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THE ROLE OF JAMES I  
IN SHAKESPEARE'S  
*MEASURE FOR MEASURE*

DAVID L. STEVENSON

One is easily tempted by twentieth century literary criticism of *Measure for Measure* to regard the play as a dramatic study wholly concerned with the ironies resulting from the moral decisions of Isabella and of Angelo. And the decisions of these two public advocates of virtue are no doubt the heart of the matter. But one needs to remind oneself occasionally that these characters, however fascinating as pawns in an intellectual comedy, are caught up in a play which is also very much concerned (in the Duke's initial words) with the "properties" of government and with "sufficiency" in office. The substantial political substratum of this comedy, indeed, is entirely Shakespeare's addition to his principal source, Whetstone's *Promos and Cassandra*. And the importance of this material to our total understanding of *Measure for Measure* is suggested by the fact that it was from this material that Shakespeare fashioned the longest single role in the play, that of the Duke. Oddly, despite the intense scrutiny to which the play has been subjected in our time, Shakespeare's political additions to his source have gone almost unremarked.

Miss Elizabeth M. Pope's article "The Renaissance Background of *Measure for Measure*"<sup>1</sup> is an exception, to be sure: she has at least called attention to the fact that *Measure for Measure* has a political aspect. She has argued that it reflects conventional Renaissance attitudes toward matters of state, interesting to its local Jacobean audience, but lost to a contemporary one unschooled in historical criticism. She would see Shakespeare's presentation of the conflict between mercy and justice in the play, and his dramatization, in Duke Vincentio, of the powers and obligations of a prince, as echoing current discussions of such matters in Renaissance theological treatises and in Jacobean sermons. She has suggested, further, that the inclusion

<sup>1</sup> *Shakespeare Survey*, No. 2 (1949), pp. 66-82.

of such material in *Measure for Measure* was in conformity with a popular taste in political ideas. It was a part of the "outburst of concern with the theory of government [which] seems to have been inspired primarily by the accession of James."<sup>2</sup>

I do not wish to challenge the validity of Miss Pope's thesis that Shakespeare, in *Measure for Measure*, is properly Jacobean in his treatment of political theory. But I should like to turn to the play itself, to examine in much sharper focus its use of political ideas and attitudes. For it is my contention that *Measure for Measure*, in so far as it is concerned with the "properties" of government, is more than a casual and fortuitous reflection of Renaissance political piety. It is a play in which the political element bears the conscious and unmistakable imprint of the predilections of James I himself as Shakespeare and his London audience were aware of them in the first flush of the post-Elizabethan era.

It is not difficult to see why Shakespeare would be prompted to add a Jamesian political element to his source story. Theatrical enterprise, then, as now, was highly competitive, and the greatest asset of his acting company in 1603-1604 was its new status as the King's men. As one of the principal directing members of this company, Shakespeare undoubtedly wished to foster its recently acquired royal sponsorship and to encourage, if possible, a direct personal attachment of the King for the royal players. Shakespeare, indeed, may even have felt under obligation to identify his first Jacobean comedy with the ideas of the new ruler. At any rate, I am convinced that he deliberately sketched in Duke Vincentio a character whose behavior as a ruler would be attractive to James (and therefore to a Jacobean audience) because it followed patterns which the King had publicly advocated. In addition, I believe that Shakespeare made a fairly general appeal throughout the play to his audience's obvious interest in the concepts of the new Stuart political order. He did this by incorporating into the action of *Measure for Measure* a series of James's known attitudes toward government, including the King's personal fascination with the conflicting demands of mercy and justice in achieving order in the state.

The evidence itself, which demonstrates the role of James I in *Measure for Measure*, takes its validity from two assumptions not

<sup>2</sup> "The Renaissance Background of *Measure for Measure*," p. 70.

difficult to make. The first is that the text of the play as we have it, surviving only in the Folio edition, is essentially that of the production at court in 1604.<sup>3</sup> The second assumption is that from the spring of 1603, with the death of Elizabeth, to the production of *Measure for Measure* at court about a year and a half later, James I was the most talked about person in London, the “observed of all observers.” His character, his personality, his political utterances were so much in the public gaze and mind in part, no doubt, because he was the first new monarch whom England had had in a generation, and in part because he had pleased all by almost miraculously succeeding to the throne without bloodshed. But beyond these obvious things, James had certainly been vain enough (and *Measure for Measure* capitalizes on this fact) to want his ideas on statecraft to be discussed, both because he was King and because he thought of himself as an intellectual. And he had deliberately advertised himself to his new English subjects as a poet and a scholar, as well as a statesman, by releasing for London publication, in 1603, all his major literary, religious, and political writings.<sup>4</sup>

The most obvious evidence that Shakespeare was attempting to appeal to the King, and to dramatize a current interest in James, as an additional strand in *Measure for Measure*, has been in the public domain since the eighteenth century. But its authenticity has remained clouded by the doubts of reputable scholars. It is the “fact,” first remarked by Tyrwhitt in 1766,<sup>5</sup> that two passages in this play (and a related third which has gone unnoticed) reflect in a flattering way a publicly known distaste on James’s part of displaying himself before shouting, unruly London crowds.

The first of the passages is from the Duke’s initial self-characterization to Angelo and to the audience as he takes abrupt leave from his newly appointed deputy:

I’ll privily away. I love the people,

<sup>3</sup> See “Revels Account,” in E. K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare* (Oxford, 1930), II, 331.

<sup>4</sup> (1) *His Majesties Lepanto, or, Heroicall Song*; (2) *A Meditation Upon . . . the First Booke of Chronicles*; (3) *A Fruitefull Meditation, Containing a Plaine . . . Exposition . . . of the Revelation*; (4) *The True Lawe of Free Monarchies, or, The Reciproock and Mutuall Dutie Betwixt a Free King, and his Naturall Subjects*; (5) *Basilicon Doron, or His Majesties Instructions to his Dearest Sonne*; (6) *Daemonologie, in Forme of a Dialogue*.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Tyrwhitt, *Observations and Conjectures Upon Some Passages of Shakespeare* (Oxford, 1766), pp. 36-37.

But do not like to stage me to their eyes.  
Though it do well, I do not relish well  
Their loud applause and Aves vehement;  
Nor do I think the man of safe discretion  
That does affect it.<sup>6</sup>

(I. i. 68-73)

The second of the passages is part of Angelo's comparison of his feelings of suffocation with desire for Isabella with a king's feelings of suffocation when pressed upon by a foolish swarm of gapers:

So play the foolish throngs with one that swounds;  
Come all to help him, and so stop the air  
By which he should revive; and even so  
The general, subject to a well-wish'd King,  
Quit their own part, and in obsequious fondness  
Crowd to his presence, where their untaught love  
Must needs appear offence. (II. iv. 24-30)

The third passage, hitherto unnoticed by editors, shows the Duke remembering his initial comment to Angelo, and seeking therefore to excuse a new willingness to display himself to his subjects on his return to Vienna. In his soliloquy, the Duke states that he will explain his lost diffidence to Angelo by the fact that:

. . . I am near at home  
And that, by great injunctions, I am bound  
To enter publicly. (IV. iii. 99-101)

Both H. C. Hart <sup>7</sup> and E. K. Chambers <sup>8</sup> have doubted the evidence cited by Tyrwhitt and the eighteenth century that James had a dislike for crowds. And some contemporary editors <sup>9</sup> of *Measure for Measure* still annotate the pertinent passages from the play so warily, and with such cautious equivocation, that one cannot tell whether they think the evidence insufficient as to James's reactions or as to Shakespeare's intentions. Fortunately, however, one seventeenth century report of James's behavior which has been wholly overlooked by Shakespeare's editors,<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Citations from Shakespeare are to *The Complete Poems and Plays*, ed. William Allan Neilson and Charles Jarvis Hill (Cambridge, Mass., 1942).

<sup>7</sup> *Measure for Measure*, The Arden Shakespeare (London, 1905), p. x.

<sup>8</sup> *William Shakespeare*, I, 453.

<sup>9</sup> E. g. Neilson and Hill, *The Complete Plays and Poems*, p. 390; Hardin Craig, *The Complete Works* (1951), p. 833; Davis Harding, *Measure for Measure*, The Yale Shakespeare (New Haven, 1954), p. 125.

<sup>10</sup> But not Sir Charles Firth. See *Stuart Tracts, 1603-1693*, An English Garner (Westminster, 1903), pp. xi-xii.

actually shows the King, very early in his reign, explicitly, vocally, and very publicly annoyed by what he considered the “untaught love” of his new English subjects. It is Gilbert Dugdale’s *The Time Triumphant* (1604).<sup>11</sup>

This pamphlet contains an extended and dramatic account of James’s spontaneous outbursts against what he considered the unruly English mob’s failure to keep its distance from his person and a proper decorum in his presence, in a sudden appearance which he made in the London streets, prior to his coronation. And I quote from it at some length to convince all waverers. Dugdale first notes that James was curious to see at first hand the street decorations being erected to honor his royal procession to Westminster to be crowned. He took coach to the Exchange, therefore, “desirous privately . . . to visit them,” and “thinkeing to passe unknowne.” But:

the wylie Multitude perceiving something, began with such hurly burly, to run up and downe with such unreverent rashnes, as the people of the Exchange were glad to shut the staire dores to keepe them out. Heare they lost the pleasing sight they might have enjoyde but for their rashnes.

The King commended the behavior of the merchants of the Exchange who, “like so many pictures . . . stood silent”; but “discommended the rudenes of the Multitude, who regardless of time, place, or person will be so troublesome.”

Dugdale, sensing that the new Jacobean world was to be a less boistrous one than that which had cheered Elizabeth,<sup>12</sup> and perhaps also hoping to flatter James into noticing him, adds a solemn admonition:

countrymen, let me tell you this: if you hard what I heare as concerning that [i. e. the King’s reaction], you would stake your feete to the Earth at such a time, ere you would runne so regardles up and downe. Say it is [his] highnes pleasure to be private, as you may note by the order of his comming, will you then be publique, and proclaime that which love and duty cryes silence too? This shewes his love to you,

<sup>11</sup> *The Time Triumphant, Declaring in briefe, the arival of . . . King James, . . . His Coronation* (London, 1604). The quotations occur sig. B2<sup>r</sup> to sig. B3<sup>v</sup>. I have partially re-punctuated and re-capitalized Dugdale’s wretched text. Dugdale, an acquaintance of Robert Armin of the King’s men, is the first to note the honor accorded this acting company by James’s “taking to him the late Lord chamberlaines servants now the Kings actors” (sig. B7).

<sup>12</sup> Contrast Shakespeare’s cheerful sketch of the “Aves” of the Elizabethan Londoners welcoming an Essex, *Henry V*; V, Prologue, ll. 22-34.

but your open ignorance to him. You will say perchance it is your love. Will you in love prease upon your Sovereigne thereby to offend him, your Sovereigne perchance mistake your love, and punnish it as an offence? But heare me. When hereafter [he] comes by you, doe as they doe in Scotland: stand still, see all, and use silence. So shall you cherish his visitation and see him, thrice for once amongst you. But I feare my counsell is but water turnd into the Tems. It helps not.

Finally, Dugdale lets go his comments on James with a flight of fancy as to the King's thoughts during the actual coronation procession making its tortuous way through the crowded streets of London. Dugdale halts his narrative to let us see James once more at the Exchange, and remarks: "his highnes being right over the Exchange, smilde looking toward it, belike remembering his last being there, the grace of the Marchants, and the rudenes of the multitude."

Tyrwhitt's evidence that James had an aversion to displaying himself in public, based upon Sir Simon D'Ewes comments in 1621, and David Hume's eighteenth century conjectures,<sup>13</sup> may have been more tantilizing than conclusive to some editors of *Measure for Measure*. If, however, we add to this earlier speculation Dugdale's graphic account of James's two visits to the Exchange, it seems fair to assert it as an historical fact<sup>14</sup> that the King had a very real and well-known dislike of the "unreverent rashnes" and the "rudenes" of the "wylie Multitude" of London. If we were still to assume, after reading Dugdale, that the three references in *Measure for Measure* to a ruler's antipathy to the "Aves vehement" of the crowd were fortuitous elements of dialogue and characterization on Shakespeare's part, we would at least have to grant that the King, Dugdale if he say the play, and a good many members of the audience would have thought otherwise.

One needs to observe that Shakespeare makes use of James's response to crowds in two rather different ways, in *Measure for*

<sup>13</sup> Tyrwhitt's evidence was: (1) a passage from Sir Simon D'Ewes' autobiography of 1637 describing James's behavior toward crowds in 1621 (Harleian ms. No. 646, British Museum, fol. 54<sup>r</sup>); and (2) an edict of James forbidding access of crowds at one point of his journey from Edinburgh to London. The edict is discussed in the anon. *The True Narration of the Entertainment of his Royall Majestie* (London, 1603), sig. D2<sup>r</sup>; Tyrwhitt's interpretation is based on David Hume, *History of Great Britain* (Edinburgh, 1754), I, 2-3.

<sup>14</sup> D. Harris Willson, in his recent *King James VI and I* (London, 1956), p. 165, speaks of James's aversion to crowds as fact, but cites no evidence.

*Measure*. The remarks of the Duke are made to seem in character, whereas those of Angelo are not. Angelo's comparison of his feelings of compulsive lust (II. iv. 24-30) for Isabella to a fainting man's being smothered by excited onlookers is sufficiently strained. His extension of the comparison to the effect which a swarming horde has on a king is sheer metaphorical decoration, and carries the intent of the comparison beyond the obvious dramatic needs at that moment of the play.<sup>15</sup> Angelo, indeed, seems to step out of his role of would-be seducer in order to rationalize, momentarily to be sure, the point of view of James himself (Angelo says a "King" and there are no kings in Vienna), rather than to enlarge our conception of what he, as a character in the play, is actually feeling. His speech, therefore, may be considered as direct, bold flattery of James. As such, it is a brilliant tour-de-force in empathy, a flawless rendering, in a few lines, of the sense of claustrophobia, of the fear of being trapped, which a person of James's temperament might be assumed to have experienced on public display, when surrounded and pressed upon by his admirers in "obsequious fondness."

The Duke's reflections of James's attitude of repulsion toward a surging crowd, however, are of a subtler nature. They are made to seem dramatically appropriate to this ruler of Vienna who has "ever lov'd the life removed," and act as a clever interpretation of James's personal feelings, suggesting both to the audience and to the King that these feelings come from the highest ethical motives. A ruler who responds to such street demonstrations as the Duke describes is not a man, in the Duke's words, "of safe discretion." He is permitting himself to be "affected" out of mere vanity, and may swerve from a right and considered course of action.

The initial remarks of the Duke concerning a ruler on public display, then, lack the gratuitous element of Angelo's lines: they carry the normal weight of dialogue which is intended to create in us a sense of the Duke's character in the play. And, one observes, Shakespeare continues throughout the play to make the Duke in the mold of James's ideal prince. He feeds into the Duke's lines sententious utterances on morality and points of view toward the proper role of an absolute prince which were such

<sup>15</sup> It might be argued that Angelo's sympathy with the feeling of kings makes him less of an outsider, and his redemption more agreeable.

as to make him exist in *Measure for Measure* as a character with whom the new king of England, and his interested admirers in the audience, would find it hard not to agree.

Less directly obvious evidence that Shakespeare added to the outlines of the play in Whetstone a Duke of Vienna whose views would seem appropriate to James lies in his demonstrable use of the King's book on statecraft, the *Basilicon Doron*, or "Kingly Gift," as a source book of ideas. This book, addressed by James to his son, was published in London for the first time in March of 1603, within a few days of Elizabeth's death. It was, as nearly as James could make it, a detailed statement of his own concepts of the correct role of a divine right king in matters of religion, the state, and in things "indifferent." Further, James had taken care to admonish his readers that his *Basilicon Doron* "must be taken of al men, for the true image of my very minde, and forme of the rule which I have prescribed to my selfe and mine."<sup>16</sup> The public's interest in it (and no doubt Shakespeare's) is indicated by the fact that it had no less than four separate editions in 1603 alone.<sup>17</sup> With James's permission it was turned into curious, aphoristic verse in this year (under the title, *A Princes Looking Glasse*) by one of its academic admirers, William Willymat of Cambridge.<sup>18</sup> Its popularity is further suggested by the references to it in the writings of such diverse Jacobean spokesmen as Samuel Daniel, Richard Martin (who had received the dedication of Davies' *Orchestra*), and William Camden.<sup>19</sup> Francis Bacon's dispassionate summary (ca. 1610) that it was a book which "falling into every man's hand filled the whole realm as with a good perfume,"<sup>20</sup> is sufficiently typical.

<sup>16</sup> Sig. B3<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> See *The Basilicon Doron of King James VI*, ed. James Craigie, Scottish Text Society, 2 Vols. (Edinburgh and London, 1944 and 1950), II, 142-149.

<sup>18</sup> *A Princes Looking Glasse . . . excerpted and chosen out of . . . Basilicon Doron* (Cambridge, 1603). Willymat confesses "I againe and againe read it over" (sig. A3<sup>r</sup>).

<sup>19</sup> Daniel, in *A Panegyrike Congratulatorie to the Kings Majestie* (1603), st. 20, refers to "those judiciall lines" of the *Basilicon Doron*. Martin, in *A Speach Delivered, To the Kings . . . Majestie in the Name of the Sherifes of London* (1603), sig. B2<sup>r</sup>, speaks of the King's "sound bookes now fresh in every mans hands, beeing (to use your Majesties owne wordes) the *Vive ideas or representations of the minde*" (this last a quotation from *Basilicon Doron*, sig. A8<sup>r</sup>-A8<sup>v</sup>). Camden, in *The History of . . . Princess Elizabeth* (London, 1675), p. 564, remarks "Incredible it is how many mens Hearts and Affections he wone unto him by his writing of it and what an Expectation of himself he raised amongst all men, even to Admiration."

<sup>20</sup> *The Works*, ed. Spedding, Ellis, Heath (London, 1878), VI (*Literary and Professional Works*, Vol. I), 278-279.

It would have been difficult for Shakespeare in 1603-1604, both as a literate individual and as leading playwright for the new king's men, to have ignored James's self-portrait in his *Basilicon Doron*. And Norman Nathan, for example, in his recent article "The Marriage of Duke Vincentio and Isabella,"<sup>21</sup> simply assumes Shakespeare's use of the book in *Measure for Measure* as fact, in order to argue (perhaps a bit thinly) that the Duke's proposal of marriage to Isabella at the end of the play is no mere rounding out of the action with paired couples. The Duke's choice of a wife he sees as a conscious reflection of James's expressed ideas in the *Basilicon Doron*<sup>22</sup> as to the kind of woman a prince should marry and as to the propriety of the unromantic approach toward matrimony which a ruler should take.

Nathan's thesis is based upon rather sketchy statements in *Measure for Measure*, and if the Duke's attitude toward marriage were the only echoing of the King's ideas in the play, at most one would concede that the James of the *Basilicon Doron* would not have disapproved the Duke's choice. But it is the accumulation of such echoes in *Measure for Measure*, reflecting other, less amorphous points of view of James, especially as they are used to characterize the Duke, that finally defeats one's skepticism. And one is forced to think that Shakespeare carefully mined the *Basilicon Doron* in order to be able to dramatize the intellectual interests of his new patron in his comedy. One is further convinced that Shakespeare grafted the role of the Duke on to his source in order to have a character in whom to embody these interests.

An early example in *Measure for Measure* of Shakespeare's attributing to the Duke ideas on matters of state which James had expressed in his *Basilicon Doron* occurs at I. i. 30-36, where in a loose, but I think deliberate, paraphrase of James's assertions, the Duke admonishes Angelo that virtue in a ruler must be in an active state. Nature, the Duke argues, lends superior qualities to men only as she expects some tangible return, or "use," from her investment. As to Angelo,

Thyself and thy belongings  
Are not thine own so proper as to waste  
Thyself upon thy virtues, they on thee.

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<sup>21</sup> *SQ*, VII, No. 1 (Winter, 1956), 43-45.

<sup>22</sup> See *Basilicon Doron*, pp. 72-82.

Heaven doth with us as we with torches do,  
Not light them for themselves; for if our virtues  
Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike  
As if we had them not.

The Duke's observations, not startling in themselves, could scarcely have been more appropriate in a play of 1604, produced at the court of the King who had specified, in his advice to his son, that

it is not enough that ye have and retaine (as prisoners) within your selfe never so many good qualities and vertues, except ye employ them, and set them on worke, for the weale of them that are committed to your charge: *Virtutis enim laus omnis in actione consistit.*<sup>23</sup>

The Duke's harsh reaction to Lucio's slanders, I think, is another example of Shakespeare's incorporation into *Measure for Measure* of James's own expressed and insistent convictions. The Duke, disguised as a Friar, first gives voice to outrage against Lucio's idle, scandal-mongering remarks that the absent ruler "would mouth with a beggar, though she smelt brown bread and garlic," at III. ii. 196-199:

No might nor greatness in mortality  
Can censure scape; back-wounding calumny  
The whitest virtue strikes. What king so strong  
Can tie the gall up in the slanderous tongue?

And, in the last scene of the play, the Duke justifies his punishment of Lucio's behavior with the terse comment: "Slandering a prince deserves it" (V. i. 530).

James had expressed a closely similar and harsh irritation in the *Basilicon Doron* at the petty slanders which a king must endure from his irresponsible subjects. His estimate of the honesty and reliability of the "wylie Multitude" in passing judgment on the actions of a ruler is very like his estimate of the significance of their public applause. He thus writes, with personal impatience, "unto one fault, is all the common people of this Kingdome subject . . . which is, to judge and speake rashlie of their Prince." As an expedient against the slanders of "unreverent speakers" James advocated the course of the law. Ideally, however, he thought the proper remedy against "unjust railers" (like Lucio,

<sup>23</sup> *Basilicon Doron*, p. 61. James, in a side note, appropriately refers his comments to Aristotle, and the Latin phrase to Cicero.

one thinks) was “so to rule, as may justly stop their mouthes from all such idle and unreverent speeches.”<sup>24</sup>

It is certainly part of the integral comic design of *Measure for Measure* that Lucio should fall so neatly into the hands of the Duke whom he had slandered. Shakespeare’s use of so outrageously unreverent a railer as Lucio as a foil to the Duke is surely also as much a calculated attempt to please James (and an audience aware of James’s attitudes) as are the play’s references to the “Aves vehement” of the crowd. One may conclude that Shakespeare, in allowing Lucio first to exasperate the Duke in the extreme, and then allowing Lucio to be caught, was anticipating, at least in part, what he hoped would be the King’s personal delight in Lucio’s exposure.

Another of the characterizing attributes of the Duke in *Measure for Measure* which seems consciously borrowed by Shakespeare from the *Basilicon Doron* is somewhat more positive than an irritation with personal slander. It is the Duke’s conviction that a king should, in his own person, be a model of the kind of virtue he expects from his people. Escalus partially expresses it in his thumb-nail sketch of the Duke, at III. ii. 246-247, describing him as “one that, above all other strifes, contended especially to know himself” (and reminding one that James had used this phrase in his excited greeting of Sir John Davies, in 1603, as “Nosce Teipsum”).<sup>25</sup> The Duke himself, as part of his soliloquy at the end of Act III, states this conviction explicitly:

He who the sword of heaven will bear  
Should be as holy as severe;  
Pattern in himself to know,  
Grace to stand, and virtue go;  
More nor less to others paying  
Than by self-offenses weighing.

To be sure, the Duke’s remarks are directed against the hypo-

<sup>24</sup> *Basilicon Doron*, pp. 52-53. Wilymat picked out James’s castigation of slanderers to versify in *A Princes Looking Glasse*, Bk. II, sts. 32-33. In *A Loyal Subjects Looking-Glasse* (London, 1604), Wilymat reiterates James’s attitude, speaking of “incorrigible felowes, these beliers, and virulent exclaimers on such as are in authority,” and who seek “to deprave their sufficiency.” He concludes: “they are worthy of death” (pp. 31-33).

<sup>25</sup> According to Anthony à Wood, Davies accompanied Lord Hunsdon to Scotland to greet James. On hearing Davies’ name, “the king straitway asked, whether he was *Nosce Teipsum?* and being answered that he was the same, he graciously embraced him.” (*Athenae Oxoniensis*, ed. Philip Bliss, London, 1815, II, 400-406.)

critic Angelo, and are an obvious bit of moralizing in context. But they are also, I think, an echo of the sense of many passages in the *Basilicon Doron*. The following two concerning virtue in high place are fairly typical of James's statements. The first has to do with what the Duke had called "pattern in himself to know":

And as your company should bee a paterne to the rest of the people, so should your person bee a lampe and mirrour to your companie: giving light to your servants to walke in the path of vertue, and representing unto them such worthie qualities, as they should preesse to imitate.<sup>26</sup>

The second of the passages from the *Basilicon Doron* is from the opening sentence of Book I, and concerns judging others by one's own behavior, what the Duke had phrased as "self-offenses weighing":

he cannot be thought worthie to rule and commaund others, that cannot rule and dantone (i. e. subdue) his owne proper affections and unreasonable appetites.

The Duke's picture of himself as something of a recluse, a man partially withdrawn from the world and given to scholarship, is a further example of Shakespeare's additions to his play from the *Basilicon Doron*. This aspect of the Duke's character reflects an uncommon and self-conscious intellectualism in a ruler that would make him, one can only suppose, additionally appealing to James. Thus at I. iii. 7-10, the Duke describes himself to the Friar as a meditative prince:

My holy sir, none better knows than you  
How I have ever lov'd the life removed  
And held in idle price to haunt assemblies  
Where youth, and cost, witless bravery keeps.

Again, in defending himself from Lucio's "unreverent speeches," and specifically from Lucio's charge that the absent Duke was "a very superficial, ignorant, unweighing fellow" (III. ii. 147), the Duke, speaking of himself in the third person, says in nettled protest:

Let him but be testimonied in his own bringings-forth, and he shall appear to the envious a scholar, a statesman, and a soldier."  
(III. ii. 152-155)

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<sup>26</sup> Pp. 83-84.

The Duke, as a scholarly, studious ruler, was no doubt very like the person Shakespeare and his contemporaries had ideally pictured the new King to be. This was true, in part, because the *Basilicon Doron*, with its running side-notes, had an air of the academy about it. In addition, James's analysis of the nature of government, in *The True Law of Free Monarchies*, would have been ample demonstration to Shakespeare and his audience that at least the King thought of himself as a scholar and statesman. Indeed, James's pride in his own "bringings-forth" was sufficiently obvious, and paid constant tribute by literate Englishmen other than Shakespeare in the opening years of the new century. William Barlow, for example, in his published report of the Hampton Court Conference (1603), had referred to the King as "a Living Library, and a walking Study."<sup>27</sup> Richard Martin, Master of the Middle Temple, in his "Speech . . . to the King" (1603), had called James a living example of Plato's philosopher-king.<sup>28</sup> Bilson, in his "Coronation Sermon," was careful to note that he spoke before a "learned King."<sup>29</sup> And Sir Richard Baker, who had been knighted by James in 1603, described him in his *Chronicle* as "next being a King, he was made to be a Scholler."<sup>30</sup>

It seems apparent, therefore, that the Duke's claims to a scholarly nature were no chance bits of dialogue in Shakespeare's first Jacobean comedy, but were rather related to a current of flattery, lapping about James, and a further effort by Shakespeare to create in this Duke a character with whom it would be pleasant for James to agree.

One cannot claim, of course, that either the Duke of Vienna or James Stuart was startlingly original in the choice of attitudes and ideas they have in common.<sup>31</sup> Nor could one assert any connection between these two on this basis were it not that the date of *Measure for Measure* coincides so nicely with that of the *Basilicon Doron*, and with James's entry into England. But this conjunction in time, it seems to me, makes it impossible to believe that

<sup>27</sup> William Barlow, Bishop of Lincoln, *The Summe and Substance of the Conference . . . in his Majesties Privy-Chamber, at Hampton Court, January 14, 1603* (i. e. 1604) (London, 1604), p. 84.

<sup>28</sup> Sig. B2<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Bilson, Bishop of Winchester, *A Sermon preached at Westminster before the King and Queenes Majesties, at their Coronations* (London, 1603) sig. C3<sup>r</sup>-sig. C3<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> *A Chronicle of the Kings of England* (London, 1648), p. 143.

<sup>31</sup> Craigie, ed., *Basilicon Doron*, II, 63-87, discusses the sources of James's ideas.

Shakespeare, just by odd luck, had enlarged on the sources of his comedy to include a Duke of Vienna who agreed with the new King not only in his dislike of the "Aves" of the crowd, but also in his concept of virtue-in-action, his irritation at the "unreverent speeches" of the common people, his insistence that a ruler should first subdue his own appetites before he attempted to subdue them in his subjects, and his wish to "appear to the envious," in his "own bringings-forth" both a scholar and a statesman. And I will end this series of parallels by noting, without further comment, the hint of Shakespeare's title for his new comedy before the King (and Duke Vincentio's repetition of it, V. i. 416) on the third from the last page of the *Basilicon Doron*, where James advises his son:

And above all, let the measure of your love to every one, be according to the measure of his vertue (p. 152).

Further evidence of the role of James I in *Measure for Measure* is more general and less specifically related to the character of the Duke. It comes from the fact that in so far as this play turns from the personal problems of Angelo and Isabella to concern itself with problems in governing, it deals with ones which had an obvious interest to the new King (and therefore to Shakespeare's audience). Thus the thematic question in *Measure for Measure*, as to the proper relationship between mercy and justice, was one in which James had displayed considerable public interest in the years 1603-1604. This interest is demonstrable both in James's theoretical analysis of this relationship in the *Basilicon Doron*, and in his demonstration of his theories in action, in his journey from Edinburgh to London to take the throne.

In Book II of the *Basilicon Doron*, "Of a Kings Dutie in his Office," James had argued a temperate point of view toward the letter of the law from which Angelo's behavior, in attempting to enforce immoderate justice against Claudio, would have seemed both tyrannous and revolting. James had summarized: "use Justice, but with such moderation, as it turne not in Tyrannie: otherwaies *summum ius, is summa iniuria*."<sup>32</sup> Further, Angelo was not using the kind of judgment which should accompany absolute power. In picking out the statute against fornication to enforce literally, he ran counter to James's basic premise that

<sup>32</sup> *Basilicon Doron*, p. 85.

statutory laws “are ordained as rules of vertuous and social living, and not to be snares to trap your good subjects: and therefore the law must bee interpreted . . . not to the literall sense thereof. *Nam ratio est anima legis.*”<sup>33</sup> One is therefore tempted to think that if Shakespeare had created a Duke to seem particularly appealing to James, Angelo as Deputy, in James’s phrase tyrannically “counterfeiting the Sainte”<sup>34</sup> in his use of statutory law as a snare to trap a good subject, was created to seem particularly evil.

In his journey to London in 1603, moreover, James had actually put theory into action. As the new King, he publicly dramatized a personal interpretation of the ageless conflict between mercy and justice, choosing an incident which had occurred on the way as a kind of case in point. As carefully reported in the anonymous *The True Narration*, a cut-purse was taken “doing the deed” at the King’s temporary court, at “New-warke upon Trent,” April 21, 1603. The King saw his chance to demonstrate his theories, and, abruptly:

his Majestie . . . directed a Warrant, presently . . . to have him hanged. . . . The King ere he went from New-warke, as hee had commanded this Silken base theefe, in justice to bee put to death, so in his beninge and gracious mercie, he gives life to all the other poore and wretched prisioners, clearing the Castle of them al.<sup>35</sup>

The wide-spread public interest in this assertion first of justice, and then of mercy, was indicated not only by its inclusion in the pamphlet *The True Narration*, but also by its impact on Sir John Harington, for example. Harington, recording his reactions in his “Breefe Notes and Remembraunces,” makes a more than usually acid comment on James’s little demonstration.<sup>36</sup> And Sir Richard Baker, looking back on James’s reign, recorded the King’s action at New-warke as one of some moment, noting the irony that this

<sup>33</sup> *Basilicon Doron*, p. 86.

<sup>34</sup> *Basilicon Doron*, p. 25. Cf. James’s further statement, p. 29: “And as for the execution of good lawes, whereat I left, remember that among the differences that I put betwixt the formes of government of a good King, and an usurping Tyrant; I shew how a Tyrant would enter like a Saint while hee found himselfe fast under-foote, and then would suffer his unrulie affections to burst forth.”

<sup>35</sup> *True Narration*, sig. E1<sup>v</sup>-E2<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>36</sup> *Nugae Antiquae*, 2 Vols., Selected by Henry Harington (London, 1804), I, 180: “I heare our new Kynge hathe hangede one man before he was tryede; ’tis strangely done: now if the wynde blowethe thus, why may not a man be tryed before he hathe offended?”

“unseasonable delinquent . . . would force the K.[ing] to commit Justice at a time when hee intended nothing but mercy.”<sup>87</sup> I think the incident but one more of the many curious parallels in time between James’s expressed ideas and publicly known behavior,<sup>88</sup> and the thematic ideas used by Shakespeare in *Measure for Measure*.

Another of the problems of governing which Shakespeare dramatized in *Measure for Measure*, is less directly central to the structure of the play than that of mortality and mercy. It is concerned with the plight of a ruler (Duke Vincentio) who has allowed the “strict statutes” of the law to go unenforced for “fourteen years.” After such a lapse, the Duke explains to Friar Thomas, the statutes are

. . . more mock’d than fear’d; so our decrees,  
Dead to infliction, to themselves are dead,  
And liberty plucks justice by the nose. (I. iii. 27-29)

The Duke remarks, further, that

Sith ’twas my fault to give the people scope,  
’Twould be my tyranny to strike and gall them.  
(I. iii. 35-36)

This specific problem raised by the Duke as to when a ruler should be strict and when lenient was also intended to interest James, I think, as he had discussed this difficulty, and had suggested a solution to it, in the *Basilicon Doron*. James confesses that he himself had thought, at the start of his rule in Scotland, “(by being gracious at the beginning) to winne all mens hearts to a loving and willing obedience.” However, he complains that his theory went awry, and that his excessive mercy achieved “the disorder of the countrie, and the losse of my thankes to be all my reward.” He therefore advises his son that when he becomes king, he begin by punishing without clemency all infractions of the law. This is to let his people know that “yee can strike, then may yee thereafter all the dayes of your life mixe justice with mercie.”

<sup>87</sup> *Chronicle*, p. 122.

<sup>88</sup> Chapman’s estimate of James’s interest in justice and mercy is implicit in the letter Chapman wrote the King in 1605, pleading forgiveness for *Eastward Hoe*. Chapman appeals to James’s “most Cesar-like Bountie (who Conquerd still to spare the Conquerd: and was glad of offences that he might forgive).” (*Letter Book*, Folger Library ms. No. 420423 fol. 88<sup>r</sup>; see also *Athenaeum*, March 30, 1901, p. 403).

But if (like the scholarly Duke of Vienna) he should exercise “clemencie at the first,” the offenses

would soone come to such heapes, and the contempt of you growe so great, that when yee would fall to punish, the number of them to be punished would exceede the innocent . . . and against your nature would bee compelled then to wracke manie whome chastisement of few in the beginning might have preserved.<sup>39</sup>

A result of Shakespeare’s attempt to reflect in *Measure for Measure* the various ways in which James reacted to statutory law may help explain one curious lapse in the dramatic structure of the play. The Duke, having turned power over to Angelo so that old laws might be enforced once more, thereafter seems to lose all interest in this particular issue, and it is not referred to at all in the long denouement of Act V. I think it more than coincidence that just as the Duke lets go the stated problem of law enforcement which motivates his departure from Vienna, and becomes completely fascinated by the behavior of Angelo, his deputy, so James in *his* writings on government, though he discusses the need to enforce statutory law, seems to be as casually indifferent as Duke Vincentio to the results of such enforcement. He advises his son: “remit everie thing to the ordinarie judicature, for eschewing of confusion: but let it bee your owne craft, to take a sharpe account of every man in his office.”<sup>40</sup>

The similarity between the Duke’s and James’s somewhat cosmic attitude toward statutory law is based upon the fact that both had declared themselves above, and somewhat apart from it. The Duke makes his position clear in turning power over to Angelo:

Your scope is as mine own,  
So to enforce or qualify the laws  
As to your soul seems good. (I. i. 65-67)

This is a fairly terse rendering of James’s own widely publicized position in regard to the powers of a divine right king. In *The True Law of Free Monarchies*, for example, James’s summary of these powers is a detailed statement of Duke Vincentio’s generalities. James argues that a ruler ought to be tolerant of the law, but that he is under a personal obligation to qualify it as circumstances vary:

<sup>39</sup> Pp. 30-31. Willymat elects to versify these ideas, *A Princes Looking Glasse*, Bk. II, st. 8.

<sup>40</sup> *Basilicon Doron*, p. 92.

the King is above the Law, as both the author, and giver of strength thereto. . . . And where he sees the law doubt-some or rigorous, he may interpret or mittigate the same: least otherwise *Summa ius* be *Summam iniuria*. . . . And therefore general lawes, made publikely in Parliament, may, upon knowne respectes to the King, by his authoritie be mittigated, and suspended upon causes onely knowne to him.<sup>41</sup>

A final piece of evidence that James I's predilections were mirrored by Shakespeare in *Measure for Measure* lies in the fact that the Duke is never more like James's concept of a king than in his bland assumption of his personal right to interfere in the lives of all subordinate persons. The Duke's arranging for Mariana's assignation, his concealment of the fact that Claudio is alive, his willingness to play a monk even to the point of hearing confessions of people about to die, was all very Jamesian. The role of the king, as pictured in the *Basilicon Doron*, was that of a "naturall father and kindly maister"<sup>42</sup> of his subjects. In *The True Law of Free Monarchies*, James had stated that a king was literally "a Judge set by God over them [the people],"<sup>43</sup> having "power over the life, and death of every one of them."<sup>44</sup> And everywhere in his writings James assumes his right, as King, to take on himself not only secular power but also any religious power he wishes, remarking in one passage to his son that "ruling them [i. e. the clergy] well, is no small point of your office."<sup>45</sup>

It is a Stuart divine-right Duke who looks on Angelo's evil deeds "like power divine,"<sup>46</sup> and who plays the Stuart role of an earthly God in the fifth act, keeping the truth from everyone until it suits his personal whim that it should be known. This

<sup>41</sup> *True Lawe of Free Monarchies*, sig. D<sup>v</sup>. Cf. Bilson's flattering repetition of this concept, "what private men may not touch without Theft and Murder, that Princes may lawfully dispose, as Gods Ministers" ("Coronation Sermon," sig. B4<sup>v</sup>).

<sup>42</sup> P. 25.

<sup>43</sup> Sig. C5<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>44</sup> Sig. D<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>45</sup> *Basilicon Doron*, p. 89. Cf. James's reply to Knewstubs, as reported by Barlow, *The Summe and Substance*, p. 70: "I will have one doctrine and one discipline, one Religion, in substance, and in ceremony: & therefore I charge you, never speake more to that point, (how farre you are bound to obey?)." Cf. Bilson, "Coronation Sermon," sig. B5<sup>r</sup>-B5<sup>v</sup>: "They (princes) are Fathers by Gods Law, that have or should have fatherly care over us, whether it be to ayde us in the things of this life, as masters and teachers; or to guide us the true way to heaven, as pastors and ministers . . ."

<sup>46</sup> Barlow reports James as identifying himself with Christ at the Hampton Court Conference: "I may say of my selfe, as Christ did of himself: Though I lived among them . . . I was never of them" (*The Summe and Substance*, p. 74).

autocratic quality in the Duke, indeed, has led Robert G. Shedd to point out (appropriately, I think) that the Duke's behavior resembles that of James himself when he decided to play with the lives of the men connected with the Raleigh conspiracy (1603).<sup>47</sup> For a contemporary's account of James's God-like teasing of these men, I quote from Baker's *Chronicle*:

. . . this was the course which the K.[ing] held in shewing mercy. After the death of the three before named he signed three other warrants for the execution of the late L. Cobham, the Lord Grey, and Sir Griffin Markeham, on a certain day then following; but before that day came he privately framed another warrant, written with his own hand to the Sheriffe; (who was then Sir Benjamin Tichburne,) by which he countermanded the former Warrants: and that there might be no notice taken of it: he sent it by Mr. John Gybbe . . . one utterly unknown to all the company, appointing him to deliver it so, that it might not take effect, til after their severall confessions, and at the very point of their Execution, which was accordingly performed: At which time, it was a wonderful thing to see how the Delinquents falling on their knees, lamented their misdoings, and most of all how they extolled the Kings unspeakable mercy.<sup>48</sup>

Sir Richard Baker's account reminds one not only of the Duke's James-like detachment as he looked upon Angelo's evil deeds, but his equal detachment in keeping Isabella "ignorant of her good/ To make her heavenly comforts of despair/ When it is least expected" (IV. iii. 113-115). Whether Shakespeare was aware of James's toying with the Raleigh conspirators or not, he apparently had sufficient insight into the new King's personality to create in the Duke of Vienna a character who could play with

<sup>47</sup> "The *Measure for Measure* of Shakespeare's 1604 Audience" (University of Michigan Dissertation, Microfilm, 1953), pp. 172 ff.

<sup>48</sup> *Chronicle*, pp. 125-126.

Cf. Sir Dudley Carlton's description, quoted on Lucy Aikin, *Memoirs of The Court of King James the First*, 2 Vols. (London, 1822), I, 174:

"So as Grey and Markham, being brought back to the scaffold, as they then were . . . looked strange one upon the other, like men beheaded and met again in the other world. Now all the actors being together on the stage (as use is at the end of a play), the sheriff made a short speech unto them, by way of interrogatory of the heinousness of their offences, the justness of their trials, their lawful condemnation and due execution there to be performed, to all which they assented; then saith the sheriff, 'See the mercy of your prince, who, of himself, hath sent hither a countermand and given you your lives.' There was no need to beg a *plaudite* of the audience, for it was given with such hues and cries, that it went from the castle into the town."

James's actual letter of clemency is quoted in William Sanderson, *History of Mary, Queen of Scotland And of Her Son and Successor James* (London, 1656), pp. 287-288.

mercy after the fashion of James for a full act. And Shakespeare must have hoped that here, too, the Duke would seem especially timely to his Jacobean audience, and especially understandable to the King.

There are obvious conclusions to be drawn from this exploration of the role of James I in *Measure for Measure*. When the evidence is examined with care, the new King's distaste for the "untaught love" of unmannerly crowds is seen to be demonstrably called attention to, and flattered, by Shakespeare in this play. Moreover, Duke Vincentio, though he has been variously identified by contemporary scholars as a stock character in Jacobean comedy<sup>49</sup> and as a forbear of Prospero, in *The Tempest*,<sup>50</sup> is also, and much more importantly, seen to be the figure of a Renaissance prince and autocrat, willfully Jamesian in his views of himself and in his attitudes towards affairs of state. One is therefore forced to conclude that Shakespeare's intentions were fairly deliberate, that he created in the Duke a character whose acts and whose theories of government would be interesting to the new age and its new King because they were so carefully like ones which the King had identified as his own. Negatively, indeed, it would be difficult to find *any* comment in this play concerning the "properties" of government and "sufficiency" in office which did not agree rather narrowly with James's personal convictions as of 1603-1604. And Shakespeare, we may infer, was as anxiously (if more subtly) courting James I with *Measure for Measure* as was a Bilson, for example, in his flattering repetition of James's opinions in his "Coronation Sermon," or as was a Barlow in his flattering portrait of James's role in the Hampton Court Conference.

These conclusions explain why Shakespeare added a rich background of political action and theorizing to a comedy in which the personal moral problems of Isabella and Angelo are the dramatic center. Moreover, I should like to argue that such literary history as that concerning James's role in *Measure for Measure* is more than just interesting and casual extrinsic information. It does not radically alter our sense of the inherent dramatic design and structure of the play, to be sure. But it

<sup>49</sup> Oscar James Campbell, *Shakespeare's Satire* (New York, 1943), p. 127.

<sup>50</sup> Harold S. Wilson, "Action and Symbol in *Measure for Measure* and *The Tempest*," *SQ*, IV (Oct. 1953), 375-384.

usefully enlarges the possible time context in which the play can exist for us. It gives us a kind of double vision, an awareness of the play today, and of the elements still inextricably and importantly a part of it which have, at the same time, lost the sharp edge of early seventeenth century implication. *Measure for Measure*, viewed in this way, is seen to reflect the first moments of a changing political order. It is a striking demonstration in drama of the fact that in 1604 the romantic world of Belpheobe and Amoret, of Leicester and of Essex, was quite dead, and that the Jacobean era of self-conscious theorizing and attitudinizing was at hand. James had published his sketches of the emotional and intellectual boundaries of his new, and less durable, world of divine-right rectitude, and Shakespeare, though no doubt primarily concerned with realizing a play, had caught some of the essence of this new, Jamesian world in *Measure for Measure*.

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