maid's chastity rates higher than a maid's life, is evaded by Shakespeare's invention of Mariana.[19]

W. W. Lawrence, who is one of the most systematic and one of the most logical of the modern critics, is caught in the web of the very problems he is attempting to solve and says of the play:

> Measure for Measure is not a tract on equity, any more than it is on government; it is not an expression of Shakespeare's convictions in regard to the administration of law, but a story of human passion, sin and forgiveness.[20]

The critics mentioned here as falling into error are a representative group of the major critics of Measure for Measure who apply the term "Problem-Comedy." There are many other critics in this period who follow the same technique as those mentioned and who treat the play as a "Problem-Comedy" but who do not explicitly use the term. These other figures apply equally diverse critical interpretations to the play, but because of the limitations of this thesis they have not been mentioned here.

18. S. C. Sen Gupta, Shakespearian Comedy, p. 174.
19. Parrott, Shakespeare: Twenty-three Plays and the Sonnets, p. 592.
20. W. W. Lawrence, Shakespeare's Problem Comedies, p. 117.

As these critics proceed to interpret Measure for Measure there is a rather interesting development in the attitude toward the major characters. A new fluctuation in critical attitude develops. Whereas in the previous period the attitude toward Isabella and the Duke wavers between good and bad and Angelo is considered as being evil, in this period the attitude toward all three major characters varies. A few critics praise Isabella very highly, but, for the most part, she is treated rather coldly. She is described by Hardin Craig as a "model of female chastity."[21] Edgar Fripp describes her as a "beautiful Puritan girl."[22] R. W. Chambers denies the theory that "Shakespeare is depicting a self-righteous prude."[23] Herman H. Horne is probably the most descriptive in his defense of Isabella. He states that "Here is a black sink of corruption out of which grows the white flower of Isabella's purity."[24] On the whole, however, Isabella is not treated this kindly. There is little appreciation here for her either as a person or as a character. Parrott notes the discrepancy in the status of Isabella's part in the play and states that the character of Isabella seems to break up midway through the play.[25] Edith Sitwell describes Isabella as cold and repellent.[26] Mark Van Doren

21. Hardin Craig, An Interpretation of Shakespeare, p. 233.
22. Edgar I. Fripp, Shakespeare Man and Artist, p. 615.
23. R. W. Chambers, op. cit., p. 37.
24. Herman H. Horne, Shakespeare's Philosophy of Love, p. 120.
25. Thomas M. Parrott, Shakespeare, p. 599.
26. Edith Sitwell, A Notebook on William Shakespeare, p. 123.

claims that she is too competent.[27] Margaret Webster states that Isabella's refusal to save her brother's life arises from a "sense of values so distorted that we lose sympathy with her."[28] H. B. Charlton claims that she lacks "a spark of humanity."[29]

The thing to note about these denunciations is the fact that they are all directed to the same problems which previous critics had treated. Isabella is condemned morally because of her attitude toward Claudio, because of her relationship with Mariana, and because of her relationship with the Duke. All of these incidents contain a moral question which was created by previous critics. The critics of this period by accepting the problems of the previous critics only confirm that there is a question concerning these actions. They hold the action open to debate, and by using a subjective basis for their ethical interpretation instead of the objective basis, they merely reaffirm old errors.

It is interesting to observe that the same ethical considerations which were used to analyze the actions of Isabella are not used to analyze the actions of Angelo. Whereas in the past Angelo was condemned as being evil or bad in his actions, in this period there is a growing tendency to attempt to vindicate his proposition to Isabella. This is, in part, another reflection of the attitude toward Isabella. Angelo is generally pictured in this period as an essentially

27. Mark Van Doren, Shakespeare, p. 220.
28. Margaret Webster, Shakespeare Without Tears, p. 98.
29. H. B. Charlton, op. cit., p. 255.

good man who was faced with a temptation that was too great. According to Sen Gupta,

> Whatever Angelo might have done in the past, he wants to act blamelessly in his capacity as the Duke's deputy, but he finds that the temptation of evil is much stronger than his power to resist it.[30]

Similarly, Margaret Webster provokes almost the same idea--the idea that Angelo may be excused in this action or that his guilt may be lessened:

> There can be no question of making Angelo 'sympathetic'; but we must feel that here is a man who has been 'sick unto death with a fever so terrible that it has left him so shriveled to the love of what he had been, and that clean flesh must grow in the slow process of healing.[31]

There is no question of a solution to this strange contradiction. That Isabella should be judged by one standard of ethics and Angelo by another, both standards being relative, is certainly a denial of the objectivity of morality. It is, ultimately, a denial of the natural law, but this point is beyond the scope of this thesis.

It must be noted, however, that this contradiction in the evaluation of Angelo and Isabella is reflected in the aesthetic interpretation of the play. The ethical consideration has determined that certain elements of the play are, at least, foul. Thus when this material is formed into a semblance of coherence the whole of the play has to suffer. This is the logical conclusion of the criticism of this period. It is evidenced in the statements of many critics, among whom is Mark Van Doren:

30. Sen Gupta, op. cit., p. 186.
31. Webster, op. cit., p. 253.

> The situation in itself makes virtue theoretical and makes their own goodness problematical, a thing to be discussed, a commodity to be weighed and measured.[32]

The total effect of this point can probably be more easily seen in Van Doren when he comments on the idea that Shakespeare is not in love with his subject-matter.[33] The implications of these statements are many, but, essentially, they show that the ethical determination of some actions in this play by the critics of this period carried the logical consequence that Shakespeare was dealing with sordid material. This accounts for the aesthetic interpretation of the play.

Although the vast majority of the critics of this contemporary period are consistent in their judgment of either Angelo or Mariana, one important segment of these critics goes far to deny virtually all of the previous critical theories of this period. E. M. W. Tillyard indicates this fact and establishes a distinction in the criticism of this period which, while it is not all-inclusive, makes a valuable point. Tillyard confirms that whereas the former critics of Measure for Measure concentrated on Isabella and the Duke, the contemporary critic goes to other extremes.[34] He maintains that some critics either have refused to find anything wrong with the play at all, or they have emphasized the religious tone of the play and have attempted to substantiate an allegorical or religious explanation of the problems of the play. Till-

32. Van Doren, op. cit., p. 221.
33. Ibid., p. 217.
34. Tillyard, op. cit., p. 118.

yard himself later states that "Shakespeare is concerned throughout with either religious dogma or abstract speculation or both."[35] Actually, Tillyard does not extend this criticism, and he is referring to that segment of criticism by such critics as R. W. Battenhouse, Elizabeth Pope, and Clifford Leech, who attempt to force a theological interpretation on the play. This idea, of course, is not new, for G. Wilson Knight attempted a similar explanation in his book The Wheel of Fire in 1932, in which he attempted to relate Measure for Measure to the Gospels. Battenhouse carries the idea to an extreme when he attempts to correlate Measure for Measure with the Christian doctrine of atonement. Elizabeth Pope does not even have as much to work with as Battenhouse when she attempts to answer the problems of Measure for Measure with popular Elizabethan theology. She asserts that

> . . . *for the answers to these questions we must* turn to the popular text-books of Shakespeare's day--not to the Church Fathers or the Latin works of the great contemporary Reformers and Counter-Reformers, but to the annotated Bibles, translations, the English commentaries, the sermons, and the tracts through which the teaching of the Church reached the individual without special training or interest in theology.[36]

While Clifford Leech does not reach the extremes of Battenhouse, Knight, or Pope, he does state that in Measure for Measure there is a morality framework.[37] Even with the contradiction in the criticism of Angelo and Isabella and the segment which attempts to demonstrate the theology behind

35. Tillyard, op. cit., p. 3.
36. Elizabeth Pope, op. cit., p. 66.
37. Leech, op. cit., p. 73.

the play, it is not to be assumed that the whole of this period is devoid of reasonable criticism. Some very valuable arguments are established even though they are not generally carried to the necessary extremes by the critics. One very valuable consideration is implied in a comment by Hardin Craig. He states that

> The thing above all that Shakespeare did was to contrive a plot which would rescue Isabella from the fate awarded Cassandra by Whetstone and Cinthio, rescue her from the staining of her honor, from the breaking of her will, and from the marriage to the villain who had plotted against her.[38]

The fact to be noted concerning this quote is that this critic has traced Shakespeare's modification of the original story by Cinthio. This fact is also considered by H. B. Charlton who cites the additions and modifications of the original material by Shakespeare.[39] Now if this element is extended so as to encompass other elements of the play, as it is extended by E. M. W. Tillyard and R. W. Chambers, a totally different over-all view of the play can be gained. Chambers, in tracing Shakespeare's modifications of the original plot notes that "If Shakespeare was so morbid at this time why didn't he retain the elements of the original story such as the heroine kissing the head of her supposed brother?"[40] It can be seen that as soon as one question is proposed in this line of reasoning other questions logically follow. Chambers goes on to mention the problematic character inter-

38. Hardin Craig, op. cit., p. 235.
39. H. B. Charlton, op. cit., p. 214.
40. R. W. Chambers, op. cit., p. 32.

pretation of Isabella, and he logically states that "If Shakespeare is depicting in Isabella the self-righteous prude which some critics would make of her, he goes strangely to work."[41] Extending this line of thought even further, the whole nature of the play can be considered. Chambers goes on to explain the cause of some other elements in the play. He states that

> Disguise and impersonation and misunderstanding are the very life of romantic comedy. The disguised monarch, who can learn the private affairs of his humblest subject becomes a sort of earthly Providence, combining omniscience and omnipotence. That story has always had its appeal.[42]

One of the final considerations that Chambers makes is in the form of a question: "Why do critics today bring against Measure for Measure this kind of objection, which they would be ashamed to bring against Shakespeare's earlier comedies or later romances?"[43] There is an implication here of a desire for a more objective criticism, but, essentially, this passage is directed toward those critics who wish to manufacture problems for the sake of having problems.

It is evident, however, that this criticism by Chambers develops from two basic critical actions. Chambers has first traced the source of Shakespeare's material, and then he has indicated those elements which Shakespeare either deleted from the source or added to it.

E. M. W. Tillyard also goes to the source of Shakespeare's

41. E. W. Chambers, op. cit., p. 320.
42. Ibid., p. 34.
43. Chambers, op. cit., p. 33.

material and in so doing reveals a rather important fact:

> The central episode of a sister having to decide whether to save her brother's life at the expense of her honour may go back to an historical incident and anyhow is related to real life and not to folk-lore. Similarly the setting in the low life of a city, not found before Whetstone, is realistic and not traditional . . . . But Shakespeare grafted onto the realistic material of Whetstone two themes that belong to the world of fairy-tale: first, the disguised king mingling with and observing his own people, and second, the secret substitution of the real bride in the husband's bed.[44]

The point which is brought to light here is that the nature and the intention behind the added elements has to be considered in making an analysis of the play. This aspect is actually resolved in empathy, but will be treated later in the thesis.

A second point which Chambers makes in considering the additions of Shakespeare to the source is implied in a statement in which he treats the Elizabethan "appetite for ingenious plot-complication and improbable and strained moments of suspense. . . ."[45] This is actually a canon of criticism of the historical approach to the play. What were the Elizabethans prepared to accept in the way of dramatic situations? This is an important question, for on it depends the interpretation of several ethical actions. If just the betrothal of Angelo and Mariana is considered, it can be seen that to the ordinary Elizabethan audience there was no moral violation in the "bed-trick." If this is accepted then there are several ramifications. Isabella is at once absolved in her

44. Tillyard, op. cit., p. 132.
45. Ibid., p. 121.

participation in the act, and Mariana's acceptance of the proposition is just. Thus the critical interpretations of many critics are found to be wanting on the basis of these two points: the limitations of the material and the limitations of the Elizabethan audience.

Essentially, then, the ethico-aesthetic criticism of Measure for Measure in this period moves in several directions. It rejects the autobiographical approach to the play which had been popular since the late Victorian period, and it incorporates more elements in the criticism. Isabella and the Duke are given the proper proportion of criticism and there is greater interest in Angelo and the minor characters. Measure for Measure is also established as a problem play which has significant ramifications. These factors, coupled with the growing interest in a more scholarly examination of the play which eliminates much of the critic's personality or society, promises to produce much in the way of a more acceptable interpretation of this play.

CHAPTER V

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

As Measure for Measure passes through the various stages and periods of criticism and as the succeeding stigmas of critical interpretation attach themselves to the play, it becomes increasingly evident that there is something wrong or something missing--not from the play itself--but in the approaches and techniques of the various critics. It becomes more evident that essential principles of criticism have been ignored. It becomes more evident that even in the contemporary period, the period since 1937 in which the term "Problem-Comedy" predominates, essential elements are lacking. Even the attempt to apply the historical approach to the play overlooks a pertinent fact. That fact, ultimately, is simply that Measure for Measure is a play. It is not an organization of poetry and prose which exists simply to exemplify the genius of its creator. It is not a play designed merely to foster critical speculation. Its designed end was not the closet but the stage.

The fact that this is a play and that it was designed for the stage carries essential qualifications. If the audience of the play wants merely idealistic realism, they do not need the play. There is no dramatic production dealing with human nature, with the actions and reactions of people, with the machinations of the intellect and the will which is go-

to contain perfect logic. George Whetstone, himself, in speaking of the English playwright, states that the playwright

> . . . 'is most vain, indiscreet, and out of order; he first grounds his work on impossibilities; then in three hours he runs through the world: marries, gets children: makes children men, men to conquer kingdoms, murder monsters, and bringeth gods from heaven, and fetcheth devils from hell.'[1]

Whetstone also directs that

> . . . 'grave old men should instruct young men, strumpets should be lascivious, clowns disorderly, intermingling all these actions in such sort as the grave may instruct and the pleasant delight.'[2]

The critics of Measure for Measure by allowing the factor of "egocentricism" to affect their critical interpretation of the play, have committed a grave error. They have accepted the fact that Shakespeare used Whetstone's Promos and Cassandra in some degree as a model for Measure for Measure, but they have ignored the fact that Promos and Cassandra was designed by Whetstone to exemplify his theory of the drama.[3] The fact to be gained here is that if Whetstone ignored the unities or did not supply perfect logic in his play, then, unless Shakespeare made drastic revisions, his adaptation is also going to contain imperfections. Shakespeare, of course, did make revisions, but these revisions were such as were demanded by custom and by the stage.

The stage, then, is actually the clue to the critical

1. George Whetstone, as quoted by F. S. Boas, Shakespeare and His Predecessors, p. 28.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

interpretation of Measure for Measure. Robert M. Smith recognizes this key and says of it:

> Brook's production demonstrates again that many of the so-called 'problems' which have troubled the literary and dramatic critics disappear on the stage. What seemed so complex and paradoxical in plot and character emerges as natural and sun-clear. Instead of the heavy gloom and especially the 'great moral purpose,' which well intentioned moralists have vainly endeavored to reassure us the play possesses, we have, according to one responsive spectator, a 'merry, bawdy, and irrestible evening's entertainment for audiences both critical and uncritical.' Rampant sex, criminal purpose, even death itself are conquered by the best devices known to man, by fortitude, by wise tolerance, and by laughter.[4]

The whole of this comment implicitly states that one important factor to be considered in evaluating a play is, actually, audience participation. This one factor of empathy gives the dramatist license to present human nature out of its natural order. The audience is willing to accept the unusual, the extraordinary, the fantastic, if it can participate in the dramatic production. E. M. W. Tillyard's comment is pertinent: ". . . in the drama the most powerful general effect comes by way of absorption into the immediate dramatic business . . . ."[5]

This, of course, is just one point to be made in the objective analysis of Measure for Measure. Even considering the source of the plot, the nature of the material, the additions which Shakespeare made to the source, the position of the audience in relation to the material, and the psychology

4. Robert M. Smith, "Interpretations of Measure for Measure," The Shakespeare Quarterly, I (October, 1950), p. 209.
5. E. M. W. Tillyard, Shakespeare's Problem Plays, p. 138.

of the drama will not, in the last analysis, answer all of the questions raised by the critics of this play. This is correct, for the stage cannot give license to immorality. But if the problems concerning ethical values are examined with the consistency of Smith and Tillyard certain revealing conclusions can be reached.

If the ethical actions of the play, such as the substitution of Mariana for Isabella in the "bed-trick," are examined in themselves a fallacy in the arguments of some critics is immediately revealed. The key to this revelation is contained in a comment by R. H. N. Hudson, who says:

> It would seem indeed as if undue fault had sometimes been found, not so much with the play itself as with some of the persons, from trying them by a moral standard which cannot be fairly applied to them, or from not duly weighing all the circumstances, feelings and motives under which they are represented as acting.[6]

If the moral standards which have been used by most critics to evaluate both Mariana and Isabella in relation to the substitution are examined, it can be seen that the nature of the Elizabethan betrothal has all but been ignored. To the ordinary, play-going Elizabethans, the "bed-trick" violated no ethical value. The sanctity of marriage and the rights exchanged were not infringed upon. Why then should critics, two hundred years later, object to this action? Shakespeare was not writing for posterity. He was employing actions which were suitable to and which were accepted by his audi-

6. H. N. Hudson, Shakespeare: His Life, Art and Characters, I, 408.

ence. Thus, the criticism of this point becomes invalid.

The whole of this argument is stated by R. W. Battenhouse when he says: "Perhaps, then, our difficulty has been largely a matter of failing to apply the proper measuring rods."[7] The improper measuring rods are actually improper considerations of morality, and as Battenhouse said, the observer is out of focus.[8] The observer, the critic, is out of focus when he fails to recognize the proper relationship of himself to the play, when he fails to consider all of the factors which are involved in a critical analysis, and when he allows the use of inappropriate materials in the analysis of the play.

If the comments of Smith, Tillyard and Battenhouse are analyzed, certain canons of criticism may be established which will, in a more positive way, insure a more acceptable interpretation of Measure for Measure. These canons involve the recognition of the certain essential limitations. The first of these limitations deals with the material with which Shakespeare worked.

As Shakespeare was dealing with material drawn from Whetstone, the nature and intention of the original material has to be considered. This material has certain internal restrictions. There is a limit to the adaptation which can be accomplished with this material. Also, the additions and deletions of Shakespeare must be taken into consideration. It

7. R. W. Battenhouse, "Measure for Measure and the Christian Doctrine of Atonement," PMLA, LXI (December, 1946), 1031.
8. Ibid.

must be noted how the additions affect the original material, and the nature of the additions themselves must be taken into consideration. Some critics of the last period of criticism of Measure for Measure noted these limitations and made their criticism with them in mind, but the idea is actually found earlier. W. W. Lawrence notes that

> The solution of the apparent contradictions must depend, it seems to me, upon careful separation of the elements which Shakespeare added from those which he borrowed from his sources, and upon an examination of the significance of these elements, in the light of narrative tradition and custom, and of the way in which they were combined with the basic action into an organic whole.[9]

The second limitation which has to be considered is the limitation of the stage. Under the limitation of the stage certain related things have to be considered. Shakespeare wrote Measure for Measure for the Elizabethan stage. This stage had necessary demands and restrictions. The dramatic structure of the play is controlled, to some extent, not only by the physical limitation of the stage and by the limitations of Shakespeare's company, but by the accepted traditions and operations relative to that stage. In this, the limitations of the stage are intimately united with those of the material.

The third limitation to be considered is that of the audience. In some respects this is the most important of the three. What were the Elizabethan audiences prepared to accept in the way of comedy? What were the customs with which they were

9. W. W. Lawrence, Shakespeare's Problem Comedies, p. 80.

familiar? What were their demands upon the playwright? All of these things have to be taken into consideration. A scholarly critic would not think of examining Hamlet without first acquainting himself with the terminology, slang, customs, traditions, et cetera which Shakespeare inserts in that play. If, then, scholars are willing to accept these practices as common in the understanding of Hamlet, why are they reluctant to move to the same extremes with Measure for Measure? Why condemn Isabella for leaving the convent on ethical grounds without first determining the nature of Isabella's relationship to the convent, the vows she had or had not made and the accepted custom of the novitiate? The true critic of Measure for Measure does not examine the play in the light of the customs of his age, but by the light of the accepted practices of the age of Shakespeare. On this same point Lawrence remarks:

> The important thing is that Shakespeare's plays are not to be judged by the works of Hull or Overbury, who wrote for small circles, and were in no wise representative of the general thought of their time, but by the literature with which the audiences of Shakespeare were familiar, literature which has proved its right to be remembered through generations of men, high and low, rich and poor.[10]

The important thing to be remembered, then, is that objective standards of criticism must be employed in the examination of any dramatic production. The error of "egocentricism" has no place in the accepted standards of literary criticism, and it must be eliminated if an acceptable in-

10. Lawrence, op. cit., p. 100.

terpretation of Measure for Measure is to be had. Only then can the play be considered in its rightful position as a work of art, and not the workings of a strange misanthrope recently plunged from the heights into the depths. R. W. Chambers sets this standard when he asks the critics of Measure for Measure to consider the works of Shakespeare as " . . . the works of art we know them to be . . . ."[11]

This thesis has demonstrated that the critics in each succeeding period of the criticism of Measure for Measure allowed their examinations of the play to be strongly influenced by the factors of "egocentricism." The result was, first of all, that the ethical standards used to evaluate the specific actions and characters in the play were relative, and were different in each critical age. The application of these relative ethical standards to the play's specific problems produced, in turn, a varied and relative aesthetic interpretation of not only specific characters, speeches, and actions, but of the whole nature of the play. It was then shown that the combined ethico-aesthetic interpretation of each group of critics took such a definite shape or pattern that it became customary to apply various categorical terms to the play, by way of definition, such as "Dark-Comedy," "Tragi-Comedy," "Bitter-Comedy," and "Problem-Comedy." These terms are indicative of both the technique used by the age which produced the term and of the general attitude of each

11. Chambers, op. cit., p. 59.

critical age to *Measure for Measure* as a whole. The examination of these terms revealed that the critics in each of these periods contradicted Shakespeare--who wrote the play as a comedy--and denied that it is a comedy in the true sense.

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