

countryside—whether disguised as men or not. In *Cymbeline*, Pisanio sees Imogen's disguise itself as a kind of sexual violation; as the result of her disguise Viola in *Twelfth Night* must suffer through the comic degradation of her duel with Aguecheek. And the nearer the noble characters come to supernatural status, the more necessary it is for Shakespeare to remind us of the frailty of their humanity. Shakespeare does not stress the godlike powers of Cerimon in *Pericles* until he has first exposed Cerimon's human limitations as a doctor. The process is most seriously dramatized in *The Tempest* with Prospero's "self-humiliation into humanity," in Howard Felperin's words. When the supernatural powers themselves are some of the play's characters, they tend to take on the frailties they mock: hence the squabbling goddesses in the Masque of *The Tempest* and the shaky marriage of Oberon and Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. There is a lovely moment in this last play that sums up this process of ironic demystifying when Puck pours scorn on the play's human stupidity—"Lord, what fools these mortals be!" (3.2.115)—some twenty-five lines after Oberon has reprimanded him for his mistake with the love-juice. So both in *Measure for Measure* itself and in many of Shakespeare's other plays there is plenty of unsubtle circumstantial evidence for believing that the greater part of Shakespeare's audience must have known what Shakespeare was up to. James I himself may be another matter.

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To the Editor:

Louise Schleiner sees the duke in *Measure for Measure* as a Christ figure, an *imitatio dei*, but also as someone who mocks and parodies that role: "the play's biblical and theological allusions do indeed evoke a parallel between the duke and God, as testing master, redeemer, and judge, but . . . they function comically, to point up that he is not God . . ." (235). Such a reading succeeds, I believe, in reconciling the Christian and the anti-Christian, the serious and the cynical elements in this intriguing character and, to some extent, in building a bridge between the conflicting critical approaches. Nevertheless, the real problem of the play remains. For the ambivalence is not confined to the duke, to the fact that he partly succeeds and partly fails in bringing "moral improvement to his subjects," but to the deeper question of what "moral improvement" is.

Schleiner comes close to recognizing this ambiva-

lence when she admits that Shakespeare makes "the bawds, whores, and fops more likable than most of the major characters, by harping on the inevitability of unlawful sex." But she follows this observation by describing "unlawful sex" as something that "comes to stand for the chaotic, potentially destructive forces of human personality in society" (235). In doing so, Schleiner misses the main point, the dramatic center of the play, which is that the attempt to prevent and punish "unlawful sex" on the part of Angelo and (to a degree) Isabella is destructive, not only of "human personality," but of life itself.

The true source of the duke's failure to regenerate the other characters is not, as Schleiner argues, the ineradicableness of the "forces of human corruption" but the difficulty of knowing where the corruption lies. Again Schleiner seems to grant this point when she mentions that Shakespeare "gives human evil so loud, so forceful, and at times so appealing a voice . . . that the controversy surrounding *Measure for Measure* may never end" (233). But then why does she argue (in the same sentence) that "the duke and his morality" define the plot and have "the last word of judgment"?

If there is a "last word of judgment" about this play, it is that no moral pattern that we (or the Jacobean audience) would recognize as Christian can encompass the various actions of the play. (Harriett Hawkins has made this point most clearly.) What we should be discussing now is just how a play that defeats all of our attempts to fit its actions into some moral scheme can still gain dramatic unity. And, assuming for the moment that the play is dramatically effective, how is its literary value affected by what seems its deliberate attempt to confuse our moral sympathies?

Since the writer of this article has shown that she not only understands the play's resistance to any moral scheme but also can enjoy this ironic and cynical attitude, I hope that she will pursue these new questions. In any case, to continue to employ our ingenuity in the traditional task of squeezing the actions of this plot into some kind of moral scheme (Christian or humanist) will only diminish the dramatic powers of the play or stretch our concept of morality beyond recognition—or both.

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Ms. Schleiner replies:

I enjoyed Michael Taylor's survey of "demystified" characters and his reading of the prison-at-