

The play's treatment of justice is complicated by the human frailty of its characters, including those in power. He is the one to utter the famous couplet about justice and retribution: "Haste still pays haste, and leisure answers leisure; / Like doth quit like, and measure still for measure." This sounds like an excellent ideal to live up to: punishments should be exactly and consistently proportionate to the crimes committed. The trouble is that the Duke fails to follow his own advice. In a world where "measure" was really given "for measure," Lucio, who spreads some unflattering rumors about the Duke, would never receive the same sentence as Angelo, who perverts the course of justice to gratify his own lust. "When I that censure [Claudio] do so offend," he insists, "let mine own judgment pattern out my death, / And nothing come in partial." As yet Angelo cannot imagine himself giving in to the kinds of base temptations that would lead to a "crime" like Claudio's. Angelo's hypocrisy begins in earnest when he recognizes the lustful impulse within himself but continues to act as though he is unsusceptible to it. He is, at first, shocked to realize he is not so different from Claudio and all the other hot-blooded men and women of the city--the very people over whom he previously sat in judgment. Wiser persons might respond by accepting their own fallible natures and thus resolving to be a little gentler toward others--for example, not decapitating young men for getting their girlfriends pregnant. Angelo, the virtuous deputy who succumbs to temptation, is the prime example.