The Mystery of Hamlet:
A Solution

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INTRODUCTION

Hamlet.
I do not know
Why yet I live to say "This thing's to do",
Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means,
To do't.

The true nature of Prince Hamlet's motivation remains the single most famous and controversial issue in Literature. Why does Hamlet, a courageous Viking prince, find himself **psychologically incapable** of killing his ruthless and deadly enemy, King Claudius, until it is too late to save himself?

Every manner of theory and concept has been postulated to account for Hamlet's motivation-problem. However, all theories have run into the hard facts of Shakespeare's play and fallen after critical analysis. Perhaps a plurality of critics today would favor an Ambiguity answer, that Shakespeare intended Hamlet's innermost self to be forever obscured by lack of textual evidence.

Yet the sphinx-like Mystery of Hamlet can be solved and the tragic hero's motivation clearly apprehended. There does exist a consistent, unambiguous, detailed Solution.

CHAPTER ONE

THE GREATNESS OF SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare has been universally regarded as a towering genius of World Literature. He composed 38 plays—10 tragedies, 18 comedies, 10 histories. The vast majority of them are acknowledged masterpieces. Imagine one person having written *Hamlet, King Lear, Macbeth, Othello, Romeo and Juliet, Julius Caesar, Antony and Cleopatra, Richard II, Henry IV, Part I, As You Like It, Twelfth Night, The Winter's Tale.*...

Why has Shakespeare been so esteemed? Why should a modern audience read, watch, study, treasure these dramas? And his poems, especially *Venus and Adonis*, *The Rape of Lucrece*, the Sonnets.

Characters

First, there are the immortal characters Shakespeare created. The tragic hero Hamlet, the scarcely credible Falstaff, the idealistic young lovers Romeo and Juliet, the earthy and very experienced lovers Antony and Cleopatra. Literature's most criminal villain—*Othello*'s Iago.

The self-dramatizing, moribund Richard II. The world's most amusing serial murderer, Richard III. Cassius, *Julius Caesar*'s passionately freedom-loving and equality-loving conspirator. Shylock, the Merchant of Venice. The brilliant rebel, Hotspur, of *Henry IV, Part I* (the site of Falstaff's greatest triumph). Prospero, sorcerer of *The Tempest*. The male-impersonating heroines of light comedy, Rosalind *(As*

You Like It) and Viola *(Twelfth Night).* Battling eventual lovers, Petruchio and Kate *(The Taming of the Shrew)* & Beatrice and Benedick *(Much Ado About Nothing).* Did I neglect to mention Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, King Lear, and many other stars?

Shakespeare also lavished exquisite care on his supporting characters. Lear's Fool and the clown Touchstone (*As You Like It*) must be the artful best in the business. The entire supporting cast of *Hamlet, King Lear, Othello,* and other plays deserves award nominations.

To single out a few more not-so minor characters: *King Lear*'s personable villain Edmund, and his fugitive brother (thanks to Edmund) Edgar in his masquerade as Poor Tom, the mad mendicant wanderer. Mercutio, the mercurial friend of Romeo; and Juliet's bawdy Nurse. Othello's wife Desdemona and her lady-in-waiting Emilia (Iago's wife) are just right in their roles, providing an excellent contrast between naïve kindheartedness and worldly matter-of-fact. (Shakespeare was expert at contrast and silhouette.)

We ought not fail to single out Antony's sharp-eyed lieutenant, Enobarbus, and the shrewd Caesar (Augustus) also of *Antony and Cleopatra*. Richard III's accomplice, then victim when he hesitates at child-murder, his accomplice in crime and comedy, Buckingham. Timon of Athens' churlish philosopher Apemantus (modeled on the ancient Greek cynic, Diogenes). [This tragedy, a fine one, should be more highly rated than it has been. The protagonist deserves the recognition I too denied him above. The kind and bountiful then misanthropic Timon of Athens of Shakespeare's play was based on a real person.

[The early Greek traveller Pausanias wrote, "In this part of the country is seen the tower of Timon, the only man to see that there is no way to be happy except to shun other men."]

Scenes

Most-memorable scenes include Lady Macbeth's goading of husband Macbeth into murdering the kindly King Duncan. The bizarre, grotesque humor in the hovel on a stormy heath as the mad Lear, Poor Tom, Lear's sharply ironic Fool, and the banished but disguised counselor Kent engage in a conversation no human beings ever had before or since. The Quarrel-scene between Brutus and Cassius in *Julius Caesar*; and Antony's incitement of mob violence in the same tragedy. No one who has read the Monument-scene can forget Cleopatra and the death of Antony. In *Coriolanus*, when the tribunes Brutus and Sicinius skillfully turn the Plebeians against the arrogant military hero, the viewer can grasp Shakespeare's grasp of realpolitik, of political persuasion, pressure, and manipulation.

The Statue-scene which concludes the volatile, penitential, beautiful *Winter's Tale* stands as a masterful set piece of Shakespeare's delicate yet forceful management of tragicomedy. Putting together tragedy and comedy truly calls for expert handling, a genuinely fine touch. The Bard had that touch, and it was an essential ingredient in his Achievement.

Comedy

Many episodes of *Henry IV, Part I* remain in fond memory of almost anyone who has read or watched this comic-tragic epic-drama adaptation of history. Perchance the most indelibly imprinted would be Falstaff's far-fetched inventions in the Boar's Head tavern attempting to alchemize ignominious flight into heroic derring-do. (He had been robbing some folks on the King's highway when unexpected opposition intruded.)

Who is Falstaff? He is the misleader of Hal, Prince of the realm who has sorely disappointed if not infuriated his father

the King by his dedicated drinking and whoring in the company of the fantastical, sophistical hedonist-jokester, the huge old (nearing 60) corpulence and irreverent, ironical, anti-establishment rogue ("What is honour? A word."), the artful dodging empty braggart warrior and disgrace to the nobility, the outrageous huckster FALSTAFF.

On the subject of humor, Shakespeare practiced various kinds. Light comedy, of which the critics favor *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*. Parody, as in *Measure for Measure, The Two Noble Kinsmen, Cymbeline.* Satire (*All's Well That Ends Well* !!). Farce, the entire *Comedy of Errors* and certainly parts of *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* (There are so many graceful and charming verses in the latter comedy that the impression one receives differs markedly from the wild and dizzying effect of *The Comedy of Errors.*)

I would point out the sardonic humor of the jealous and murderous King Leontes in *The Winter's Tale.* And the malignant obscenities of Iago and the Clown which hover about *Othello*.

Shakespeare's frequent play-on-words send a light humor rippling throughout his plays, and his wordplay goes ingeniously beyond what moderns call "punning". For example, Antipholus of Syracuse departs for a stroll around Ephesus where he will be mistaken for a lookalike (a lost twin) Antipholus of Ephesus. The wife of Antipholus also shares the common befuddlement, treating altogether too hospitably the wrong Antipholus, while the right one pounds on the front gate issuing futile cries of outrage. This all begins when Antipholus of Syracuse departs for his stroll, saying "I will lose myself [in the city]". Losing identity was not his idea.

I quote Falstaff's Honour-speech before concluding this section. King Henry IV and his son Hal, the temporarily misled Prince, emblemize values of Duty and military glory.

Subduing the rebels and bringing order to the realm dictate their quite solemn, sacred, furious, honorable activities. The misleader, on the contrary, prefers to eat, drink, be merry, and rake in profits without taking chances, Falstaff has this to say about risking life-and-limb for the sake of Duty:

> What is honour? a word. What is in that word honour? What is that honour? air. A trim reckoning! Who hath it? He that died o'Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. Doth he hear it? No. 'Tis insensible, then? Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with the living? No. Why? Detraction will not suffer it. Therefore I'll none of it. Honour is a mere scutcheon: and so ends my catechism.
> V.1.143

A couple of scenes later, Falstaff lies down on the battlefield pretending to be dead. From his point of vantage on the ground with one eye partly open, the fleeing brigand of Gadshill sees Hal slay the heroic rebel Hotspur in single combat. After the Prince's departure, Falstaff stabs the poor corpse in the thigh, slings the great fallen commander over his shoulder, and stomps into camp demanding a suitable reward:

> I look to be either duke or earl,
> I can assure you.
> V.4.140

Poetic Drama

Aside from the deep psychological insight into human nature which informs Shakespearean characters, aside from Shakespeare's uncanny sense of dramatic effect, aside from the understanding of human complexity and his sympathy for human weakness, and aside from his mastery of both tragedy and comedy—and blending ability—the beauty and force of

Shakespeare's plays derive in goodly measure from his wonderful **language**.

Note that his drama was written in verse. All the playwrights of the English Renaissance—as was traditional from the time of ancient Greece—composed poetic drama.

Seldom did Shakespeare actually rhyme, except to render a particular effect. (We shall discuss an important instance of this exception when analyzing *Hamlet*.) By Shakespeare's time, continuous or frequent rhyming was considered a bit crude. His drama, however, produces sensitive linguistic effects with metre, splendid imagery, and honey-tongued mellifluous sounds. (In his day, an account of current English dramatic talents referred to "mellifluous, honey-tongued William Shakespeare".)

He assembled his verses in riveting dialogues and in a variety of superb speeches. No other writer in history has bequeathed so many famous lines to posterity. Here are a few of them:

Romeo.
What light through yonder window breaks?
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.
II.2.3

Juliet.
O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?
II.2.33

What's in a name? that which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet.
III.2.44

Mark Antony.
Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears;

I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.
—*Julius Caesar*
III.2.77

Cleopatra.
My salad days,
When I was green in judgment, cold in blood.
—*Antony and Cleopatra*,
I.5.74

Enobarbus.
Age cannot wither her nor custom stale
Her infinite variety.
II.2.242

Of course, he speaks of Cleopatra.

Antony.
O this false soul of Egypt! This grave charm . . .
Like a right gypsy hath at fast and loose
Beguiled me to the very heart of loss!
IV.12.29

Cleopatra.
We'll bury him; and then, what's brave, what's noble,
Let's do it after the high Roman fashion
And make death proud to take us.
IV.15.87
Give me my robe, put on my crown. I have
Immortal longings in me.
V.2.281

Caesar.
She looks like sleep,

As she would catch another Antony
In her strong toil of grace.
V.2.347

Antony and Cleopatra, I love this play.
[By the way, Caesar here offers a small, subtle instance of Shakespeare's poetic mastery of language. "Toil" evokes "Coil", because Antony liked to call Cleopatra "serpent".]

Othello (about Desdemona).
She loved me for the dangers I had passed.
And I loved her that she did pity them.
I.3.168

Iago.
O, beware, my lord, of jealousy;
It is the green-eyed monster.
III.3.167

King Lear (to his beloved youngest daughter Cordelia; though captured by their enemies, they are at last reunited).
Come, let's away to prison.
We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage.
V.3.10

Macbeth.
Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.
V.5.28

Morocco chooses the golden casket which reads,

"All that glisters is not gold."
—*The Merchant of Venice*
II.7.65

Theseus.
Awake the pert and nimble spirit of mirth.
I.1.14

A Fairy says to Puck, who personifies that spirit,

"Over hill, over dale . . . "
—*A Midsummer Night's Dream*
II.1.2

Jaques.
All the world's a stage …
—*As You Like It*
II.7.140

Duke Senior.
Sweet are the uses of adversity.
II.1.12

Abbess.
The venom clamours of a jealous woman
Poisons more deadly than a mad dog's tooth.
—*The Comedy of Errors,*
V.1.70

Falstaff.
The better part of valour is discretion.
—*Henry IV, Part I*

V.4.116

The following lines truly ought to be celebrated, connoting Presumption comes before a Fall. The fellow who utters them will end the play unceremoniously thrown into jail.

Falstaff.
Let us take any man's horses; the laws of England are at my commandment.
—*Henry IV, Part II,*
V.3.140

King Henry V (the former Hal).
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers …
—*Henry V*
IV.3.60

Richard (who will become Richard III*).*
Now is the winter of our discontent.
I.1.1

Perdita.
But quick and in my arms.—*The Winter's Tale*
IV.4.132

Nestor.
In the reproof of chance
Lies the true proof of men.
—*Troilus and Cressida*
I.3.33

And a thousand and one verses more.

Monologues

Falstaff served up an example of Shakespearean soliloquy with his not-so metaphysical a disputation on the subject of Honour. A powerful philosophic monologue of quite a different stamp comes from Richard II. In the Third Act, the overbearing monarch perceives that he will lose his crown (and Richard will be eliminated permanently by Bolingbroke once he wears that crown as Henry IV).

King Richard.
Let's talk of graves, of worms, and epitaphs,
Make dust our paper, and with rainy eyes
Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth.
Let's choose executors and talk of wills.
And yet not so—for what can we bequeath,
Save our deposed bodies to the ground?
Our lands, our lives, and all are Bolingbroke's,
And nothing can we call our own but death
And that small model of the barren earth
Which serves as paste and cover to our bones.

For God's sake let us sit upon the ground
And tell sad stories of the death of kings!
How some have been deposed, some slain in war,
Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed,
Some poisoned by their wives, some sleeping killed—
All murdered; for within the hollow crown
That rounds the mortal temples of a king
Keeps Death his court; and there the antic sits,
Scoffing his state and grinning at his pomp;
Allowing him a breath, a little scene,
To monarchize, be feared, and kill with looks;
Infusing him with self and vain conceit,
As if this flesh which walls about our life

Were brass impregnable; and humored thus,
Comes at the last, and with a little pin
Bores through his castle wall, and farewell king!

Cover your heads, and mock not flesh and blood
With solemn reverence. Throw away respect,
Tradition, form, and ceremonious duty;
For you have but mistook me all this while.
I live with bread like you, feel want, taste grief,
Need friends. Subjected thus,
How can you say to me I am a king?
III.2.177

I cannot believe that a finer speech has ever been written.

When Richard held sway, free to give rein to his own irresponsibility and acts of injustice, the dying nobleman John of Gaunt offered advice to the sneering King. Gaunt's counsel rates as one of the best patriotic speeches in English or any other language. Shakespeare honors England with verses such as these:

This royal throne of kings, this scept'red isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demiparadise,
This fortress built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war,
This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall,
Or as a moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happier lands;
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England . . .
II.1.50

Prospero recites an outstanding soliloquy in *The Tempest*. A number of us feel that when the sorcerer says "I'll break my staff, Bury it certain fathoms in the earth," Shakespeare addressed the audience directly—announcing his intended farewell to the stage.

The soliloquy begins,

> Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves,
> And ye that on the sands with printless foot
> Do chase the ebbing Neptune and do fly him
> When he comes back …

The middle stanzas describe the wizard's "potent art":

> I have bedimm'd
> The noontide sun, call'd forth the mutinous winds,
> And twixt the green sea and the azured vault
> Set roaring war; to the dread rattling thunder
> Have I given fire and rifted Jove's stout oak
> With his own bolt …

The recital concludes,

> But this rough magic
> I here abjure, and when I have required
> Some heavenly music, which even now I do,
> To work mine and upon their senses that
> This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,
> Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
> And deeper than did ever plummet sound
> I'll drown my book.
> V.1.57

It was rather saddening to read that. And recalled to me contemplative verses, also from *The Tempest*:

We are such stuff as dreams are made on,
And our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.
IV.1.158

Dialogue

Julius Caesar, Act IV, scene 3. The republican conspirators have assassinated would-be dictator Julius Caesar. Mark Antony, Caesar's formidable lieutenant, has been mercifully (and foolishly) spared. With equal folly, Brutus allows Antony to address the People, even permitting him to speak after Brutus.

Antony's "friends, Romans, countrymen" become a raging mob attacking the republicans. Civil war breaks out, Antony and Octavius (who eventually assumes the mantle Emperor Augustus, the "Caesar" of *Antony and Cleopatra*) line up against republican commanders Brutus and Cassius.

The latter, who are also brothers-in-law and close friends, have difficulty cooperating in these trying times. Cassius arrives at the tent of Brutus, and one of the greatest quarrels in literature flares up. An excerpt from it:

Cas.
That you have wrong'd me doth appear in this:
You have condemn'd and noted Lucius Pella
For taking bribes here of the Sardians;
Wherein my letters, praying on his side,
Because I knew the man, were slighted off.

Bru.
You wrong'd yourself to write in such a case.

Cas.
In such a time as this it is not meet
That every nice offence should bear his comment.

Bru.
Let me tell you, Cassius, you yourself
Are much condemn'd to have an itching palm;
To sell and mart your offices for gold
To undeservers.

Cas.
I an itching palm!
You know that you are Brutus that speak this,
Or, by the gods, this speech were else your last.

Bru.
The name of Cassius honours this corruption,
And chastisement doth therefore hide his head.

Cas.
Chastisement!

Bru.
Remember March, the idea of March remember:
Did not great Julius bleed for justice sake?
What villain touch'd his body, that did stab
And not for justice? What, shall one of us,
That struck the foremost man of all this world
But for supporting robbers, shall we now
Contaminate our fingers with base bribes,
And sell the mighty space of our large honours
For so much trash as may be grasped thus?
I had rather be a dog, and bay the moon,
Than such a Roman.

Cas.
Brutus, bay not me;
I'll not endure it: you forget yourself
To hedge me in; I am a soldier, I,
Older in practice, abler than yourself
To make conditions.

Bru.
Go to, you are not, Cassius.

Cas.
I am.

Bru.
I say you are not.

Cas.
Urge me no more, I shall forget myself;
Have mind upon your health, tempt me no farther.

And so it goes until the point of Cassius offering Brutus his dagger, and then on into blessed reconciliation.

A wholly dissimilar sort of conversation takes place in the forest of Arden, in *As You Like It*. Rosalind and Orlando share an undeclared love. Rosalind disguises herself as a young gentleman, and they meet by accident in the forest where Orlando has been scrawling silly things about his love on the trees thereabout. The "young gentleman", very serious and clinical, tells Orlando that she can cure love through counsel.

Ros.
I would cure you, if you would but call me
Rosalind and come every day to my cote and

Woo me.

Orl.
Now, by the faith of my love, I will!

The lovesick dupe naturally falls for this, and will proceed to disclose all of his feelings and thoughts to this helpful young fellow, playing his diagnostician and therapist, Shakespeare's top comic heroine, Rosalind.

Read *As You Like It*'s lovable dialogue for yourself. At the moment, I prefer quarrels. This one from *Othello.*

The jealous Moor, inflamed by malevolent cunning Iago, had given wife Desdemona a handkerchief received from his mother. ("There's magic in the web of it.") At Iago's persistent urging, Desdemona's lady-in-waiting Emilia takes possession of the handkerchief and gives it to her husband Iago.

Ironically, Desdemona's concern for Othello's ill-disposed moods led to the loss. She wiped her husband's brow with the fateful handkerchief, it fell from her hand, in her concern she forgot it and Emilia took it up.

Othello asks his wife later for the handkerchief, already half-believing Iago's lie that she presented it to her (falsely alleged) lover, Cassio, Othello's lieutenant and good friend. Othello had suspended Cassio from duty for drunkenness, and Desdemona wants Othello to reinstate his friend.

Des.
Why do you speak so startingly and rash?

Oth.
Is't lost? Is't gone? Is it out o' the way?

Des.
Heaven bless us!

Oth.
Say you?

Des.
It is not lost; but what an if it were?

Oth.
How!

Des.
I say it is not lost.

Oth.
Fetch't, let me see't.

Des.
Why, so I can, sir, but I will not now.
This is a trick to put me from my suit.
Pray you, let Cassio be received again.

Oth.
Fetch me the handkerchief. My mind misgives.

Des.
Come, come;
You'll never meet a more sufficient man.

Oth.
The handkerchief!

Des.
I pray, talk me of Cassio.

Oth.
The handkerchief!

Des.
A man that all his time
Hath founded his good fortunes on your love,
Shared dangers with you—

Oth.
The handkerchief!
III.4.96

That quarrel was rather one-sided.

Shakespeare as Mystery Writer

Several of Shakespeare's works reveal him to be a writer of mystery stories. An intriguing aspect of the genre involves the fun he must have had in concealing from us the fact we indeed peruse a riddling tale.

Ordinarily, we recognize a mystery when we see one. And going through the text, try to puzzle it out. That's the nature of a whodunit or other of its ilk.

But Shakespeare operated differently. He wrote several plays which **confound us to comprehend that we have a mystery to solve.** We presume to read a straightforward account, containing the normal problems incidental to understanding the finer points of Shakespearean drama.

But the difficulties which arise in these plays have proved so intractable that critics have coined a term for such obstinate works of Shakespeare—"**problem plays**"—especially the

often-denounced "problem comedies" *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure.*

All's Well That Ends Well

Appearance: Helena is a storybook heroine. Bertram is a bounder and a cad. Diana, named for the chaste goddess, narrowly escapes the clutches of the lustful Bertram and is rewarded for her virtue by having her pick of the King's nobles. The King (of France) and the Countess (of Rousillon, who abuses her only child Bertram for his antipathy to marriage with Helena) are emblems of traditional wisdom. The King was afflicted with a fatal illness but is saved by Helena's medical treatment which she learned from her commoner but exemplary father. Parolles is a coward and a no-account. Bertram, ultimately, is consigned to happiness with wife Helena despite his reproachful character. Except for that, everything worked out as it should—but why did Shakespeare write this play? What does it accomplish?

Reality: Helena is a slut. She cures the King of impotence—his terrible malady—by going to bed with him and securing an erection and ejaculation. Bertram is a fallguy, an aristocrat forced into marriage with the sluttish Helena by the King because His Majesty was grateful for the restoration of his sexual powers. The "wise old" Countess is a silly old bird who mother-mother-mothers the shrewd-and-sleazy Helena. Diana's mother is the madame of a whorehouse, and Diana's abode is the brothel. Vive le nobleman who gets her. Parolles is the only genuinely decent sympathetic character in the story. Bertram arrives at the finale with a velvet patch on his face, not to signify a war wound, but to indicate he has syphilis—given to him by wife Helena. She, in turn, got it from the King.

Measure for Measure

Appearance

Just another conventional romance yarn, like *All's Well That Ends Well*. The Duke of Vienna claims to go on vacation and leaves the government in charge of Angelo, a puritan who has a reputation for integrity. Escalus, a good magistrate, seconds him while the Duke—as per the folk-tale motif—adopts the disguise of a monk and stays around to watch.

There was an unenforced law against extramarital sexual intercourse. The Duke had winked at it, but Angelo instantly enforces it with rigor. Death by decapitation to anyone who transgresses.

Claudio is the first to fall afoul, having had unlawful—but not immoral—congress with his fiancée. Angelo has him imprisoned and slated for shortening by a head.

Claudio's sister Isabella is a novice in a cloister, a highly religious young woman. Accompanied by Lucio (a "fantastik": a lively, peculiar, amusing character), she goes to Angelo's house to plead for her brother's life. He denies her request yet allows her to return to discuss the matter. Isabella does; this time Lucio does not attend. Alone with her, Angelo has a proposition to make: Go to bed with me and I will release your brother. The puritan, overcome by passion, thus unfolds his unholy offer. But Isabella refuses, and must tell her brother of her failure in the matter.

In prison, she speaks with Claudio of what has transpired. The condemned man appreciates her virtue and, at first, supports her decision. But after second thought, he wishes she might give up her virginity just this once. Isabella fires off a few righteous volleys at the sinful notion, and departs.

The Duke in monk's clothing has been eavesdropping on the conversation in the prison cell. He tells Isabella to contact Angelo and to accord with his desires. When the time comes

to deliver, we will substitute Angelo's former, jilted girlfriend. In the dark, he will not know the difference. (Suspend your skepticism, reader, this is the old Boccaccio *Decameron* bed-trick. It was used also in *All's Well That Ends Well* when Bertram, thinking he sleeps with Diana, actually gets his own wife Helena. Hence the velvet patch.)

Isabella agrees to the Duke's scheme. And it works. Angelo bonks what he thinks to be Isabella, then Mr. Niceguy promptly orders Claudio's execution.

In the conclusion, the Duke uncowls and resolves everything. He had arranged that a pirate's head be substituted for Claudio's, so Claudio makes an appearance and the Duke sanctions his marriage to his affianced. The Duke himself latches onto Isabella for his wedding partner. The fantastik Lucio had spoken disparagingly of the Duke to the disguised Duke, and His Eminence now marries off the petrified Lucio to a "punk", a whore. And one more marriage: Angelo must wed his jiltee. Finis to *Measure for Measure.*

Literary Criticism

Shakespearean critics have been as unhappy about this "problem play" as was Lucio about his bride. Commentary singles out "its notoriously troublesome final scene": "something forced and blatantly fictional about the Duke's ultimate disposition of people and events"; its "implausible happy ending"; "the treble-dyed Angelo is merely told that his evil quits him well".

Let us begin to locate the basis of the problem. A critic states that "moral issues … dominate the play". Another calls it a "profound examination of moral issues". A "cynical" play about "sin", says a third; a play "about forgiveness" comments a fourth.