Athwart Decorum:

David Thacker’s Postmodern Measure for Measure

Aiko WATANABE

Abstract

From its complicated plot and the ambivalent ending, Measure for Measure is called a tragi-comedy, or a ‘problem play’. While numerous attempts have been made by scholars to explore the problematic aspects in the play, in his postmodern production Measure for Measure (1994), David Thacker attempts to interpret the play in his own way. For example, the director additionally endows the heroine Isabella, whose verbose tendency also presents some contradictions in her personality, with boyish elements so as to make her position more tolerable. Furthermore, while Shakespeare provided the Duke with a monk’s costume so that he can observe the state without being known who he is (this might be enough for the Shakespearean period), Thacker endows the Duke with a state of the art technology such as hidden cameras in order to secure his unshakeable power, as well as to imply the stability of the invisible power discourse in the modern state. In this sense, it can be said that this production makes the fact ‘visible’ in an ironical sense as postmodernists usually aim at. By using the tactics of postmodernist interpretation, the director seems not only to wrestle with the controversial aspects in this playtext, but also to represent the actual state of our present mood.
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. (Matthew, 7. 1–2)

It is well-known that Shakespeare adapted the title of Measure for Measure (c. 1604) from the Gospels of the New Testament, and it is said that there is a central message of ‘justice’ and ‘mercy’ in this play. However, the Duke’s value judgements have provoked a great deal of controversy among critics, mainly with regard to his sense of morality towards women. While the ambiguous deeds of the Duke has always been a disputable point in discussing the playtext, it is this ‘enigma of authority’ that ‘Shakespeare failed to resolve in the character of his Duke’.

‘Athwart Decorum’, which I chose as the title, was quoted from the Duke’s speech on the corrupt situation in Vienna before he supposedly leaves for Poland: ‘And Liberty plucks Justice by the nose,/ The baby beats the nurse, and quite athwart/ Goes all decorum’ (1. 3. 29–31). Although the Duke means these lines with an anxious feeling, due to the fact that the state of ineffective laws and acts have not been enforced since ‘nineteen zodics have gone round’ (1. 2. 157), I take this phrase in another way — namely, as an attempt to break down or deconstruct the established Shakespearean play-style. In what follows, this problem play is examined by analysing David Thacker’s recent BBC production of Measure for Measure (1994). To begin with, I shall discuss what the director understands and does with the playtext in a postmodern way, together with examining his dramaturgic intention in the performance. In addition, I will investigate the way in which the director tackles some problematic aspects in the playtext, which, it is generally said, Shakespeare seems to leave unsolved. In particular, I would like to concentrate on exploring the originality and creativity of the director, who tries to represent the current society, being charged with matters of sexuality and power, respectively focused on Isabella’s asexual elements and the Duke’s ambiguous authority throughout the state. Also, it is examined to what extent he makes real those issues raised in the current period, by working with actors. Through his postmodern approach to the play, it seems that the director tries to interpret it in both the senses as the reinterpretation of the Shakespearean playtext and as the representation of the current society.

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I. Postmodern elements in the production

Thacker’s *Measure for Measure* is set in the so-called postmodern period. A good place to start is to devote a little space to examining some aspects of postmodernism, the central concept of his film. The idea of ‘postmodernism’ is very uncertain and the viewpoint of such authors varies considerably, whereas they are seemingly quite similar in many ways. It may be said that postmodernism has probably appeared as a radical reaction against the established forms of high modernism. According to Peter Barry, the modernist features it ‘in such a way as to register a deep nostalgia for an earlier age when faith was full and authority intact. . . . For the postmodernist, by contrast, fragmentation is an exhilarating, liberating phenomenon, symptomatic of our escape from the claustrophobic embrace of fixed systems of belief’. This fragmefariness is one of the points which the director seems to emphasise throughout the production.

The film opens with a scene in which the Duke (Tom Wilkinson), with a glass of brandy and lying on a large sofa in the dark room where the shelves groan with numerous books which do not seem to have been opened for a long time, is intently watching the screen of a big monitor. The picture in rapid sequence shows the social demoralisation in Vienna, with scenes of the rampancy of juvenile delinquency, drug abuse, public disturbance, uncontrolled business activities, such as striptease and sadomasochism. As seen in this opening, postmodern society is often described as that of the consumer, or the post-industrial, perceiving life as a spectacle. One of the most distinctive examples of postmodernism is television, which is seen by some cultural commentators as signifying a loss of reality. In this respect, it is noticeable that this production was actually made for television, not for the cinema.

The scene in the brothel (1. 2) is inserted into scene 1 ‘fragmentarily’. The site is filled with the smoke of cigarettes, and gloomy sound effects, which are sometimes offensive to the ear. Mistress Overdone is complaining about the sudden enforced Acts and is almost going to be arrested by the police, while holding an illicitly born baby, supposedly delivered of by Kate Keep-down. Here, the important point to bear in mind is that, while the modernists take fragmentation pessimistically, the postmodernists embrace it optimistically. If it is a modernist approach, the baby should be crying as if it deplores its miserable social position and its fate to which it is reduced. However, the director’s dramaturgy goes the other way around: not only is the baby totally quiet, but also it seems to parody the ill-matched, unhealthy and dark situation ‘ironically’, without apparently regretting them.
This is as if Thacker follows Umberto Eco's view on postmodernism: 'The postmodern reply to the modern consists of recognising that the past, since it cannot really be destroyed, because its destruction leads to silence, must be revisited: but with irony, not innocently' (my italics). Thus the more the innocence of the baby becomes conspicuous, the more actual corrupt society of experience is emphasised.

There are a lot of prostitutes wandering from one place to another. Some are dancing, some doing a strip and seeking for customers, while one is even vomiting out of morning sickness in front of Overdone and Pompey, who informs her of the first 'victim', Claudio, caused by the reinforced law. Furthermore, the point to observe in this production is that, along with female prostitutes, the director casts a 'male' prostitute to be found, which has already been commonplace today, although the number is still small. In addition, we can find a few men who appear abnormal: one is vacantly sitting on the stairs with a baby bottle in his mouth, and another is rambling with a monster-faced mask, while there is a man, who, tenderly holding a dog, might imply a zoophile or zoorast (which can be also categorised as one symptom of abnormal sexuality). All these uncanny depictions are possible circumstances in our contemporary period. Besides the relationship between heterosexualities, the number of homosexual such as gays, lesbians and bisexual is increasing, or at least, it is becoming more conspicuous than before. It is a fact that such groups are gradually coming to have a stronger voice in society. In this way, the raised question of female morality and chastity in the playtext can be easily amplified today, since, as mentioned, our sense of morality is no longer classified by the double standard of the Shakespearean period, but represents a multi-standard society. Nevertheless, their sexual practices are now still considered as 'abnormal', so that most of them are outwardly forced to conceal their sexuality. This fact can be regarded as the point which the director tries to emphasise.

All these scandalous scenes are shown as a 'spectacle' for TV viewers. As for observers, there is a typical example of some of the aspects of postmodernism, which can be related to what Baudrillard calls a 'simulacrum'. The contemporary French writer Jean Baudrillard comments on the phenomenon in his book Simulations (1981, translated in 1983), examining such devices as film, TV and advertising, which blur the distinction between reality and illusion. Here he discusses the process of a culture of 'hyperreality', which has consequently been constructed. It is merely a representation for most people, provided by the media, so that their actual state of mind is, in a way, paralysed. It is also a fact that ordinary people can hardly face this actual status quo of the brothels — for they
were historically ousted from the public sphere as we will see in a while — unless they obtain it, through some media such as newspapers, magazines and television, in the form of information, knowledge, or even common sense. Through the TV screen, every viewer can be a voyeur. For ordinary people, while such a spectacle can be a kind of unapproachable sphere, they are often, nevertheless, curious about it. However, as they cannot tell whether what is happening inside the frame of a TV screen is real, they really do not care about it. In this production, as if to emphasise the confusing nature of this ‘reality’, the TV monitor turns out to be actually a ‘glass’ mirror reflecting real events behind the Duke and the viewer. It suddenly smashes to pieces and falls.

Another characteristic aspect of postmodernism woven in Thacker’s production is a lingering attachment to the past or deep nostalgia, with the result that postmodernism contains a sort of anachronism or eclecticism. Fredric Jameson regards these retrospective facets as ‘The practice of pastiche, the imitation of dead styles’ in the nostalgia film. The reason seems to be that we are no longer able to focus on our present situation. This feature is even more true of the gap between Isabella’s and the Duke’s anachronistic costumes and the other characters’ up-to-date ones. For example, while Isabella’s monastic tunic costume, which does not belong to any particular period, is completely out of date, Angelo’s smooth, high-quality suit is in time. The tension between costumes might signify that, in one sense, Angelo’s authority will be short-lived, for he, more or less, follows the fashion. In addition, the sense of nostalgia is stressed on the relationship between Angelo and Mariana. Angelo (Corin Redgrave), the deputy of the Duke, looks reserved, sober and earnest from the start and seems to be very puritanical, and his silver-rimmed glasses make more difficult to read his facial expression. His betrothed, Mariana was betrayed by him five years ago (because she lost her dowry by her brother’s accident), so that she lives in a grief as if she was a recluse. While at his desk, Angelo casually takes out a picture of himself and her (Margot Leicester). There follows a shot of herself, sadly looking out of the lattice window in the rain, which are originally inserted in this film. In this production, thus, although Angelo’s past only exists in the small frame of the picture and he can pick it up and put it away in the drawer as he pleases, Mariana’s past exists in her own memory and actually she lives ‘in’ it. As she strongly adheres to the past, she cannot catch up with such a speedy evolution of the city. She is now entirely in the past.
II. Inversions of sexuality

Having described several characteristics of postmodernism in Thacker’s film, we may now turn to the real subject. What we have seen so far is preliminary to a further task of exploring how the director represents the present society, while trying to interpret a couple of common questions raised in the playtext: Isabella’s role as a speaker, the Duke’s cunning bearing and the obscure ending in relation to the question of sexuality and power.

Obviously enough, female characters are differently described from the male ones. When we look at the role of the central character, Isabella, who is seemingly a peculiar woman of the contemporary period, the question is how to read her morality and chastity. In order to understand the contemporary state of affairs through this production, there needs historical knowledge in the first place. Michel Foucault, one of the most influential philosophers in the field of postmodernism as well as that of poststructuralism, makes several important statements on the process of sexual repression. In The History of Sexuality (1976), he shows the way in which sexuality came to be hidden from the public sphere and veiled behind some place provided in favour of making profit such as the brothels. In Thacker’s production, we can find several scenes which seem to embody those situations. However, what is more stressed here is rather exaggerated corruption of the society, which far goes beyond that in the early seventeenth century. According to Foucault, since around that period calling sex by its name has been censored and people were not able to mention it in public. However, this does not mean all people had remained silent. Some people had found other ways of speaking of sex in alternative ways. Sexual repression thus had been more and more reinforced, especially since the Victorian period. For these last three centuries, under the rigorous control over enunciations, a veritable discursive explosion is seen, but this only ‘constituted a whole restrictive economy’. The brothels in modern society are, therefore, quite different from those in the sixteenth century. In short, it can be said that what Thacker means to represent is no longer the actual situation in those days, but that in ‘our’ period by borrowing and even parodying Shakespeare’s plot.

In such circumstances, Isabella is presented as the most independent, strong-willed woman in this production as well as in the playtext. Although there was a convention of woman-worship, which was symbolised in the Virgin Mary since the Middle Ages, or even in Queen Elizabeth in the Renaissance period, ordinary women were generally considered as creatures who were inferior to men, as daughters of Eve, who tempted and corrupted Adam.
On the basis of St Paul’s precept of the Catholic church, women were supposed to remain silent and should be submissive towards their fathers and husbands in all situations. In those days, while men had great sexual licence or permissiveness, which was not detected (whereas women’s was detected), it was the concept of ‘chastity’ that women were pushed to follow as representative of their virtue. Against the current of the times, though, Claudio praises her, and eagerly urges Lucio to tell her about her brother’s predicament. At this moment, Thacker’s film seems to faithfully trace the original text. Claudio (Ben Miles) describes that in Isabella’s youth, ‘There is a prone and speechless dialect /Such as moves men; beside, she hath prosperous art /When she will play with reason and discourse, /And well she can persuade’ (1. 2. 173–76). Contrary to his expectation, however, in her first interview with Angelo, Isabella (Juliet Aubrey) is somehow lacking in eagerness to persuade him. She asks for Claudio’s acquittal in a very faint, trembling voice, though on being admonished by Angelo, she easily gives up doing so. She then turns around and begins to leave regretfully, fumbling with the cross worn around her waist. It is Lucio, a fantastic, who pushes her over and over again. Otherwise she would have withdrawn her plea more easily. Urged by him, she is gradually led to intercede with Angelo, and comes to have a voice, which conventionally belonged to men’s privilege, and persists in her case with a great deal of gesture.

Unlike Claudio, Angelo’s attitude towards women typifies the above-mentioned stereotypes of that period. During the scene in which Isabella encounters him in the Duke’s room for the second time, he underrates women’s status. It is significant in this scene that his glasses are taken off and he reveals his face. In addition, it is on the sofa that Angelo finds that he loves Isabella, after going away from the desk with a book on law. The blazing fire in the fire-place behind him signifies his passionate desire. Isabella is, on the contrary, self-contained and deplores such women’s predicament, expressing her abhorrence of it sadly, when she is approached by Angelo:

ANG. Nay, women are frail too.

ISAB. Ay, as the glasses where they view themselves,

Which are as easy broke as they make forms.

Women? — Help, heaven! Men their creation mar

In profiting by them. Nay, call us ten times frail;

For we are soft as our complexions are,

And credulous to false prints.
ANG. I think it well;  
And from this testimony of your own sex—  
Since I suppose we are made to be no stronger  
Than faults may shake our frames—let me be bold.  
I do arrest your words. Be that you are,  
That is, a woman; if you be more, you're none.  
If you be one— as you are well express'd  
By all external warrants—show it now,  
By putting on the destin'd livery. (2. 4. 123–37)

Then he tells her of his love calmly and suddenly kisses her. The sign of the desk is also implied in the shot and Isabella screams that she would disclose his immoral design in public, showing off some papers on Angelo’s 'desk'. She believes the effect of the restored law, though that law is, as it were, Angelo’s possession, so that he does not worry about her protest, and coldly says that her appeal would never be accepted: ‘Who will believe thee, Isabel?’ (2. 4. 153). As following the playtext, the film stresses on the male ego, and carves his sexual desire in relief. When he knows that Isabella would not change her mind, his attitude changes completely, and he attacks and edges up her on the sofa, which is so large that it now functions as a bed. Thus, while the desk is a sign symbolising the puritanical rigid side of his character, the sofa (a bed) functions as a device which drives his sexual motivation. On this sofa, Angelo’s violent attack is performed like an action of rape. This is one of the most violent scenes in the film, along with the scene of Isabella’s and Claudio’s meeting. After resisting his persistent approach, Angelo, who perceives that he cannot satisfy his desire this time, transfigures into a furious punisher and knocks over her fiercely. Isabella sobs in grief: ‘To whom should I complain? Did I tell this,/ Who would believe me?’ (2. 4. 170–71). At this moment, the film emphasises the fact that women were even not allowed to reveal their own will, which is as well supported in the playtext.

Nevertheless, according to the text, Isabella subsequently has to use her tongue not to rescue her brother but to protect her chastity. As she flatly resisted Angelo, who compelled her to resign her body to him, in favour of her virginity, she chooses to offer her brother to be sent to the gallows against her own will. It seems Isabella takes it for granted that Claudio should be punished, because he has committed a horrible sin. Considering the secular justice of the Jacobean audience, her value judgement might have been rather rigid, though she insists on holding morality in higher esteem rather than bonds of affection.
towards her true brother. She says to the disguised Duke, after seeing Claudio, 'I have spirit to do anything that appears not foul in the truth of my spirit' (3.1.205-7). She shows at this moment a gifted tongue by Shakespeare in order to embody, or protest, her essential self. In this film, the director makes more obvious this fairly puritanical spirit in her personality, by exaggerating her reaction in the form of inverse sexuality, and diversifying the matter of morality in the current mode.

What comes next is the Thacker's unique filmisation, which one cannot find in Shakespeare's original text. The scene of Isabella's and Claudio's reunion in the prison is noticeable in terms of Isabella's sudden emotional change, after he desires her spiritual death. From the beginning of the play, compared with the one (Kelly Nelligan) in Desmond Davis's previous BBC production Measure for Measure (1979), Isabella (Aubrey) in Thacker's is remarkably dramatised in a boyish image. Upset by Claudio's persuasion, Isabella gets carried away in anger, wishing his death in order to protect her virginity. Here she violently screams, 'I'll pray a thousand prayers for thy death; /No word to save thee' and 'I had rather my brother die by the law than my son should be unlawfully born' (3.1.145-46, 188-90). In Davis's production, Isabella indeed gets upset and angry by her brother's imploration, though her attitude is still self-contained. This means, in one sense, she stands by her position as a novice. On the other hand, in Thacker's production, she not only turns a deaf ear to Claudio's entreaty, but also violently censures him for it. What is more, an inversion of sexuality is symbolically suggested here. On the critical situation of Claudio, whereas Isabella seems to even enjoy the riddle (see 3.1.54-72), completely lacking calmness, she behaves as if transforming from a role of merciful Madonna into a heartless witch. Although Angelo stated in the earlier scene that 'That is, a woman; if you be more, you're none' (2.4.134), she has just gone beyond the woman sphere: that is, Isabella plays a role of a man and Claudio, who cries and looks 'womanish', is completely scared at her frenzy. Thus her violence against Claudio is exactly like a furious villain who rapes a helpless lass. Whenever Isabella argues against male characters, she refuses to stay in a feminine role and cannot help behaving like men. If she remained in a passive position like Mariana or Juliet, she would not obtain any means to attack the established drama/society. Therefore, in this production, by transforming herself into a male on a mental level, Isabella's rather unconvincing words and deeds concerning her morality embody the actual fact of male-defined society and even false Christianity in those days, even if she does not put on male clothes but a sort of asexual costume.

Another example of the inversion of sexuality can be found when Claudio is arrested
and taken to a prison. Since sex became a 'police matter' in the eighteenth century, the
police have become what Althusser calls, an overt 'repressive state apparatus' in the public
sphere, which not only judges, but also gains a power to administer society. In this
production, on entering the prison, Claudio is first stripped off all his clothes by the police.
The other prisoners are, like onlooking crowd, curiously coming closer to watch the 'show'.
During the inspection, Claudio is completely passive and obedient all the time. Here the
relationship between power and sex can be defined as that of repression. We are also shown
other men's naked bodies in the prison, who generally do just as the policemen order them
to do. Only Pompey (Henry Goodman) plays a trick, but he obeys the authority after all.
By contrast, in the film, the more impressive shot is that the arrested Overdone is still
complaining about the Acts and grumbling about the police's rough treatment of her. It can
be inferred that, in the modern period, men have become more and more powerless and
women powerful. Furthermore, nowadays moral standards concerning sexuality is diverse
and it is impossible to divide society simply into a matter of binary oppositions such as men
and women. In this way, it seems that this film tries to parody the state of sexual corruption
both in the Shakespearean sense and in that of our period.

III. The enigma of authority

Inspite of her aforementioned resistance, towards the end of the play, Isabella has to give up
her role as a speaker, because of the unconquerable power of the Duke, who shows his real
nature in the final scene. There is an opinion that considering his behaviour, his temporary
leave is totally meaningless for the city of Vienna. If the Duke had not evaded his
responsibilities, such a discord would not have happened, and Angelo would not have been
able to enforce the law. Consequently, as Carol Neely indicates, 'In his attempts to reform
sexuality in Vienna, he merely reinstitutes the problems.' Finally, the problem increases
when one combines the question of sexuality and power, that is, the way in which the Duke
rules the sexually corrupted city, by way of exercising his power. Here we shall concentrate
on Thacker's interpretation on these questions, unfolded in what he understands the modern
society.

It is needless to say that the most influential agent in this production is the Duke as the
ruler, the watcher and a 'good performer'. Throughout the film, he is keen on checking his
subjects' words and deeds all the time and tries to ascertain whether their loyalty is genuine
or not, sometimes in the disguise of a friar and at other times watching through a TV
monitor. It is noteworthy that his power has, even during his leave, not weakened, but infiltrated, for a surveillance system of this city is perfectly established. As seen in the first shot in the Duke's room, we can see that hidden cameras are provided throughout the city. In modern society, the authority and high-technology are not only useful, but also absolutely necessary to augment power. While the legitimate exercise itself has lessened somewhat, the agencies of control and the mechanisms of surveillance in a pedagogic and therapeutic way have been reinforced more than ever, which is symbolised in the hidden cameras placed within the city in the film. His power even increases when he conceals himself in a friar's costume. Historically, after the evolution of the Catholic pastoral and so on, the rite of confession is an established practice in the Christian church. It is needless to say that the person as a confessor has an absolute power towards a confessant. That is, in the name of confession, according to Foucault, people believed that 'everything had to be told' *(HS, 19)*. Hiding himself through cameras and pretending to be a merciful friar sometimes, the Duke absorbs knowledge to his hearts content in order to make his power invincible. As the network of power is spread everywhere, even if you are not aware of the existence of the Duke, one is always already a certain subject, who is at all hours observed by the Duke's eyes. Ordinary people are in fact unconscious that they are subject to the Duke (the state) in their daily life. While he can obtain any information through the various apparatuses, nobody is generally aware of being watched and controlled. We can say that this is representative of the actual status quo in modern society. The Duke's invisible power thus seems to signify the power of the state in the contemporary period.

Having presented the function of power in this production, let us have a close look at the way in which the Duke entraps Isabella at will. Inspite of her resolute resistance, Isabella's trans-historical tunic seems to have ironically implied to anchor her 'permanent' position as a triple subordinate to the Duke, who now contains three authorities: the friar to whom Isabella (a novice) is faithful, the ruler to whom Isabella (a citizen) is loyal, and the man to whom Isabella (a woman) is subject. It is a contrast to the Duke's monastic gown, which is supposed to represent poverty and also belongs to 'all' times or defies the idea of period, implies his invincible power. In the scene that Isabella practically assaults her brother by a kind of weird monstrous copulation, quite ironically enough, it is the moment that the Duke, who should serve for God, is actually attracted to her and falls in love with her through a 'monitor'. While watching, he is the real Duke (not a friar), for he does not wear his monastery gown and his hair style looks neat. Being impatient with her accusation towards his brother, the Duke in disguise enters into the prison, or inside the frame of
monitor. The Duke, as a ‘confessor to Angelo’ (3.1.165), then, calmly cautions Claudio against his overstatement, and asks the provost to leave, showing off under the friar’s influence: ‘Leave me a while with the maid; my mind promises with my habit no loss shall touch her by my company’ (3.1.175-77). At the first interview with Isabella, the Duke begins to appease her anger, by freely talking to her. Notwithstanding the fact that the Duke has to conceal his real features when he is not disguised, the disguised Duke, the friar, now does not have to keep anything secret in front of the others. He has the right to say, ‘I have overheard what hath passed between you [= Claudio] and your sister’ (3.1.159-60). Here, the Duke’s other characteristic, the sexual egoistic view, which has been concealed in a friar’s anachronistic costume, is uncovered. Accordingly, since the device of plotting the bed trick is put into her head by the friar, the embodiment of justice, Isabella easily accepts this offer even with ‘pleasure’: ‘The image of it gives me content already, and I trust it will grow to a most prosperous perfection’ (3.1.260-61); ‘I thank you for this comfort. Fare you well, good father’ (3.1.269-70). The Duke appears as a father to function as Isabella’s protector, but in reality he is nothing but her dictator. Now the Duke, the ruler of the state, has power in both the public and private spheres, and at the same time becomes a shadowy authority, the agent of the Church.

The last scene of the Duke’s re-appearance entails a typical postmodern aspect, neatly arranged by the director. Especially, the setting makes an impression on the TV viewer that the original dramatist Shakespeare has entirely disappeared without leaving any trace. The Duke’s press conference is supposed to be held at the palace. Followed by several cameras, the Duke, with a false smile, solemnly enters the room. As the Duke, the public figure, is now in a real position, he is this time an object to be televised. In another room, Isabella, Mariana and Lucio are anxiously watching the provided monitor. Furthermore, Claudio is also taken into the other room and it is suggested that she watches the course of the interview with the provost (Later Barnardine joins them). All of them become viewers at this moment. Thus, through the TV cameras, a kind of ‘pastiche’, in which the reality (the relay spot) and the superficiality (TV monitors) coexist, is composed in this one scene. The viewers in the outside place, by turn, enter into the public sphere. As suggested by the Friar Peter, Isabella at first enters into the palace, where the press conference is now on air. She appeals for justice to the Duke as loud and intense as she can, although this is at once rejected by him, in favour of the well-prepared dramatisation. The moment when he reveals his identity is not so exaggerated but dramatic enough. (Gradually, the TV viewer is drawn to the lines by Shakespeare.) The other actors are evenly surprised, especially Lucio,
who unveils the Duke's hood and seems to be shocked. From this revelation onwards, however, all the characters, other than the Duke, begin to be silent and the play itself begins to lose its vitality, as if the Duke has taken their energy to speak lively. On the contrary, the Duke becomes more and more powerful and eloquent towards the end. Now the Duke, the dominator of the state, has achieved total control over the course of the play. When he sentences Angelo to death, he comes close to the desk. Pointing to the book on law on the desk significantly, he declares in a loud voice, 'An Angelo for Claudio; death for death' (5. 1. 407). This is the moment when everybody is convinced that anybody can hardly resist him. Even Mariana cannot make her plea firmly. Thus, she asks Isabella to plead for Angelo's life, although it is Isabella who was almost attacked by him at one time. This is because, it seems, under the Duke's power, only Isabella still has the strength to oppose the Duke. Mariana once says to Isabella, 'Hold up your hands, say nothing, — I'll speak all' (5. 1. 436), though after that, she actually does not speak except for a short response. Isabella accepts her offer in a calm way, and kneels in front of the Duke, in response to Mariana's suggestion. This is also the moment when we once more realise the director follows the original text. She then gives an honest appeal for Angelo, which is much more eloquent than Mariana, who primarily ought to do so:

[kneeling.] Most bounteous sir:
    Look, if it please you, on this man condemn'd,
    As if my brother liv'd. I partly think
    A due sincerity govern'd his deeds
    Till he did look on me. Since it is so,
    Let him not die. My brother had but justice,
    In that he did the thing for which he died:
    For Angelo,
    His act did not o'ertake his bad intent,
    And must be buried but as an intent
    That perish'd by the way. Thoughts are no subjects;
    Intents, but merely thoughts. (5. 1. 442–52)

These are the last lines Isabella speaks, however. At this time, her speech is still eloquent enough, though, in this production, her usual exaggerated gesture is weakened. Isabella, who has been bold and even talkative in the middle of the play, now becomes silent. She
stands still on the spot, anxiously staring at his face. When the Duke suggests his proposal ('Give me your hand and say you will be mine.' 5. 1. 490), from her expressionless face, it is unknown if she will accept this offer or will be a nun as is her original aim. It has already been shown that, even when the Duke is in disguise, Isabella cannot but obey him.

All she has done was seen through by the Duke, and now she realise that she was also controlled by him. What is more, she also finds that what she has done is just devoted to the Duke's purpose. This time, there is no escape for her: in front of the invincible power of the Duke, she is now intimidated to give up her chastity. The only fact that we can infer from Thacker's version is, therefore, the Duke remains the most powerful ruler in the play, and Isabella has no right to reject him. Thus Isabella, the most eloquent speaker throughout the play/film is reduced to speechlessness, along with the other characters. In the end, mildly but coercively, the Duke expels her from the male domain in which she has been for a while, and once more forces her to confine herself to where she originally belonged. The film ends with a considerably longer shot in which Isabella and the Duke stand still in silence, keeping a certain distance: his coercive attitude thoroughly dominates the scene; Isabella's distress and confusion are well expressed from her flurried complexion. This tense ending seems to be more convincing than the climax of Davis's production, in which Isabella exits from the screen, smiling, hand in hand with the Duke, as if she accepts the Duke's proposal without hesitation. This is the answer by the director responding to the question with regard to the ambiguous ending in the original — like Shakespeare, the director leaves the matter open.

That the purpose of playing is to hold 'the mirror up to nature' is the phrase that Shakespeare makes Hamlet say (Ham., 3. 2. 19). As shown by the long history of the English theatre, Shakespearean plays have been staged, or even shown nowadays in films to reflect the ethos of each period. Contemporary spectators in each period might, on one hand, enjoy those performances as if they had lived in the Shakespearean period. On the other hand, they are asked to reconsider their own time through them. In this respect, Thacker's postmodern TV production Measure for Measure is not an exception. He may well agree to what Madan Sarup says, 'How we conceive of postmodernism is central to how we re-present the past, the present, and the future to ourselves and others'. In the postmodern period, represented by high-technology and an information-oriented society,
everything surrounding us seems to be superficial and dispersed, as clearly seen in
the brothel scene in his version. Nonetheless, in a deeper sense, we tend to recollect the past
nostalgically, just as when Mariana was lost deep in thought in the rain. In another sense,
however, what we can acquire from a knowledge of the past is that, after all, nothing has
really changed, or the fact that we have not advanced very far at all. As far as social
relationships are concerned, we are always facing the essential problem of the human
relationships between the oppressor and the oppressed such as men/women and
master/servant. This becomes more understandable as Thacker, while adapting the
postmodernist approach on the level of representation, did not manipulate the Shakespeare’s

text itself. In conclusion, by making the most of the postmodern approach to this
Shakespearean play, David Thacker attempts to hold a sort of prism, which not only
projects the problematic interpretation of the play in full relief, but also mirrors the features
of moral and sexual perversions in both the Shakespearean and the (post)modern period.

NOTES

1. William Shakespeare, Measure for Measure: The Arden Shakespeare, eds. Richard Proudfoot et

2. The concept of postmodernism cannot easily be defined without a reference to modernism.
While it is said that modernism was prosperous during the first half of the twentieth century and
postmodernism began after the Second World War, both of the two have quite similar features
in the sense that they emerged in an attempt to overthrow the metaphysical idea of truth prior to
the century. On this matter, in addition, see Jeremy Hawthorn, The Concise Glossary of

3. Peter Barry, Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory (Manchester:
Manchester UP, 1985), p. 84. Barry continues that postmodernists reject “the distinction
between “high” and “popular” art which was important in modernism, and believes in excess, in
gaudiness, and in “bad taste” mixtures of qualities... Postmodernity thus “deconstructs” the
basic aim of the Enlightenment, that is “the idea of a unitary and of history end of a subject”
(85, 87).

4. Umberto Eco, “Postmodernism, Irony, the Enjoyable”, Modernism/Postmodernism, ed. Peter

5. See Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Capital”, New Left Review, 46

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York: Vintage), 1, p. 18. Further references to this essay will be indicated in the text in parentheses by the abbreviation HS, followed by a page number.

7. She is thin and has a gaunt face with deep-set eyes, and when she implores Angelo to help her brother with many gestures, her gestures look exaggerated, and her creeping hands and bare feet are seemingly peculiar. There is also an invented scene of her hair being cut in Act 1 scene 3, which creates a sort of masculine or asexual characteristic in her.

8. As touched on, disheartened features of women are embodied in Mariana and Juliet. They share some common misfortunes.

