

wrote Fuller this description of it: "I was content & happy to meet on a human footing a woman of sense & sentiment with whom one could exchange reasonable words & go away assured that wherever she went there was light & force & honour" (*Letters* 2:352). Emerson's view is complimentary, surely, but also somewhat cold, as Fuller would have recognized. Later in the same letter he says, "There is a difference in our constitution. We use a different rhetoric[.] It seems as if we had been born & bred in different nations. You say you understand me wholly. You cannot communicate yourself to me. I hear the words sometimes but remain a stranger to your state of mind" (*Letters* 2:353). This perception was what I meant when I described Emerson and Fuller as "victims of temperament." Certainly much more needs to be said about their relation, especially about Fuller's influence on Emerson, but that was not my concern in this essay.

The phrase a "state of outrage" does not accurately describe Emerson's mood in preparing the *Memoirs*. He indeed wrote Carlyle after Fuller's death that "Her marriage would have taken her away from us all, & there was a subsistence yet to be secured, & diminished powers, & old age" (*Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle* 462; italics mine). This is hardly a lover's lament or jealous rage. Emerson never ceased to value Fuller's friendship and her intellectual example, but he was more emotionally distant from Fuller, despite his genuine regard for her, than Urbanski implies.

That Fuller's writing has suffered from a lack of objectivity in the past, and that Emerson underestimated her genius, is true. While we cannot hope for uniformity of opinion about her, I hope and feel that such objectivity is beginning to emerge, much to the benefit of Fuller's reputation.

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Measure for Measure

To the Editor:

I couldn't agree more with Louise Schleiner's balanced reading of Shakespeare's most theologically impregnated play, *Measure for Measure* ("Providential Improvisation in *Measure for Measure*," *PMLA* 97[1982]:227–36), in which the duke's role as *imitatio dei* is undermined comically (but never degraded grotesquely) at almost every crucial turn by the play's counterinsistence on an invincible natural instinct. So persuasive is Schleiner's interpretation that it is odd to find her, three

quarters of the way through her essay (233), doubting the ability of Shakespeare's audience to see the irony she has seen in Shakespeare's presentation of the duke's performance, as though the cogency of her argument has no real basis in the play's affective life in the theater. Even odder when we consider that such an audience was so much closer than we to the *realities* of those measure for measure antitheses that make up the play's dialectic; odder still when even a modern audience can hardly fail to notice the broadness in theatrical terms of some of the "subtle ironies in this treatment of the ruler as imitator of God in judgment and mercy" (233).

One such "subtle irony" concerning the ruler's judgment is a variation on a timeworn vaudeville routine of dashed expectations, in which duke and provost combine to set the duke up for the inevitable pratfall. In this sequence, the duke asks if the provost has received from Angelo the "countermand" to Claudio's execution. He then confidently predicts that the provost soon will: "As near to dawning, provost, as it is / You shall hear more ere morning" (4.2.89–90). The provost demurs, though he acknowledges the friar may "something know" (line 91). At this point Angelo's messenger enters. However pointedly inflected, all the duke then says is, "This is his lordship's man" (96). It is the provost—convinced, presumably, by part of the prediction having come true—who leaps to the wrong conclusion: "And here comes Claudio's pardon" (97). While the provost silently scans the offending document, the duke seizes the opportunity to moralize in rhymed sententiae on the foregone collusion between Angelo and Claudio. Inevitably—after such a buildup—the letter merely reaffirms Angelo's original intention to do away with Claudio, only sooner. What *is* subtle—and comic—is the duke's response to the provost's "What say you to this, sir?" He replies (blandly? hurriedly? remotely?), "What is that Barnardine who is to be executed in th' afternoon?" (123–25). And that's that. The whole sequence is very funny, but despite the duke's evasiveness the joke is obviously on him.

Shakespeare's plays are in any case frequently concerned with characters like the duke in *Measure for Measure* who disguise their natures or their persons in order to circulate freely among an often irreverent, ribald populace. None of them gets much pleasure out of the activity—not even Hal, pace the sentimentalists' version of his friendship with Falstaff. Coriolanus loathes having to put on the "napless vesture of humility" (2.1.223) in order to beg the people's stinking breath. Even Shakespeare's noble women court disaster when they are forced to walk down mean streets—or in the savage

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-