***Measure for Measure***

1. i. The Duke deputizes Angelo and Escalus.

ii. Lucio baits gentlemen; Mrs. Overdone tells them of Claudio’s arrest; Pompey tells her of the order against brothels; Claudio ask Lucio to get Isabella out of the cloister to plead.

iii. The Duke disguises himself as a friar.

iv. Lucio gets Isabella out of the cloister to plead.

1. i. Angelo and Escalus begin to hear the case of Elbow, Froth, and Pompey, which Escalus settles.

ii. Angelo and the Provost hear Isabella plead for Claudio’s life; Angelo lusts after her.

iii. The disguised Duke meets the Provost and Juliette.

iv. Angelo hears Isabella again, alone, and propositions her.

1. i. The disguised Duke counsels Claudio, eavesdrops on Isabella and Claudio, interrupts to speak briefly with Claudio (without Isabella overhearing him), and concludes by offering to substitute Mariana for Isabella.

ii. Elbow, arresting Pompey, meets the disguised Duke; they are joined by Lucio, who refuses to pay Pompey’s bail, whereupon Elbow and Pompey exit – and Lucio maligns the absent Duke to the supposed friar. With Lucio gone, the disguised Duke meets Escalus and Mrs. Overdone, who has been arrested; alone on stage at last, the disguised Duke soliloquizes.

1. i. The disguised Duke meets Isabella at Mariana’s and makes plans.

ii. The Provost makes Pompey assistant to Abhorson, the hangman; Claudio come on and goes off; the disguised Duke and Provost await Claudio’s pardon but receive instead an order for his death, and the Duke countermands that order.

iii. Pompey, Abhorson, and the disguised Duke fail to get Barnardine ready to be executed; the Provost suggests Ragozine’s head be used. Disguised Duke tells Isabella that Claudio is dead.

iv. Angelo and Escalus learn of the Duke’s proposed return.

v. The Duke sheds his disguise and summons his friends.

vi. Isabella and Mariana review their instructions.

1. i. All is revealed. The Duke greets Angelo and Escalus; Isabella makes her complaint, omitting Mariana’s role, and is arrested for slander; Mariana steps forward with her version; and the Duke exits, pretending disbelief. In his absence, Lucio abuses the supposed friar to Escalus. The Duke re-enters, once more disguised as a friar, and confronts both Escalus and Lucio, who unmasks him. The Duke orders Angelo and Mariana married and then condemns Angelo to death for the supposed execution of Claudio. Isabella and Mariana plead for Angelo’s life. The Provost produces Barnardine and Claudio. The Duke pardons Angelo, condemns Lucio, and orders Claudio to marry Juliette. Finally, he proposes to marry Isabella, who says nothing.

Characters on one possible moral spectrum

* Barnardine and Pompey have no moral sense; they are amoral rather than immoral.
* Lucio, despite his name, sheds no light; he is rather a Lucifer.
* Claudio learns two lessons he lacked at the beginning of the play: to repent for his sins

and to resign himself to death.

* Likewise, Isabella learns forgiveness for sins and acceptance of life.
* Angelo is a fallen angel, but he is redeemed by grace.
* Mariana is a virgin wife until Angelo falls.
* The Duke is either the best or worst of the characters, the most or least responsible,

the demi-god or the arch-deceiver of the play.

In practice, students tend to put Isabella, Mariana, and Juliet on a good-to-bad spectrum with regard to sexual behavior. Students also disagreed about whether Barnardine-Pompey-Lucio are on a spectrum from worst to best of the “bad” male characters, or whether they are all in a heap at the bottom. Ambivalence is most marked when considering the Duke, for me as well as for every class of students.

Genre of “problem play”

*Problem 1*

Isabella seems somewhat cold and lacking sympathy for others early in the play, but her development of warmth and empathy are not visible. Angelo is in need of repentance, but his contrition is not audible. Lucio is given a speech we may find admirable, but he is punished for it. Claudio and Juliette sincerely repent of their act, which we may consider the least sinful of any sin committed in the play. The Duke hides his interventions from other characters; he gives no hint to any of them or to the audience of his desire for Isabella; and he professes social reform but dispenses individual correction instead. He also pretends to be a friar – not a positive character in Protestant England – and hears confessions as if he were one. Finally, he counsels everyone to have contempt for the world when he is in disguise, but unmasked he prescribes marriage for everyone, which is not at all contemptuous of worldly desires. In short, the characters either seem to stay the same when they should change or seem inconsistent when they should be consistent. These difficulties with character development lead directly to Problem 2.

*Problem 2*

We expect poetic justice at the end of a comedy. We get Claudio alive and married to Juliette, which is just and merciful. We get Angelo alive and married to Mariana, which is at least merciful, but it does not produce justice for his supposed treatment of Isabella and Claudio. We get Isabella released from her religious vows (nuns were not positive characters in Protestant England) and apparently engaged to marry the Duke, which offers her a kind of reward for her suffering, but there is no sign that she would consider the reward to be just or merciful. And we get Lucio condemned to marry a whore, which is probably as fitting as Claudio’s and Juliette’s treatment; he has been a user of whores and will now be a cuckold of one, garnering for himself the ridicule that he has heaped upon everyone else he encounters.

In what sense does the closing scene represent the poetic justice promised by the title of the play?