



Rewarding Learning

eGUIDE//English Literature

Shakespearean Genres

Unit A2 1

Measure for Measure

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Starting Point

In this unit there are 5 Assessment Objectives involved – A01, A02, A03, A04 and A05.

A01: Textual knowledge and understanding, and communication

In this examination, the candidate should be able to articulate informed and relevant responses that communicate effectively knowledge and understanding of the selected play.

This Assessment Objective (AO) involves the student's knowledge and understanding of the play, and ability to express relevant ideas accurately and coherently, using appropriate terminology and concepts. Quality of written communication is taken into consideration in all units.

A02: Dramatic methods

In this examination, the candidate should analyse Shakespeare's use of such dramatic methods as characterisation, structure, language and staging.

The student should analyse relevantly the ways in which meanings are shaped in plays. This means identifying dramatic features and showing how these features relate to the key terms of the question.

Discussing dramatic methods – advice to teachers and students:

In this component, equal marks are available for the candidate's treatment of the extract and other relevant parts of the text. As the unit is closed book, examiners will be realistic about the amount of detail from the wider text which can be provided in the time available. Every play has its memorable phrases which come to mind when writing, but it is anticipated that the larger-scale features of form, structure, language and staging will be helpful in constructing a relevant response. The student will, however, be expected to respond in a more detailed fashion to the use of language and dramatic methods within the given extract. A reminder of the process of identification (of methods), illustration, analysis, and relation to the question may be timely.

A03: Contexts

In this examination, the candidate should demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which a play is written and received by drawing on appropriate information from outside the play.

Each question will specify a particular type of context in the stimulus statement/directive. In this unit the stipulated context will be literary and will focus on the nature of a particular Shakespearean genre. Contextual information offered should be of this stipulated type. It should be relevant to the question. And it should be external to the play itself.



Contextual information which is made relevant to the key terms of the question will be rewarded. Students should be aware that little credit can be given for contextual information that is introduced merely for its own sake. They should remember that the text has primacy over the context. A good response will use contextual information sparingly and judiciously.

A04: Connections

In this examination, the candidate should explore connections within a Shakespeare play, and between the extract accompanying the question and the wider text.

The student should explore similarities and differences between characters, plot lines, themes, staging, and other dramatic techniques within the play and its wider context. Significant, pointed connections which are made relevant to the key terms of the question will be rewarded.

A05: Argument and interpretation

In this examination, the candidate should offer opinion or judgment in response to the given reading of the play, taking account of the key terms as the basis of the argument.

This AO is the driver of Unit A2 1 and is of primary importance.

A05 can be satisfied in full by the candidate developing his/her own reading in response to the given reading. If, however, critics are used, they must be

- used with understanding
- incorporated into the argument to reinforce or be seen as an alternative to the student's opinion
- not used as a substitute for the development of the student's own opinion
- properly acknowledged.

Coherence and relevance of argument will be rewarded. Students should be aware of the importance of planning in the sequencing and illustration of the reading they wish to put forward. They should also beware of the danger of replacing the key terms of the question with others of their own choosing which they assume mean much the same thing.

The following information is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive, but is intended as a starting point for teachers and students. It reflects some of the stylistic and contextual issues which may be explored and developed further both in the classroom and through teachers' and students' own independent research.



Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that there is no obvious or straightforward interpretation of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*. Death is threatened but does not occur; there are elements of comedy, tragedy and even romance; the ending can look like a happy conclusion from one angle and a troubling lack of resolution from another. This may be a challenge for potential directors, but for students it is an opportunity. *Measure for Measure* offers you great scope to explore multiple readings of potentially equal validity and to show in-depth knowledge and critical analysis.

A01 Plot, Characters, Themes

Plot Summary

The Duke of Venice, concerned about moral standards in the city, allows his puritanical deputy Angelo to take over and disguises himself to observe. Angelo condemns Claudio to death for fornication; his sister Isabella pleads for his life and Angelo offers leniency if she will sleep with him. Devout, chaste and about to enter a convent, Isabella is horrified and refuses, even when her brother recants his earlier support for her stance and begs her to save him. Disguised as a Friar, the Duke arranges a 'bed trick' in which Isabella consents to Angelo's terms but unknown to him sends Mariana, Angelo's former fiancée, in her place.

Characters

It can be argued that some of the characters seem to be simplified, with the personalities and actions informed by the plot rather than by their real feelings. On the other hand, many of them face difficult choices.

Character	Attributes
The Duke, Vincentio	Generally seen as a good and kind-hearted ruler who is too lenient in administering his city but wants to be better; some argue he is also deceptive, and cruel to pretend to Isabella that Claudio is dead.
Angelo	Puritanical, devout, stringent, rigid, inflexible; hypocritical, lustful and manipulative when he deals with Isabella. Surprised by his lustful feelings and described by Stewart as a "sincere self-deceiver", he lacks self-knowledge, but ultimately he learns from the experience and we may feel some sympathy for him.
Claudio	May be seen as somewhat weak or cowardly, but ultimately a sympathetic figure who does not deserve his cruel sentence. Loving and committed to Juliet.
Isabella	Devout, chaste, virtuous, rigid, inflexible in matters of her religion which gives her a certain amount of confidence in her speech and action. She has some family loyalty, pleading for her brother's life even as she abhors his sinful ways, but some see her as cold and unfeeling in her treatment of Claudio. Ultimately forgiving and sympathetic. The ending makes us wonder if she will fulfil her dream of becoming a nun or will be persuaded, even coerced, to marry the Duke.



Mariana	Devoted to Angelo despite his rejection of her, she is a forgiving person.
Escalus	An older counsellor who is wise and loyal to the Duke, he understands the problems of administering justice but lacks the status to stand up to Angelo.
Pompey	Pompey is a clown and something of a rogue, used as comic relief. He works with the brothel keeper Mistress Overdone; lower class status than the main characters.
Elbow	Dim-witted, often speaking in malapropisms for comic effect. A constable; he is quite self-righteous and solemn; he takes his duties seriously but is exasperated by them.
Lucio	Described in the Dramatic Personae as a 'fantastic', Lucio is a courtier, a philanderer and a liar who nonetheless tries to help Claudio by seeking Isabella's help. He is slippery, self-serving and often comically talkative in inappropriate situations.

Themes

Justice – whether it is fair and right for Claudio to be condemned; issues of what 'justice' really means or is, how it can be properly administered in any society, and who in a world of sinners is fit to judge the sins of others.

Mercy – the role of mercy in religion and as a counterbalance to power; the extent to which it is right to show mercy to those who have sinned, knowingly or otherwise.

Forgiveness – the role of forgiving as a central message of Christianity, as a personal challenge for the 'sinned-against' and as an agent of healing at the end to enable characters to 'grow'.

Governance – the role of the ruler and of the law in society; the differences between law and religion; what aspects of public and private life can be legislated for and enforced; how power affects those who have it; how citizens should be treated and what qualities make a good governor.

Hypocrisy – discrepancies between Angelo's thoughts, words and deeds and how these manifest themselves; the linked idea of deception or 'seeming' (a major theme in Shakespeare) and its implications in a supposedly religious society; the hypocrisy of society at large (e.g. the anonymous state official who funds the relocation of the brothels) and in some interpretations of the play, the Duke himself.

Sin – the perceived hierarchy of sins in an imperfect world; the motivations and temptations afflicting characters; the differences between sinning and lawbreaking; whether committing or condoning a sin can ever be 'right'; the grey areas between actively sinning and complacently accepting/refusing to acknowledge the sins of others.

Repentance – the 'flipside' of forgiveness; nearly all are forgiven at the end but repentance is different, and its presence (e.g. Angelo) or absence (e.g. Lucio) impacts on our understanding of character development.



A02 Dramatic Methods

Character Development

Many of the characters experience no change or development throughout the play, but we can argue that Isabella, Angelo and the Duke at least progress throughout and are changed by the end. At first Isabella is rigid in her beliefs but by the end she has learned to show more mercy and forgiveness towards others. Angelo likewise has learned the benefits of clemency – he may have the strength of character to ask for death when he is revealed to have committed the crime for which he condemned Claudio, which at least shows some attempt to overcome his hypocrisy and live by the rules he prized, but nonetheless the Duke notes that when Angelo is forgiven and ‘Perceives he’s safe’ there is a ‘quickening in his eye’ which could be a shifty look or even tears of relief.

The Duke is the hardest to gauge in terms of character development, partly because we cannot be sure of his motives in the first place. On the one hand he says Angelo will be better than he at ‘playing the bad cop’ and imposing strict justice on the licentiousness of Venice, but he may have an ulterior motive. The closing lines of Act One scene Three, in which he speaks of Angelo’s self-denying character and says ‘Hence we shall see/ If power change purpose, what our seemers be’ could suggest that he suspects Angelo of ‘seeming’ or being somehow deceptive, and that the whole thing is a set-up to test his deputy’s integrity. In Act Three when discussing the loss of Mariana’s dowry at sea, the Duke (in disguise) refers to him as ‘this well-seeming Angelo’, which in the context may both give weight to his idea of Angelo as deceptive and also convey some disapproval of his conduct.

The Disguised Ruler

This isn’t a generic convention, but was nonetheless a recognisable feature of some Elizabethan and Jacobean dramas as well as many folk-tales. Shakespeare himself had used it in *Henry V*, written around 1599, when he showed King Henry in disguise moving through his camp and asking soldiers what they thought of the King. The Duke’s disguise is central to the plot of *Measure for Measure* and allows him to gain further understanding and maintain a degree of control over the other characters throughout.

The Bed Trick

The ‘bed trick’ was another recognisable feature of dramas at this time (as was the ‘head trick’, in which the severed head of another person was produced to fool characters into thinking someone had been executed offstage; this is also used in *Measure for Measure* when the pirate’s head is substituted for Claudio’s). These ‘tricks’ can be hard for modern audiences to stomach as they seem so ludicrous, though they were understood as dramatic conventions by the audiences of the past. Some critics find the inclusion of the bed trick here by Shakespeare to be corny and insubstantial. Others point out that it



is a necessary plot device to preserve both Claudio's life and Isabella's virtue as well as compromising Angelo, and reaffirm that audiences of the time would have accepted the trick as such and not found it unlikely or ridiculous. Isabella's willingness to go along with it is also a problematic factor for some readers, but it can be read as consistent with her character if we consider factors such as the trust she places in the friar as a religious man - agreeing to the trick because it is his idea.

Settings

The mix of 'high' and 'low' characters and the plot require a variety of locations in the play – we are transported from court to prison and from the nunnery to the city's streets. The contrasts inherent in these locations enhance the meaning of the play – they enable the audience to see that both sin and virtue can be found everywhere for example, and perhaps underline the message of humanity that seems to lie at the heart of the play.

Whether they were performing at court or at a theatre like the Globe, actors had limited resources with which to evoke setting (no artificial lighting or elaborate painted backdrops, for example) and so Shakespeare often includes clues as to the setting of a scene in the lines spoken by a character (e.g. references to the city gates in the final scenes, used to compound the Duke's deception in making it seem that he has just arrived from an absence). Other settings are made apparent more implicitly by the actions which take place there, such as the court hearing run by Escalus.

Take note of the meanings that settings may impart to the scenes taking place there, and how these relate to the play at large. In an extension of the religious imagery used throughout, for example, Angelo chooses as the scene of his great transgression not a typical bedroom but a small summerhouse in the grounds of his estate; his Fall from Grace will occur in a garden, just as it did for Adam and Eve, the first human sinners.

Structure

Inconsistency is a charge often levelled at *Measure for Measure* and not without cause. Tillyard and other critics believe that much of the problem stems from Shakespeare's choice to deviate from the source material such as Whetstone's *Promos and Cassandra*. It makes Isabella in particular a more interesting character but leaves Shakespeare with a trickier job at the end in coming to a convincing conclusion. Seemingly the playwright's desire to make the characters' motivations and actions more believable has an impact on the structure, making it more convoluted and resulting in an ending that is not particularly neat or appropriate for several of the characters.

Viewed from a different angle, the whole play and its characters (both those who remain true to themselves and those whose integrity is compromised) are actually a kind of puppet show orchestrated by the Duke. His decision to retire from duty for a while sets in motion the events of the play and he is the one who imposes his will on everyone at the end, demanding they all marry and be happy. He manipulates characters throughout, and if his goal really was to see law imposed more fairly in his city it is almost certain that nothing positive was achieved in this direction. The Duke is an agent of action and therefore plays an important role in the structure of the play, especially his 'forced' resolution, which some critics have seen as a deeply cynical finale. The feeling of it being a 'play of two halves' is further compounded by the switch in writing style from mostly



verse towards a greater representation of prose after Act Three scene One (after Isabella turns her back on Claudio and the Duke steps in to intervene), a significant stylistic shift. Some point to this as evidence that the play was heavily rewritten by Middleton or other playwrights during the almost twenty-year hiatus between performance and publication, but most concur that the version of the play we have is largely as Shakespeare wrote it. So, a 'problem play' indeed. Try to look at what shapes the structure (particularly in terms of the consistency and motives of the characters and their subsequent choices), places where events seem unlikely and the possible reasons for these, and the problematic ending, which requires close study and an examination of the alternative interpretations of Isabella's silence in the face of the Duke's proposal.

Language

Shakespeare's use of language to convey character and heighten emotion is the key to his longevity and enduring appeal; it is skilful and demands close attention. What follows here is a starting point from which to extend and enhance your own study.

Some key elements of the imagery employed throughout *Measure for Measure* are:

Mercy - this key theme is referred to on several occasions. The Duke tells Escalus that 'Mortality and mercy in Vienna/Live in thy tongue and heart' and in Act Four muses to himself that 'When vice makes mercy, mercy's so extended,/ That for the fault's love is the offender friended'. Escalus laments on hearing of Claudio's plight that 'Mercy is not itself, that oft looks so'. Isabella refers to mercy many times starting with her pleas to Angelo, though it is noticeable that her mentions of the word grow less confident as time goes on; having named mercy the most gracious of traits a ruler can have, she is later forced to indignantly point out that 'lawful mercy/ Is nothing kin to foul redemption' and she calls Angelo's proposition a 'devilish mercy'. When Claudio asks her to save him regardless, she reveals the full extent of her disgust – 'Mercy to thee would prove itself a bawd: / 'Tis best thou diest quickly' – and never mentions the virtue again.

Sickness and the body – there is a notable repetition of the word 'remedy' with regard to Claudio's situation. Numerous characters ask if there can be 'no remedy?' that would relieve his situation; in Act Two scene Two Angelo answers Isabella's pleas with a curt 'Maiden, no remedy'. The Duke Vincentio presents himself as the solution to Isabella's troubles, informing her while in disguise as the Friar that 'to the love I have in doing good a remedy presents itself' (Act Three scene One). Isabella flatters Angelo that noble authority is 'a kind of medicine in itself'. Lucio and others speak of sexually transmitted diseases (where moral vice results in physical disease); Isabella refers to how a soul can 'sicken', implying that to her the spirit is every bit as real as the body; Escalus talks of small cuts as a means to enforce the law rather than to 'fall, and bruise to death'. In other bodily references, Angelo's austere nature is conveyed by equating his corporeal blood to 'snow-broth'. Having been struck by Isabella, Angelo's own language shifts from conceptual references to offence and condemnation (Act Two scene Two) to a more sensual register (Act Two scene Four), musing on his mouth, tongue, heart and blood. Later, when Mariana unveils herself in court to a shocked Angelo, she speaks of herself to him as a series of body parts – the face he looked on, the hand he held and so on.

Nature – Renaissance audiences believed in a divine order of the world, and playwrights often reflected calamitous occurrences in their dramas with a sort of pathetic fallacy in which the natural world reflected turmoil because a character had gone against nature



(horses eating each other after Macbeth kills the rightful king, for example). Isabella uses natural imagery of thunder, trees, and apes to lend weight to her argument as she pleads for her brother's life; she also alludes to the natural hierarchies to which the audience would be accustomed, comparing behaviours of great men and saints, soldiers and captains. Angelo's own use of 'nature' imagery, after she has departed, is extremely striking. He compares her to a flower and himself to an animal corpse; in their natural states of sitting side by side in the sun, she will blossom and give delight while he will be made more foul and rotten by the same situation: 'it is I/ That, lying by the violet in the sun,/ Do as the carrion does, not as the flower,/ Corrupt with virtuous season.' Claudio's sombre consideration of death mentions ice, floods and wind, all harsh and powerful forces of nature that cannot be resisted.

Means of control – Angelo speaks of a scarecrow in an allusion to the law, implying he believes people should fear the law and not become accustomed to it (such as when the scarecrow becomes a mere 'perch'). Other means of control to which characters allude include Isabella's reference to a 'giant's strength'; the Duke's explanatory speech which refers to 'threatening twigs of birch', commonly used for spanking children and 'bits and curbs', elements of tack to control a ridden or driven horse; the 'sword of heaven', which implies both divine righteousness and the threat of violent punishment. Even Escalus, the most fair-minded of the courtiers, threatens Pompey with a whip if he breaks the law again and calls for the Duke-as-Friar to be taken to the rack in the last scene before his true identity is revealed.

Money – for a religious man, Angelo seems to place much store in money and status, and his language contains both straightforward and implied references to money and coinage. He implores the Duke: 'Let there be some more test made of my metal' – metal here being aligned with mettle/temperament and a sign that he equates his value as a servant of the kingdom on some level with material and monetary value. He phrases his proposition to Isabella in several ways, but at one point decrees that she 'lay down the treasures of [her] body', again equating pleasure with money. In contrast, Isabella makes it clear that she prizes most the gifts of heaven, rhapsodizing that a merciful Angelo would be rewarded 'Not with fond shekels of the tested gold,/ Or stones whose rates are either rich or poor/ As fancy values them; but with true prayers' (Act Two scene Two).

Marriage/Relationships – the Duke asks of Mariana in Act Five: 'Why, you are nothing then: neither maid, widow, nor wife?' underscoring the predicament of her unfulfilled marriage contract – she is without status and less than a full person. The status of marriage is an uneasy one in this play: some desire it; Claudio's life is threatened by it; it is imposed upon Angelo and Lucio in a strange mix of punishment and salvation, and Lucio complains right to the end of the play about this; it is offered as a prize by the Duke to Isabella, who has until at least this point in the play avoided it.

Much of the Duke's language in referring to his subjects evokes a parent/child relationship – he speaks of 'fond fathers' who cannot or do not spank their children, and highlights the unnatural state of things by comparing licentious Venice to a situation in which 'The baby beats the nurse'. Isabella wants to be a 'Sister' of the Church, but her wish is compromised by the fact she is also a sister to Claudio; she mentions both their parents when chastising Claudio, saying he sounded like their father from beyond the grave. Compare her statement: 'We cannot weigh our brother with ourself' with Juliet's own self-referential response when asked if she loves Claudio: 'Yes, as I love the woman that wrong'd him.'

There are also numerous references to **imagery** related to *truth and lies, goodness and sin, religion, crime and justice*.



Bear in mind, too, the implied values of the power of language itself. After all, Claudio believes Isabella's arguments can literally save his life. Note the rhetoric and imagery that prefigure major decisions by Angelo (who muses on temptation prior to giving voice to his 'proposal' to Isabella) and by Claudio (who conjures up chilling imagery of death, in doing so seemingly talks himself into 'wanting to live', and then asks Isabella to compromise herself for him).

Other types of language to look for:

Puns – these are used frequently in most Shakespearean plays, and not always for overtly comic effect. Many are almost double entendres and somewhat lewd in nature, but others emphasise the duality and contrasts inherent in characters and situations. An example would be Lucio and the gentlemen, who in their conversation use the word 'dollar', for money, as interchangeable with 'dolour' for sadness. The gentleman is saying that he has bought 'three thousand dolours' worth of sexual favours/disease/trouble in Mistress Overdone's brothel, but he is also setting the tone both for the seedy nature of the city Angelo is to 'clean up' and the idea that sin and lawbreaking may lead to grief.

Malapropism – almost exclusively for comic effect, and used in this play exclusively by the put-upon constable Elbow, who is all the funnier because he takes himself and his duty very seriously. He claims to 'detest' his wife, when he probably means to 'attest' to an incident; he speaks of a woman 'cardinally given' instead of 'carnally'. These are humorous, though in the context we could argue they perhaps give us a little wry insight into the complicated nature of relationships and marriage in *Measure for Measure*.

Contrast and Paradox – contrasts are frequently used in the language of the play; Angelo, making his proposition in Act Two scene Four, for example, shows frequent use of contrasting fair/foul imagery such as 'sweet uncleanness' and 'my false o'erweighs your true'; he has already marvelled at the surprising strength of his own desire, asking himself 'Dost thou desire her foully for those things/ That make her good?' These juxtapositions of opposites are not exactly paradoxes, since they do not directly contradict themselves and their own internal logic, but they are notable and effective in highlighting the extremes of the situation. The relevance of the play's title becomes a little clearer as we see how Angelo's rise to power gives opportunity for his sinful behaviour, while Claudio's downfall comes partly from his honesty in choosing to stand by his intended wife and admit his fornication.



A03 Contexts

The nature of Shakespeare's 'Problem Plays'

Perhaps because it was first coined so long ago (F.S. Boas first used it in 1896), the term 'problem play' has become problematic itself. In modern usage, it can variously mean a play with an 'unsatisfactory' ending, one which has a narrative based around a moral or social problem to be resolved, or simply one which does not neatly fit the moulds of comedy or tragedy.

Because of this, critics dispute which Shakespearean plays fit the description, but it is generally agreed that *Measure for Measure* satisfies the basic criteria, along with *Troilus and Cressida* and *All's Well That Ends Well*. These plays are also sometimes referred to as the 'dark comedies', implying greater complexity and suffering for the characters than in other Shakespearean comedies. The fact that the three originally date from around the same chronological period in Shakespeare's writing career have led some to speculate that perhaps he had grown tired of more straightforward dramatic genres and was trying something new, or even that he was experiencing some kind of personal difficulty that led him to reflect life's uncertainties and challenges a little more openly in his plays at this time. This is however just speculation: we do not know enough about Shakespeare's biography to be confident.

Medieval plays and their predecessors did not have the kind of developed characters we are used to – characters were more likely to be a 'type'. Greek tragedy had its heroes, who fought bravely but rarely showed depth or vulnerability and would succumb to one fatal flaw. Morality plays, very popular in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, contained personifications of attributes such as the seven deadly sins. Vices like Greed or Lust would be presented as characters to tempt the protagonist. Escalus refers to such plays when he asks 'Which is the wiser here – Justice or Iniquity?' attributing these roles to Pompey and Elbow and implying that they are as ridiculous as characters in such plays.

Shakespeare's characters are more nuanced than mere types; he does use stock characters for various dramatic purposes, but his characters usually have discernible motivations and personalities, are capable of change or even actions deemed to be 'uncharacteristic'. They can be complex and three-dimensional, reflecting the complicated nature of real life, and the use of such characters is a convention which some identify as the root of a 'problem play'.

Measure for Measure ends in weddings rather than deaths, usually a signifier of comedy over tragedy, but it isn't that simple. For one thing, Isabella's silence at the end of the play does not amount to an acceptance of the Duke's proposal – it is left unresolved and it isn't clear what will become of her. The ending isn't joyous as we might expect from a romantic comedy. Some even argue that the Duke's decrees are a forced ending, almost a *deus ex machina*, to tie up the loose ends and that the resolution is uneasy, even bitter or cynical. There are scenes of comic relief and instances of innuendo that may be played for laughs in a production, but Shakespeare includes comic scenes in some of his most intense tragedies, so this does not indicate a comedic tone overall.



Many of the themes in the play are undoubtedly those of tragedy – corruption of power, deception, retribution, execution – but they do not result in a necessarily tragic ending. No one has died though several were threatened with death. Certainly many of the characters face harrowing dilemmas and reveal darker sides of their personalities, but the forgiveness that abounds at the end seems to smooth this over. Because of this grey area between tragedy and comedy, some describe *Measure for Measure* as a ‘tragicomedy’, containing elements of both.

In answering any question on *Measure for Measure*, you will need to address its genre as a ‘Problem Play’ and demonstrate your understanding of what this means and why it throws up issues for those studying or performing the play. Genre impacts on character, plot and language, as well as affecting how we think about the play itself, so ensure you carefully explore and consider its implications.

The world within the play

Some aspects of the play require a little knowledge about the world in which it is set, in order to fully understand their significance. An example of this is the nature of the marriage contract, the details of which end up having power of life or death over Claudio.

Though the play itself is set some years before in Venice, the English audience of the time would have been familiar with the idea of a marriage contract. A couple would be betrothed or promised to each other in a semi-formal fashion, meaning they were then married in all but name; a formally witnessed ceremony would complete the marriage. Claudio and Juliet are committed to each other and have only foregone this formal ceremony because they are apprehensive as to how her family will feel about the match. There can be no doubt that they care for each other and intend to live as a married couple. This makes it exceedingly harsh when Claudio is sentenced to death for fornication, because to all intents and purposes he would have done nothing very wrong in the eyes of the audience. Angelo’s commitment to Mariana was clearly less heartfelt, and he broke off their ‘engagement’ or marriage contract because her dowry was lost at sea.

A detail concerning the convent which Isabella is about to join is a small one, but nonetheless tells us something about Isabella’s character. The nuns she intends to join are in the Order of St Clare, known colloquially as the ‘Poor Clares’ because of the voluntary poverty in which they lived, which was harsh even by the standards of most religious orders. The fact that Isabella then says she had been ‘wishing a more strict restraint’ upon the nuns shows that she displays an intense devotion to the idea of living in poverty and tough conditions, but also that she is extreme in her views, maybe even fanatical. This determination to live such a devoutly ‘holy’ life tells us about her character and throws some light on her decision to preserve her chastity even at the cost of her brother’s life.

The world in which the play was written and received

Measure for Measure is believed to have been written in or just before 1604, the year it was first performed, though it wasn’t published until 1623. This was during the rule of King James I, who came to the throne in 1603. He became, among other things, the patron of the band of actors to which Shakespeare belonged, and as a result they changed their name from The Lord Chamberlain’s Men to The King’s Men.

James succeeded Elizabeth; he had been raised as a Presbyterian, studied theology and presided over the standard English translation of the Bible still in use today. Despite this devotion to religion, his less rigid stance on Protestantism was not satisfactory to some factions, notably the Puritans, a Protestant faction who wanted to ‘purify’ the church of all vestiges of Catholicism that remained and condemn or even kill those who continued



to follow that faith. Their unyielding interpretation of the Bible is seen by some as being reflected in Isabella's staunch devotion to her faith and even in Angelo's inflexible enforcement of the laws of Venice. That forgiveness in a variety of difficult circumstances is so central to *Measure for Measure* may, some critics believe, be Shakespeare's attempt to reassert the idea that mercy and compassion should lie at the heart of true Christianity. The Puritans certainly did not approve of theatre and the people who gathered to watch it – they would go on to decree in 1642 that all theatrical plays be banned in the city of London – so it may be a safe assumption that playwrights like Shakespeare were suspicious of the movement. *Measure for Measure* may take its title from a Biblical source (Matthew 7:1-2: "Judge not, that ye be not judged./For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again") but its central message has been seen by some as more humanist than Christian.

Given the important status of the Monarch in Renaissance times as well as the fact that he was a personal patron of Shakespeare's company, it was important that artworks produced reflected well on the life of the King or flattered his interests. Shakespeare did this in several of his plays – *Macbeth*, for example, is a story about witchcraft, a morbid interest of King James, and features one of James' ancestors, Banquo, in a favourable light – and it is suggested he does so in *Measure for Measure* as well. As a model for the Duke, several aspects of James' life seem to fit. The King wrote several books, one of which, *Basilicon Doron*, was a treatise on government. Written in 1599, it had almost certainly been read by Shakespeare and most other literate citizens by 1603. It urged the virtue of the principle of temperance (or the Aristotelian mean – all things in moderation) and stated that rulers must, among other things, display virtue in action. These are points which concern the Duke in the play and lead him to give control to Angelo in the first place. Several critics, such as Albrecht and Stevenson, have suggested that the Duke is an idealised portrait of King James and that the play itself is a kind of homage to the King on his accession to the throne.

Shakespeare did not create the story of *Measure for Measure* himself; like all of his plays, it had external sources in other stories and plays, such as Whetstone's *Promos and Cassandra*, which itself was based on prior tales. Many of these earlier stories lack character development, ending in either happy marriages which seem based on false psychology of sudden heartfelt forgiveness, or in death of various characters (the Claudio figure, for example, or the character whose parallel in Shakespeare is Angelo). From this source material, Shakespeare faced some choices. He could go for a revenge tragedy, which would take the form of Angelo successfully having Claudio executed anyway despite Isabella's fulfilment of his wishes, and her in turn exposing his lies and causing him to be executed. He could go for a comedy, which would end in no deaths and happy marriages all round. We can't be sure why he chose something more nuanced and complex, but examined in this light, many of the dramatic elements he included in the play are more easily understood. One example of this is the 'bed trick', which is criticised by many as being trite even in the time in which it was written, despite it being a convention of Renaissance theatre that audiences would recognise. If Claudio's life had to be saved and Isabella wasn't to be made a victim of rape, a substitute had to be found and so Shakespeare employed this kind of familiar device.

In considering how Shakespeare feels about Claudio's dilemma, the main crisis of the story, it may be worth noting that Shakespeare's own first child was born six months after he formally married her mother, so he is unlikely to feel strongly that Claudio's behaviour was unreasonable.



A04 Connections

Students should be keenly aware that there are equal marks available for their treatment of the extract and the wider text in the exam. The focus should be on parallels or connections between the extract and the wider text which are relevant to the key terms of the stimulus statement. It may be beneficial for students to prioritise connections that also reveal their knowledge and understanding of the dramatic methods (A02) and the nature of Shakespearean Problem Plays (A03).

When studying the play, you will note many connections and it may be useful to track elements which show parallels or contrasts. For example:

Angelo and Claudio

There are notable parallels between these characters – the Duke underlines the connection between them in his speech in the final scene: ‘An Angelo for a Claudio, death for death’. Both men are or were engaged in a marriage contract that hadn’t been completed (though for different reasons which throw lights on their respective characters); both commit fornication (though in different circumstances); both are condemned to death (Claudio by Angelo and Angelo by the Duke and, to some extent, himself); both are forgiven. Remember to analyse similarities and differences in their speeches and actions.

The Duke and Power

The Duke seemingly foregoes his power for some of the play, but this doesn’t mean he becomes powerless altogether. He gives up his royal authority but replaces it with religious authority by dressing as a Friar, and as such can still wield influence over religious characters like Isabella, who instinctively trusts him as a religious superior. The power of law and the power of the church are seen to be sometimes similar in scope, but also occasionally at odds with one another. Power itself, and the nature of those who use and abuse it, is a thread running throughout the play.

The Duke perceives himself as a ‘good’ ruler but recognises he is not tough in enforcing laws and rather than negotiate this difficult balancing act himself, he gets Angelo to do it. Their differing styles of governance could show the contrast between a ‘true’ leader (Shakespeare’s audience lived at a time when the ‘Divine Right of Kings’ was a widely held belief) and one not born to rule. Would a ‘true’ leader have been corrupted by power as Angelo was? He was pious and devout with ‘snow-broth’ blood in his veins until he obtained a more powerful position. Less explicit but still worth examining is the idea that the Duke himself is little different from Angelo as far as corruption goes. He deceives, manipulates and coerces his subjects shamelessly; both the motivation for and the outcome of his tricks are questionable.

Sin and Fornication

Conversations between Pompey and Mistress Overdone reveal that while Angelo has attempted to shut all the brothels in Venice, they have simply been relocated and will continue as ‘houses of sin’ in new locations. There is a connection between Angelo’s zeal to crush lawbreaking and the equal determination of those who earn their money from the sins of others to continue breaking the law. The hypocrisy of power is also highlighted, as



it is revealed that many were saved by an injection of cash from a wealthy politician. This contrasts with Claudio, sentenced to death without mercy for the sin of sleeping with and impregnating his betrothed before the formal marriage ceremony could be completed. It also sits alongside Angelo, who is sufficiently corrupted by power to essentially force himself upon Isabella and then renege on their sinful 'deal'. It seems clear from all of this that the law of the land cannot always legislate fairly or effectively in matters of physical desire, and can even raise the question of how much control over people's private lives and personal choices the state should be allowed to exercise – the connections and conflicts between these concepts underscore the whole play.

Other Connections

Compare Mariana and Isabella. At the end of the play, so we are led to believe, both will become wives – Mariana is achieving her long-held wish, while Isabella's fervent desire to live chastely and in poverty as a nun is not mentioned by her or any other character. Consider, too, their spouses-to-be – Angelo is deeply desired by Mariana, who has done little but grieve since he cast her off, and yet while he may have redeemed himself somewhat by the end of the play, he is still an attempted rapist, an attempted murderer, a corrupt official and someone who abandoned his fiancée because of her diminished wealth. In contrast, the Duke should be the 'catch' of the play – rich, powerful, a seemingly 'wise' ruler – and yet it is hard to imagine Isabella feeling much desire to be matched with him in the wake of his deception and manipulation.

The connections between the 'high' and 'low' characters are important – the likes of Pompey and Mistress Overdone did help imbue the play with comic relief, but were also included as a way of commenting on the 'larger' issues in the play. Look out for ways in which the characters and situations of the lowborn folk can be related to those in the play's main storyline – the different attitudes displayed towards women, marriage and fornication, for example.



A05 Argument and interpretation

For your response to convince the examiner, it is important to have a well-structured argument so you need to plan before you write. It's a good idea to underline the keywords of the question before you begin to read and annotate the extract given – it will help you focus on the most relevant features.

Constructing an essay argument requires you to write thematically rather than chronologically, so make this easier for yourself by adding any relevant references from the rest of the play next to the notes that relate to them. You will be able to link them more easily and avoid missing connections that could have earned you marks before you go on to your next paragraph.

A very strong argument will examine alternative interpretations and explain why these have been dismissed as infeasible or ill-fitting. This does not need to form a large part of your essay, but it will show the examiner that you have thoughtfully considered other points of view and made an informed decision to reach your own conclusions.

Specimen Question:

Isabella is presented as being passive in the face of pressure from men.

By referring closely to Extract 5 and to other appropriately selected parts of the text, show to what extent you would agree with the view expressed above.

Your argument should include relevant comments on Shakespeare's dramatic methods and relevant external contextual information on the nature of Shakespeare's Problem Plays.

N.B. Equal marks are available for your treatment of the given extract and other relevant parts of the text.

A02

The question requires analysis of Shakespeare's dramatic methods which will be demonstrated throughout as you analyse both the extract shown and your other chosen references from the rest of the play. Remember dramatic methods refers to staging, structure and characterisation as well as language, but close language analysis is important, especially since you will have a printed extract in the examination. Make sure that what you say about dramatic methods contributes to your argument about Isabella's passivity in the face of pressure from men.

A04

Obvious examples relevant to the key terms of the question would be times when Isabella seems passive (possibly at the end, depending on your reading, or in the willing way she goes along with the Friar's plan), times when she does not seem passive (which is needed for comparison's sake – this could be when she hails the Duke at the start of Act



Five scene One, for example). It's important to pay attention to the second part, however – 'in the face of pressure from men'. We could argue that were it not for pressure from men – Lucio, Claudio, Angelo, the Duke-as-Friar – that Isabella would be happily living a chaste life in a convent, so to some extent any instances of her behaviour in the play can be construed as the result of 'pressure from men', but you must deal with how she is presented in the play. Should you want to choose moments of high tension to illustrate Isabella's passivity or lack thereof, there are numerous apt choices; the extract itself offers you an illustration of her conduct under both Lucio's micro-managing prompts and Angelo's seeming indifference. If you want to pick a scene of less obvious or overt pressure exerted by men, ensure you justify that choice first in the strict terms of the question. Isabella could be compared and contrasted with another female character such as Juliet or Mariana to get a better sense of how she functions as a woman in the play's society (but keep the focus on Isabella). Her impassioned pleas in the face of Angelo's attempt to make her go away could be contrasted with her disapproval of her brother's sin or connected to the unbreakable conviction she seems to derive from her faith, which gives her a strong sense of (a kind of) self, not necessarily as a woman but as a servant of God with a virtuous soul.

A05 requires argument and interpretation, meaning you must construct a relevant argument in presenting the evidence as you see it. Purely as an example (remember there is no one 'correct' interpretation), perhaps you wish to argue that Isabella is anything but passive in the face of pressure. You could cite her allusions to 'great men' in the extract as flattery, and her gentle but unmistakable tenacity (refusing to acquiesce to Angelo's requests that she 'be gone', bidding him not to turn away from her) as anything but passive. You could admit that Lucio is giving her instructions throughout, but there could be various reasons for this – Lucio is a talkative character anyway; he clearly cares about saving Claudio; he possesses elements of social ease and cunning that Isabella does not, and so on. Even if we concede that Lucio is telling her how to do what she is doing, we can still validly assert that Isabella is the one who has chosen to do it, even against her own better judgment. Is she passive when Angelo suggests she forfeit her virginity for her brother's life? No – she is revolted, even threatening him (at the time the most powerful man in the city in the Duke's stead) with exposure. Is she passive when Claudio undergoes his change of mind and begs her to go ahead with the deal? No – she is outraged: 'Take my defiance,/ Die, perish.' Is she passive in the wake of this crisis? Perhaps, but it bears analysis – the Duke does approach her quite soon afterwards with his 'remedy', meaning we don't get to see what course of action she might have taken herself. It could be argued that she is passive in agreeing so readily to the Duke-as-Friar's plan – but since he is playing the puppet-master to the whole of the noble court, can it be said she is any more passive than any other character in the play? Note how important it is not to be one-sided and to examine other points of view. Do concede points which don't exactly fit your argument but be ready to explain why these do not damage the overall weight of your interpretation as a whole.

A03

You must include relevant external contextual information on the nature of Shakespeare's Problem Plays, meaning you will need to be confident in explaining briefly just which interpretation of the term 'Problem Play' seems to you to be the most apt or useful. Depending on which meaning you pick (and of course, it may be more than one - you may want to briefly allude to the 'problematic' Problem Play label itself no matter what information you choose), you might want to relate it to the terrible dilemma Isabella faces, or to the not-quite-comic-or-tragic-outright tone of the play, or to the uneasy ending (during which, of course, Isabella is conspicuous in her silence). Added to contextual knowledge about the limited power and agency of women at this point in



history, you could variously argue that Isabella has no choice but to be passive in the face of men because she is not legally or socially their equal, or that she is actually not passive at all; that the uneven tone of the play's genre gives us an equally uneven but nonetheless very human heroine; you could go into detail in interpreting the silence of the heroine in the last scene and what you think is going on. It is not helpful to spend a whole paragraph on the status of women in Renaissance times, for example, but do ensure that your contextual knowledge is clear, applied appropriately and used where the argument requires it.

Remember:

- Stick to the key terms used in the question.
- Think what the question is really asking you.
- Argue clearly – explore opposing points of view but explain why they don't sway you.
- Make connections throughout the text, demonstrating your knowledge of the play and your ability to link concepts, ideas and references.



Resources

<http://bit.ly/1Qw0kCZ>

Shakespeare's Words, Measure for Measure online text (including definitions of unfamiliar terms).

<http://bit.ly/1Ji3MJt>

Royal Shakespeare Company, Famous Quotations.

<http://bit.ly/1ULCrpS>

Crossref-it, The Stuart Monarchy. Useful contextual information as a basis for your own notes.

Critical Readings

Evans, Johanna. Masters Thesis – 'Dramatic Choices in *Measure for Measure*'. Outlines a feminist reading of Isabella and the choices she faces.

<http://bit.ly/1NCowxw>

Goldberg, Jesse A. Journal article – 'Power and Transgression in *Twelfth Night* and *Measure for Measure*: Artifice and Ideology as Tools of the Elite'. Examines critiques of the plays' societies with some elements of Marxism.

<http://bbc.in/1Gi9xWb>

BBC 'Free Thinking' podcast - Actress Romola Garai and director Joe Hill-Gibbins discuss their considerations in staging a 2015 production of *Measure for Measure*.

<http://bit.ly/1NufEfB>

Woodhouse, E.D.M. English Association Shakespeare Bookmark – '*Measure for Measure*'. Outlines choices facing a director staging a production of the play.

Tillyard, E.M.W. 'Realism and Folklore' in Shakespeare: *Measure for Measure* – A Casebook (ed. C.K. Stead). Macmillan Press, 1971.

Stewart, J.I.M. Cited in Muir, Kenneth, '*Measure for Measure*', in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Measure for Measure* (ed. George L. Geckle). Prentice Hall, 1970.

Albrecht, Louis. Cited in Lever, J.W, 'The Disguised Ruler', in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Measure for Measure* (ed. George L. Geckle). Prentice Hall, 1970.

Stevenson, David L. *Design and Structure in Measure for Measure: A New Appraisal*. First published in 'English Literary History', vol. 23, No. 4 (Dec., 1956), pp. 256-278.





General Glossary for A2 1

– this glossary is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive.

Antagonist	The main character who opposes the protagonist or hero in a narrative or drama; in simple terms he/she is the villain. (See protagonist.)
Aside	A brief remark made by a character during dialogue which is understood not to be addressed to or heard by other characters. In an aside true feelings are voiced, as distinct from what is being said for others to hear. See also soliloquy.
Blank verse	Non-rhyming lines of poetry, the standard verse form of Elizabethan drama, also known as 'iambic pentameter'. Each iamb is an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one, like the sound of a heartbeat – five iambic feet make a ten syllable pattern per line, a rhythm frequently used in Shakespeare's work.
Characterisation	The means by which a character's traits are established, often through action and dialogue in drama.
Climax	The moment of greatest tension in a drama. It is usually near the end of the play where the rising conflict results in a high point of intensity.
Costume	The clothes or outfit worn by a character.
Denouement	The plot resolution of a narrative.
Dialogue	The words spoken between two or more characters in a play, novel or poem.
Dramatic convention	A set of rules which all parties in a dramatic performance accept (including, importantly the audience), e.g. the 'Three Unities' in classical Greek drama, the Shakespearean soliloquy, the missing fourth wall of a traditional nineteenth-century stage set, the impenetrability of disguise in Shakespearean drama.
Dramatic irony	A stylistic device where the audience is aware of the implications of a speech or act, but the character(s) involved is not. The audience has an understanding that the characters do not have.
Figurative language	Non-literal language – similes, metaphors, hyperbole and synecdoche, for example – used by writers to communicate additional meaning about characters and situations.



Imagery	This word generally applies visually, to vivid or figurative language used in a more than literal way that stimulates a picture in the imagination. Tactile imagery appeals to the sense of touch. Auditory imagery appeals to the imagination by echoing or creating sound effects.
Juxtaposition	Placing two contrasting characters, things, ideas close together to illuminate meaning or create tension.
Lighting	Refers to the way the stage is lit and the equipment which provides artificial light effects.
Metaphor	Where one thing is described directly as another, to enhance meaning or effect. When this is used for a more protracted purpose it is called an extended metaphor.
Meter (or metre)	The pattern of rhythmic accents in poetic verse, formed of stressed and unstressed syllables in certain numbers and combinations.
Metonymy	A form of figurative speech in which a closely related term is substituted for an object or idea. One example would be referring to royalty or a monarch as “the crown”.
Motif	A dominant or recurring idea or figure of speech within a work of art or within the work of an artist, musician or writer.
Pathos	A quality of a play’s action or dialogue that stimulates the audience to feel pity for a character. Pathos is always present in tragedy, and may be present in comedy as well.
Props	Items used on stage by the actors.
Protagonist	The principal character in a novel or drama (See antagonist).
Soliloquy	A speech in which a character’s true feelings or intentions are voiced, usually but not always when that character is alone on stage. In general, soliloquies are longer than asides, which have the same revelatory function, and do not always involve turning ‘aside’ from an ongoing dialogue.
Sound effects	Sounds on the stage used to create the setting or atmosphere of the play, or for other dramatic effect.
Stage/Set design	This refers to the visual scenery on the stage, the creation of the background in which the play is set.
Stage directions	The directions written in the play script to indicate how the characters should speak and move. Shakespeare seems to have written very few explicit stage directions. These were added by later editors. There are however plenty of implicit stage directions in the Shakespearean text.

**Structure**

The way in which the parts of the plot are organised.

Synecdoche

A form of figurative speech where the whole concept of something is referred to by one of its parts. An example would be calling a car “wheels” or asking if someone can “lend a hand”.

Theme

A main idea or concern explored in a work of art.