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Substitution in Shakespeare's Problem Comedies

THE plays commonly known as Shakespeare's problem comedies, *Measure for Measure*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and *All's Well That Ends Well*, are linked together by their notable ability to start arguments, and solutions to the "problems" they pose are less enduring than the competition among different critical standpoints. The critical dialogue about these plays mirrors their action on stage, in which questions of judgment and evaluation prevail, surviving even the carefully emphatic endings—theatrically conclusive in *Measure* and *All's Well*, reductively inconclusive in *Troilus*—whose very finality becomes the continuation of the "problem." Since the plays offer few implicit guides to judgment, such as a normative tact in the hero or heroine, a uniform wisdom in the commentator, or an ease in the denouement, they inevitably confer on the audience the ambiguities of uncertain judgment.[1]

To make uncertainty of judgment theatrically effective and dramatically coherent is a formal problem which Shakespeare resolves in these three plays by a sustained stress on the act of substitution: the placing of one self in the role and into the identity of another. In romantic comedy, substitution is a common feature of plot complication. Its form is the impersonation of a fictional self, created and controlled by the impersonator.

1. Uncertainty of judgment now commonly defines the generic link among these three "problem comedies." Clifford Leech rightly observes the risk and the propriety of the association: "There are, of course, considerable differences between any two of the three plays in question. . . . But the three plays are alike in that at different moments within each attitudes are set up which are strangely at odds with one another": "The Theme of Ambition in *All's Well That Ends Well*," *Journal of English Literary History*, 21 (1954), 18. Cf. A. P. Rossiter on their "shiftingness," in *Angel with Horns*, ed. Graham Storey (London, 1961), p. 128, and J. R. Brown's perceptive remark that "such a shifting response is alien to pure satire," in *Shakespeare and His Comedies*, 2nd ed. (London, 1962), p. 183.

Thus, Rosalind impersonates Ganymede, Viola Cesario, and Portia Balthasar. The effect of these impersonations on the audience is the delight of watching a comic dilemma or confusion which is known in advance to be temporary, and which also expresses the versatility of self always affirmed by Shakespeare's romantic comedy. By contrast, substitution in Shakespeare's problem comedies involves the replacement of one real self by another, one character by another—Angelo for the Duke, Ajax for Achilles, and many others. The devices of the substitute leader and substitute bed-mate, central to these plays, are the most literal form of substitutive actions, yet substitutions which are the effect rather than the donnée of intrigue are just as common, such as the substitution of Ragozine's head for Claudio's, or of Patroclus for Polyxena in Achilles' affections. Indeed, changes in a single character are often presented dramatically as a reductive displacement of one real self by another one with a different, weaker identity, as is the case with Parolles' transformation from Bertram's companion to Lafew's fool, or with Cressida's change from Troilus' Cressida to Diomedes'. The act of substitution is central to the creation of multiple and sustained tests of adequacy, to which the plays' problems refer. They raise the tense questions: can the substitute do it? what does the parallel between one character and his or her surrogate imply? As a means of testing character against role, and character against character, substitution allows a dramatization of ambiguity that demands comparison and evaluation by the audience. This essay's exploration of substitution, then, offers a study of the means to ambiguity, its dramatic definition, in *Troilus and Cressida*, *All's Well*, and *Measure for Measure*.

I

Commenting on the Trojan war, Diomedes, who will get to know even more about substitutions, tells Paris that for every drop of blood in Helen's

> bawdy veins
> A Grecian's life hath sunk; for every scruple
> Of her contaminated carrion weight
> A Troyan hath been slain. (IV.i.69–72)[2]

This bitter reversal of the war's formulaic glory—the face that launched a thousand ships takes on the carrion weight of the thousands of lives it cost—is perhaps the play's epitomizing instance of the felt gap among

2. All quotations from Shakespeare are taken from *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*, ed. Alfred Harbage (Baltimore, 1969).

values that come to invest a single object. Instability of value has been as inescapable an experience for critics of *Troilus and Cressida* as it is for the play's characters, but something remains to be said about the primary form which the instability assumes. Diomedes' instance will serve: Helen's value was felt to be matchless, Helen unique, and so worth a war—the war that demonstrates, with its bloody substitutions of lives for scruples, that Helen's matchlessness is a futile fiction. Helen's own appearance confirms for us that she is anything but unique; she is just cheerfully common. Such denial of uniqueness is arguably the play's most frequent proof of the fragility of value, and the usual form for this puncturing of human claims to singularity, to the highest personal worth, is an act of substitution which reductively identifies two selves to the detriment of both. This dramatic synonomy of characters is primarily satiric in effect, as it is when Paris' selfish fecklessness connects him, through Helen's bed, to Menelaus' gross ineptitude. But the target of substitution in *Troilus and Cressida* is less individual deflation than the revelation of a universal limitation on human adequacy, a limitation that diminishes, though it never quite erases, the value in character which we call humanity.[3]

The first of the play's substitutions, Ajax for Achilles, occupies the Greeks from their first appearance in the play until Ajax is embraced by Hector at the end of Act IV.[4] The substitution is funnier to the audience than it is to Achilles, and more effective with them too, since it is Patroclus' injury, not Ulysses' policy, that drives Achilles into battle, and Achilles' reputation is no more humbled by the replacement than Ajax's is glorified. Yet the comparison brought on by the substitution is no mere occasion for broad comedy; the grooming of Ajax has something significant to say about the grooms, and Ajax himself throws considerable light

3. Reductive comparisons between characters and episodes have been mentioned by recent studies that emphasize the play's satiric character, following, with important qualifications, Campbell's well-known argument (1938); see R. A. Foakes, *Shakespeare: The Dark Comedies to the Last Plays: From Satire to Celebration* (Charlottesville, 1971), pp. 44–45; Camille Slights, "The Parallel Structure of *Troilus and Cressida*," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 25 (1974), 42–51. This does not mean, Slights rightly observes (p. 46), that Shakespeare speculates on the bankruptcy of values because characters betray them, a point first stressed by Kenneth Muir in his valuable corrective to critical excess: "*Troilus and Cressida*," *Shakespeare Survey*, 8 (1955), 38.

4. Richard D. Fly has noted the play's "inordinate amount" of "mediating and conveying of persons, objects, or information from one party to another," and many of his examples are drawn from the Achilles-Ajax plot, but his listing serves a method and approach quite different from my own (" 'I cannot come to Cressid but by Pander': Mediation in the Theme and Structure of *Troilus and Cressida*," *English Literary Renaissance*, 3 [1973], 151–52).

on the hero for whom he substitutes. In fact, the case of Ajax draws so much into it that Shakespeare wittily makes Ajax a casing that other men fill; as Cressida's man tells us on our first introduction to him, he is "a man into whom nature hath so crowded humors that his valor is crushed into folly, his folly sauced with discretion. There is no man hath a virtue that he hath not a glimpse of, nor any man an attaint but he carries some stain of it" (I.ii.21–25). Ajax, in short, wears motley within, and hence Ulysses' plot to "dress him up in voices" does not so much change him as repackage him. As Achilles' substitute, he is the natural fool made lord of misrule, a fact which may well comment ironically on Ulysses' other substitution, of himself for Agamemnon. Ajax's motley, at any rate, is varied enough to include a piece of Hector's pride, which Hector, in the vicious circularity of a war based on pride, would like to get back. It is Ajax who struck Hector just before the beginning of the play, we are told (I.ii.32–34), and Hector's "disdain and shame" issue in the chivalric challenge which, it turns out, is answered again by Ajax (who keeps the pride). Ajax even has a piece of Thersites in him. His "war" with Thersites translates Thersites' verbal brutality into the savage ineffectuality of the beatings Ajax administers to him, thereby revealing the limits of Thersites' raillery and, incidentally, the mindlessness of the Trojan war. Ajax even has a piece of that.

Both the Trojan and the Greek attitudes toward Ajax deny uniqueness to him by definition, and that denial is the premise of the plot to substitute him for Achilles in answer to Hector's challenge. Both the wit of the plot, thoroughly enjoyed by all the Greeks, and its wisdom as policy are based on the dressing down of Achilles' pride by the fact of his substitute's inadequacy. But since Achilles' role is being filled by the pieced man that Ajax is, Achilles is being asked, in effect, to emulate Ajax by replacing his own replacement, to verify his own lack of uniqueness by acknowledging that his heroism is a commodity. The Greeks need an "Achilles," not necessarily Achilles himself. This disparity between the hero and his heroic role riddles our expectations of Achilles, of course. If Ulysses' trick works, Achilles can at best rise to meet the myth of his name, without necessarily embodying it. If the trick doesn't work, Ajax will just have to do for the only Achilles available. Uniqueness, the premise that only Achilles can be Achilles, is the goal of policy, not its assumption. The force of substitution is to make everyone aware of that fact, and Achilles evades the inevitable reduction of his reputation by refusing to rise to the bait. He flinches at the substitution but sanctions it by his presence at the combat between

Ajax and Hector. But though the substitution fails in its intended effect, Achilles does not recover from its denial of his uniqueness.[5]

The substitution of Ajax for Achilles makes it necessary to re-evaluate both men. Ajax makes a poor Achilles, but Achilles perhaps makes a worse one. Ajax is willing to fight Hector, and indeed holds his own until Hector calls things off; Achilles, by contrast, has Hector butchered. Ajax is foolishly proud, but roots his pride in action; Achilles stages his pride theatrically, with exits and entrances, refusing company and inviting it, as if acting at his tent the role Ulysses had defined for Achilles' own worst enemy:

> Time is like a fashionable host,
> That slightly shakes his parting guest by th' hand,
> And with his arms outstretched, as he would fly,
> Grasps in the comer. (III.iii.165–68)

Anticipating Achilles' behavior, this passage suggests that Achilles has a sharper instinct for fashion than Ulysses himself. Ulysses' remonstrations about Ajax are dutifully acknowledged by Achilles with moderate wit: "I see my reputation is at stake; / My fame is shrewdly gored" (III.iii.227–28), yet with Ulysses' departure Achilles' immediate concern is not with Ajax at all, but with Hector. Achilles mocks his dependency on Ajax for getting Hector into his tent (III.iii.270ff.) as he joins a satiric improvisation on the substitution that Ulysses has stressed so earnestly. When we see him next, at the combat between Ajax and Hector, his whole concern is again with Hector. It is Hector whose embrace of Ajax, which curiously mixes a reluctance to bother with the substitute and a concern for his kin, turns Ajax himself into a "parting guest," unimportant for the rest of the play; it is Hector who, Achilles perceives, is the "comer." Achilles' passionate gazing at Hector, at the close of the combat scene, "grasps in the comer" in an instructive analogue to his substitute's physical embrace of Hector a moment before. Ajax's civility toward Hector turns to Achilles' visual caresses, erotic with violence, and the thoroughness with which this embrace dissolves the importance of a surrogate Achilles is clear from the indifference of Hector and Achilles to Ajax's attempt to calm them (IV.v.259–64). Here, as in the combat scene, Ajax reveals his growth through the substitution from a pieced man to a civil one, who achieves a modest form of authenticity, while Achilles, indistinguishable from

5. Cf. Rosalie L. Colie: "So far short of heroic measure, this Achilles, whatever his name, in this play, proves not to be 'Achilles' but the 'nothing' of his own alternative" (*Shakespeare's Living Art* [Princeton, 1974], pp. 333–35).

Hector in their joint absorption in the foreplay of violence, has diminished to an embodiment of sheer power.

Later, the uniqueness of Achilles, threatened so dangerously by the substitute, is re-established by the killing of Hector, but only in ironic terms. Achilles, as Hector's killer, almost comes to fit the opening description of Ajax himself, "valor . . . crushed into folly," a man who "carries some stain" of every man in himself, even of Hector. Hector's strange lust to strip the "goodly armor" from the unknown Greek soldier is a troubling inconsistency that makes more sense if seen as the Achillean side of Hector's own love for war. When Achilles, a moment afterward, so triumphantly enjoys the conquest of Hector's armorless body by the Myrmidons, a little of Hector's stain has been revealed by its vicious form in Achilles. So, too, Achilles like Troilus is provoked to battle at last by a lost love; and like Helen, Achilles is only nonpareil ironically, the most brutal character in the play, as she is the most vulgar. Finally, when the undifferentiated Myrmidons go wordlessly about their work, Achilles takes on the faceless, un-unique being they represent, as indifferent now to Hector's uniqueness and condition as he formerly was to Ajax's, as abstract in Patroclus' cause as in Polyxena's. Achilles, in the end, no longer distinguishes between "comers" and "parting guests": he has become sheer impersonality, valor crushed into the folly of mindless violence.

If the play's war-plot is rooted in the denial of uniqueness by reductive substitution, so is the climax of its love-plot. Troilus, watching Cressida betray him to Diomedes, internalizes the play's substitutive action and creates a substitute for Cressida by his act of interpretation: "This she? No, this is Diomed's Cressida" (v.ii.133). Troilus' division between Diomedes' Cressida and his own, the substitution of a reductively false Cressida for a hyperbolically true one, is meant to preserve the unique value of his love, thus allowing Troilus to revere the authentic Cressida, with her uniqueness for him, and to take revenge on Diomedes for the substitute. The result, however, is even more thoroughly ironic than Ulysses and Thersites, looking over his shoulder, perceive it to be. When Troilus says that he will pursue Diomedes with as much passion as he has given to Cressida (v.ii.163–64), he not only undercuts Cressida's supposedly unique value to him, already so desperately "preserved," but he also creates a surrogate Troilus, Troilus the revenger, who is at once reduced to synonomy with the old Troilus by a motive indistinguishable from "his." Further, Troilus' insistence on "two" Cressidas itself cues the audience to stress Cressida's continuity, and to recall, from her tryst with him, her

uneasy unawareness of a self residing with Troilus and an "unkind" self that would leave him (III.ii.40–42). Cressida's prolonged vacillation at Calchas' tent with Diomedes is of a piece with her initial hesitation with Troilus, and her own perceptions of an uncertain flux in self and world make her as resistant to Troilus' idealizations as to Diomedes' reductions.[6]

Of course, Diomedes is a literal substitute for Troilus, and his inadequacy as a replacement jars Cressida without dislodging the fact of the substitution, as when she tells him of the pledge, " 'Twas one's that loved me better than you will. / But, now you have it, take it" (v.ii.84–85). Cressida broods over a distinction in value she feels impelled to accept, and the Trojan capacity for distinctions always mingles uneasily in her with the Greek urge toward adaptation. The mingling is apparent earlier in the wit of her reserve with Pandarus, whose purpose as the Trojan heroes parade is so transparent, and in the wit of her composure when welcomed by the Greek leaders. Cressida, unlike Ajax, is aware of the meaning of being traded, and part of the poignant ambiguity of her character is that she is reluctant to lose the protective hypothesis of her own uniqueness, granted so briefly to her by Troilus' love, in which she herself has never really believed. Her ultimate freedom from the will to uniqueness is perhaps unique in the play, but her ambiguity and vulnerability are representative.

II

In *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure*, substitution is intimately linked with the nature of identity, not, as in *Troilus and Cressida*, with its value, but rather with its form and the potential that form may realize. In *All's Well*, substitution is the medium by which identity, defined as a growth toward autonomy and maturity, is created, while in *Measure for Measure*, substitution becomes the medium through which identity, straining against the limits of its definition, is dissolved and recreated. Accordingly, *All's Well* presents substitution as succession, the replacement of a false self by a true. Helena's replacement of Diana in Bertram's bed is the instance to which most of the play's substitutions

6. Rejecting the stock denunciation of Cressida's "faithlessness," D. A. Traversi notes her subjection to a time-dominated world "where attraction and separation seem necessary and connected aspects of a single situation," yet he weakens good points by concluding we cannot judge her (*An Approach to Shakespeare*, 3rd ed. [Garden City, 1960], p. 330). Robert Ornstein usefully reveals the scene's ironic comments on Troilus in *The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy* (1960; rpt. Madison, 1965), p. 245.

are assimilated. *Measure for Measure*, by contrast, presents substitution as a condition, more or less prolonged, in which both the substitute and his principal (the character he replaces) are given over to uncertainty and vulnerability before their own inwardness. Substitution in this play, with its typifying instance Angelo for the Duke, leaves inwardness up for redefinition even in the final moments of the play. In both plays, the intent behind the substitutions is undermined by the implicit satirical effect of substitution itself, the always troubled, often deflating, comparison brought on by the substitutive action. Neither play moves toward the reductive identification so common in *Troilus and Cressida*, but jarring assimilation between the substitute and the replaced self does haunt response to character. Both plays, then, and especially *Measure for Measure*, at once define and question the identities of the characters who play out their substitutions, and so, by implication, define and question the validity of the comic communities those characters finally form.

The structure of *All's Well That Ends Well*, as its critics have shown, is linked by the major episodes of healing the king and fulfilling "impossible" tasks to the oldest stories in folk-tale, fairy tale, and traditional drama.[7] Such stories represent the growth of the young toward autonomy by the logic implicit in their typical movement: the witty accomplishment of impossible tasks proves to coincide with the integration of the self, the autonomy of which is confirmed and rewarded by the gracious perpetuities of betrothal. In the play, the movement toward autonomy is stressed by the inwardness of the central character, a heroine whose resolution is made explicit in her self-defining second soliloquy: "Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie, / Which we ascribe to heaven" (I.i.208–09), and whose success in the task of winning Bertram has an ostensibly analogous action in Bertram's own "reformation" from the immaturities of his companionship with Parolles. More centrally, the pattern of identity created by task and betrothal appears in the substitutions which give form

7. For the definition and dissemination of the episodes, see W. W. Lawrence, *Shakespeare's Problem Comedies*, 2nd ed. (1960; rpt. Baltimore, 1969), pp. 43–79; for the link to traditional forms of Christian drama in a secular "comedy of forgiveness," see Robert Grams Hunter, *Shakespeare and the Comedy of Forgiveness* (New York, 1965), pp. 106–31; but for the play's reflection of the newest story, the fusion of Elizabethan comic kinds in the contemporary fashion of prodigal son comedy, see Robert Y. Turner, "Dramatic Conventions in *All's Well That Ends Well*," *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, 75 (1960), 497–502. My emphasis on the meanings of autonomy in such stories and in the play also reflects the influence of Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York, 1976).

to the play, and which compose a major link between the play's often uneasily discordant halves. Though the course of the replacements is by no means untroubled, the play's several substitutions all resemble the bed-trick in form: the replacement of a false or inauthentic self by a true one. But if the play's substitutions or replacements give form to the tests of romance, representing the maturation and success of the protagonists, the same replacements are the means to the play's continual ironic comparison between one character and another, and between one phase of the self and another. Discord and ambiguity are the effects, as the problem and the comedy emerge together.[8]

In the first two acts of the play, substitution first appears as an exchange, Helena's barter of the King's recovery for Bertram's hand in marriage. The exchange, however, also implies a substitution of one form of Helena's identity for another: the replacement of the virtuous Helena, whose virtue is constrained to the praise of her potential, by the Helena whose achievement of "free scope" is symbolized by the right to possess Bertram, if she chooses. Still, though newly equal with her "bright particular star," Helena is, of course, rejected by him, and responds to the rejection by displacing her newly won identity into two simultaneous and troubling replacements: the pilgrim of Saint Jaques le Grand, whose self-abnegation is figuratively aligned with death, and the substitute bed-mate, who represents the covert attainment of her true self as wife. In the strange dissolution of this duality, which preludes her authentic self-disclosure, Helena first "dies" as pilgrim and takes Diana's place in bed; then she repeats the substitution in reverse, and substitutes Diana for herself in the exposure of Bertram. Bertram, in an appropriately defined complication, must then rid himself of a substitute bride (Lafew's daughter), the false bedmate (Diana), and his own inauthentic self still outdoing its own falseness, in order to accept the true marriage that embodies his, and Helena's, maturity. This reformation, disquieting in itself, is dramatically vexed still further by the presence of the final scene's second substitute, Parolles, whose role must both support Bertram's reformation by partially antic-

8. Realism's discord with the romance elements that Lawrence presented as the solution of the play's unity, and the dissolution of its "problem," is persuasively defined by G. K. Hunter's Introduction to the New Arden edition of the play (1959; rpt. London, 1967), and is stressed by recent studies, e.g., by J. M. Silverman, "Two Types of Comedy in *All's Well That Ends Well*," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 24 (1973), 25–34, who regrets the play's "lapsed design," and by Walter N. King, who makes of the same discords a deliberate and proper stress on "the wavering balance between the virtues and faults of ordinary human nature," in "Shakespeare's 'Mingled Yarn,' " *Modern Language Quarterly*, 21 (1960), 33.

ipating it, and undermine it by playing scapegoat for Bertram's persistent lies.

The healing of the King by the prescription inherited from her father is not only Helena's means to Bertram but her means to the autonomous virtue she wills for herself. The Helena who represents to the Countess and Lafew, at the opening of the play, the "credit of . . . [her] father" longs, nonetheless, for independence; she makes the erasure of her father from her imagination the condition of her present self, which seeks only Bertram (I.i.75–81). Her dialogue with Parolles on virginity embodies her will to lose it properly, and the brevity of her replies to him testifies to a self-absorbed and determined resolve that emerges at last in her soliloquy, where the developing equation between her love for Bertram and her achievement of autonomy becomes most explicit: "Who ever strove / To show her merit that did miss her love?" (I.i.218–19). The conversion of the virtues of her patrimony to the virtues of an active autonomy are so linked with Helena's pursuit of Bertram that it seems easy to applaud her courage and energy, as the King does, and to contrast, even without the text's insistent distinctions between virtue and nobility, Helena's resolve with Bertram's stubborn dependence on his patrimony. Yet exchange, the form of substitution that dominates this episode, disturbs Helena's equation between a virtuous cure and a worthy marriage, and even vexes her virtue. To Helena, healing the King is good, even possible, only insofar as it is instrumental to Bertram, as she confides to the Countess (I.iii.225–28); yet she herself, in doing it, associates her cure explicitly with Heaven's will (II.i.148–54).[9] Lafew appears to confirm this association when he makes the cure an instance of the unwisdom of those who "make modern and familiar, things supernatural and causeless" (II. iii.2–3). Yet the association is strongly questioned by the implications of trading in Helena's use of exchange. Her earlier use of religious language to portray her passion for Bertram ("my idolatrous fancy / Must sanctify his relics" [I.i.93–94]) is suggestively recalled when she uses it again to give divine sanction to her destiny, with the effect that religion, like the King's health, appears to be drawn into a troubling combination of self-approbation and sheer instrumentality. The turning of value to commodity is also clear in the strictly secular virtue associated with her success. Helena, strangely, asks that failure in the task charge her with "a strumpet's boldness" (II.i.171), as if her chastity were at stake in a game, and, curiously,

9. Critics commonly accept Helena's own association—e.g., R. G. Hunter, who finds her "a recipient of God's grace and a means by which it is transmitted to others" (p. 114).

at stake in the healing, not the marrying. Later the King himself, having lengthily defended Helena's self-sufficient virtue before the recalcitrant Bertram, turns to add his own "love" and then a financial "balance more replete" (II.iii.152, 175) to the scale where a virtuous Helena *must* equal the noble Bertram. And the reward of these efforts, stressed by the form of the exchange, is only Bertram, whose inadequacy is well known.

If the implications of exchange criticize the heroine without denying her success, the same is true of the replacement of the physician's daughter by the "true" betrothed. Helena does win a new identity as wife, and her truth is emphatically endorsed by Lafew, the King, and the Countess. Yet Helena's behavior at the betrothal calls into question the autonomy and the vindicated rightness for Bertram that her new identity confer. When she successively rejects four lords before offering herself to Bertram (II.iii), she says to three that they merit a nobler wife than herself, a stress that can only exacerbate Bertram's particular sensitivity. Further, on reaching Bertram, she immediately lapses into an uncharacteristic language of subservience that persists until his departure from France (II.iii.101–03, II.iv.45–52, II.v.53ff.). Thus Helena's own association between winning Bertram and gaining autonomy is questioned, as her sudden surrender of that autonomy shakes our confidence that she has replaced one form of identity with another, better one.[10]

Unlike Helena's, Bertram's identity is certain and unambiguous as he departs from France, for his bridling at a wife who lacks noble blood is an immaturity that not even the King's command can cure. Substitution, as replacement, is the only cure for it: the substitution of Helena for Diana in his bed, of Helena for Parolles in his affections, and of Helena's center in France for his own in Italy. But Bertram's maturation, ostensibly signified by the substitutions which enact a passage from a "false" Bertram to a "true" one, is notoriously deflated by his insistent lying and evasion in the final scene. His reformation is promised, not dramatized, and even the promise of it is phrased in the conditional: "If she, my liege, can make me know this clearly, / I'll love her dearly—ever, ever dearly" (V.iii.312–13). The play teases us with hints of his capacity to reform—his honor in war, the passing remark that he "changed almost into another man" through the stings of his mother's grief and the King's anger (IV.iii.4)—

10. Frances M. Pearce nicely argues for a balance of sympathy for Helena and for Bertram in this scene, though I would call it a balance of questions about their claims to sympathy; see "In Quest of Unity: A Study of Failure and Redemption in *All's Well That Ends Well*," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 25 (1974), 74–76.

yet clearly the Parolles subplot, an addition to the source story, does the major work of reformation through a surrogate. The exposure of Parolles, which Bertram witnesses, is a form of scapegoating which clearly suggests the humiliation of Bertram's own falseness. Moreover, the dramatic displacement of Parolles from the companion of Bertram to the fool of Lafew is intended to suggest the containment of knavery in Bertram as well as in Parolles. Yet the surrogate is not thoroughly reformed; though acknowledging his humiliation, that "every braggart shall be found an ass" (IV.iii.313), Parolles does not fully discard his knavery but uses it as his surety: "Parolles, live / Safest in shame; being fooled, by foolery thrive" (IV.iii.314–15). What, then, of Bertram?

The substitute's presence in the final scene riddles the question of Bertram's reformation even further. Parolles does tell the truth as he knows it about Bertram's relationship with Diana, even though he presents his truths with mock-reticent evasions. The substitute thus surpasses his principal; a mock liar rather than a monstrous one, he ironically reverses the scapegoat relationship so carefully established by the subplot. Yet Parolles' decorative evasions do continue to shadow Bertram in part, for Parolles' arbitrary mixture of truth and falsehood is so stylized, so much a performance, that it emphasizes Bertram's own vulnerability to this charge of feigning. Parolles' presence thus questions further both the reformation and the autonomy that Bertram's final acceptance of the "true wife" overtly signifies. The final scene's handling of Parolles, like its introduction of the other substitute, Diana, is intended to perplex, and even reduce, the protagonists' characters, a function confirmed for both substitutions by the fact that they are deviating from the source story.[11] Bertram, finally, has the constancy of the attractively and intractably trivial: he is the play's major argument that human nature can resist the comic urge to replace a poorer self with a better one.

Bertram's continuing recalcitrance reminds us of the impossible conditions he has imposed on Helena, from which emerges the literal substitution of Helena for Diana, the true wife for the false, which constitutes the main business of the last three acts. That Bertram sets her the terms,

11. Leech's essay, cited in the first note, made this point about Helena's substitute years ago (pp. 28–29), though I had not seen it when I compared play with source, and my own view, which follows shortly, is less fiercely satiric in emphasis than his. The addition of both substitutes, Diana and Parolles, may reflect the intention to intensify the chastisement of Bertram, as Turner thinks (p. 502), though he accepts the means of exposure more sympathetically than I do.

that Helena is legally the true wife, and that wit, propriety, and the inventiveness of the second ring are all embodied in her bed-trick seem to suggest that Helena's sexual substitution itself cannot plausibly evoke a "modern" skepticism. It is objectionable, if it is, not in itself but only by its assimilation to the other, more troubling replacements: Helena's replacement of her newly gained self by a dual identity, and the replacement of Diana for Helena in the final scene. All three substitutions, of course, continue the problems shaped by substitution in the first two acts.

Helena's exile to become a pilgrim of Saint Jaques le Grand is self-consciously the creation of a new identity, which replaces the identity of the rejected wife with that of the sacrificial martyr: "He is too good and fair for death and me; / Whom I myself embrace to set him free" (III.iv. 16–17). This description of Bertram is only credible as self-abnegation, but Helena's embrace of death is real enough—to the Countess, the King, and the others whose grief in her behalf is still apparent in the final scene. As a "pilgrim" Helena creates the false reports of death for which her counterpart, Duke Vincentio, is so frequently criticized, and unlike the Duke she has only her own welfare in mind. Given her presence when the Countess, reading her son's letter, is so moved by grief as momentarily to deny him, and given Bertram's admissions of the cowardice implicit in his own letters (II.iii.282–83), it is troubling to find her embracing Bertram's methods, with precisely the same consequences. Were Helena's "pilgrim" self more than a momentary figure of self-accusation, this would be more acceptable, as would, too, the "pilgrim's" ready discussion in the next scene of the "turn" Diana might perform for her. Helena the pilgrim conceals her full knowledge of Bertram, while Helena the wife encourages talk about the shrewd turn, thus making her closing lines in the scene reductively ambiguous: "I will bestow some precepts of this virgin, / Worthy the note" (III.v.96–97). In short, the saintliness of the pilgrim and the wit of the wife are incompatible, deliberately discordant selves that perplex our acceptance of the heroine. If we accept her wit, we must be repelled by her claims to virtuous martyrdom; if we regard her martyrdom as an authentic impulse, we must be uneasy when it so quickly and thoroughly becomes a convenient fiction. This bifurcation of identity may define Helena's predicament as the heroine of a problem comedy. She must simultaneously be the disguised protagonist, like the witty heroine of romantic comedy, whose comic impersonation represents a benign form of play, and the replaced self of ironic and potentially tragic modes, whose new identity signifies the constraint of character by

a serious dilemma. Helena, like Vincentio, is shaped by the ambiguity.

The climactic substitution of Helena for Diana, which is ostensibly meant to resolve that ambiguity, literally enacts the replacement of a false wife by a true, and creates the identity it affirms by giving body to the "mother" and the "wife" in Helena. Whereas in the source Giletta simply discloses herself, and receives Beltramo's acceptance, in the play Helena chooses to renew the pattern of substitution, using Diana as her surrogate in the final scene. This addition, like the added presence of the other substitute, Parolles, seems designed to stress ambiguity and uncertainty even in the play's final moments. If Diana, as surrogate, preserves Helena from harsh accusations of unchastity—in other words, from Bertram's reductions of her—she does so at the cost of suggesting a Helena who exacts from a surrogate what she would not endure herself. Indeed, she herself implies as much: "You," she tells Diana, "Under my poor instructions yet must suffer / Something in my behalf" (IV.iv.27–28). Diana's willingness to risk public humiliation for Helena's sake underscores Helena's reluctance to do so for Bertram's, as Diana's direct confrontation with Bertram's weaknesses earlier has emphasized Helena's more impersonal, even evasive, methods (IV.ii.). And the final scene tests Diana's poise, intelligence, and flexibility, her virtue, in short, in exacting ways. The paradoxes with which she charges Bertram with his faults are effective until her principal's protracted delay strains her own evidence by protraction, causing the King's well-known recoil from her, and perhaps the persistence of his doubts of her chastity, even after Helena's arrival. Helena, by contrast, is protected from such strain of resource and reputation by her own well-planned mediations—a letter, a Gentleman, and Diana herself—which smooth the way for Helena's final self-disclosure. At the close, Helena has wittily achieved her autonomy and won her right to Bertram, yet the active virtue implied by the final form of her identity has been symbolically demonstrated in the substitute, not embodied by the principal. The same is true again of her husband's reformation, and here even the substitute is dubious. The effect is to emphasize the very conditional affirmations of the play's closing lines, the only proper ending to such a comedy.[12]

12. Barbara Everett draws most from the conditionality of the concluding lines; see the Introduction to her New Penguin edition of *All's Well That Ends Well* (Harmondsworth, 1970), p. 38.

III

The burden of ambiguity created by substitution for the audiences of *Troilus and Cressida* and *All's Well* is shared by the characters in *Measure for Measure*. For substitution in this play is not merely donnée, crisis, and resolution, but the central means to the testing and re-formation of identity which it is the comedy's problem to dramatize. And problem it is, for the scope of comedy is as strained by substitution as the characters whom it makes vulnerable. Claudio's case is an instance: Angelo's scapegoat for rigor, he is the Duke's for mercy, and although made the means to the re-formation of others, Claudio's identity is as vulnerable to dissolution as his life. His last line in the play, "He will not wake" (IV.ii.63), describes Barnardine, but problematically it defines his own identity for the rest of the play, a nullity finally redeemed by its analogue, a severed head, and "unmuffled" or reawakened in the play's closing moments. The dissolution and re-creation of Claudio serve to illustrate the powerfully internalized form of substitution in *Measure for Measure* and the ironic comparisons it creates, which continually trouble our response to the characters.

The substitutes, Angelo and Mariana, are brought by the actions of substitution into a realization of their fuller, and hence truer, selves: in Angelo's case, a confrontation with the dark side of his moralism and rigidity, and in Mariana's a release from the prolonged stasis of her Claudio-like imprisonment in the moated grange. When Mariana enacts her part in the substitute bed-mate trick, she plays like Helena the role of rejected bride transformed, gaining her true identity by substitution. More, like Diana at the court, she herself grows through her act of substitution: the renewed Mariana can embrace Angelo despite his stubborn preference for death, successfully urge Isabella to perform the most difficult act in the play, the ransom of Angelo, and finally by her own identity confer new value on Angelo's, as the Duke understands: "Her worth, worth yours" (V.i.493). Mariana's progress by substitution is surely the most unambiguously creative in the play, and her change, from the most isolated to the most flexible of characters, is probably the most striking. Angelo's progress, on the other hand, is as paradigmatic for the play's potentially tragic point of view as Mariana's is for its comic substitution. His growth, unlike hers, is promised at the final scene rather than demonstrated, and its achievement comes at the cost of a painful dissolution of self.

Angelo's ordeal is so defined by substitution that any selfhood he may

have had before the substitutive action is permanently lost. His first act as deputy, the sentencing of Claudio, turns to ice the character Lucio gave him as a man "whose blood / Is very snow-broth" (I.iv.57–58); given the "scope" to do it, he virtually attempts to create a new, immutable self, which hyperbolically embodies his ideal of rigor. Then, as Escalus and Isabella foretell, Angelo's propositioning of Isabella assimilates him firmly to Claudio, a "synonymy" which the audience may feel flatters him, but which to Angelo himself is a grim reduction. His fallible mortality unwillingly finds its image in the man he has condemned, in ironic anticipation of the final scene's "An Angelo for Claudio." Until his exposure, however, Angelo continues to make Claudio what he himself is to the Duke: a fallible ransom for fallibility. Angelo's "justice," therefore, is reductively assimilated to the Duke's own "scope," and both forms of authority are put into question. Parallels multiply by implication, deflating both the principal and his deputy: the ransom of justice by excessive severity, the reliance on deception, the persistent division between seeming and being. Sometimes, the sequence of maneuvers seems to dissolve into its burlesque, Elbow's pursuit of Pompey, particularly since Angelo abruptly delegates Escalus to resolve the collision of bumbling justicer and impervious pimp.[13] Yet the Duke's intentions, and even his methods, are too different from Angelo's to sustain reductive synonomy for very long. Angelo's proposal for "foul redemption" defines an absolute difference from the Duke, and constitutes, in the debates with Isabella, the play's crisis and his own dark transformation. The division in Angelo's self between saint and satyr, the play's extremest form of the substitute's vulnerability, is frozen in place by his redoubled substitutive condition—deputy to the Duke, counterpart to Claudio—and becomes the ominous ground of the play's tragic potential. Its force, moreover, is too intense to be contained, and creates its own counterpart in Angelo's victim. The division between compassion and chastity that Angelo's demand exacts in Isabella violates the unity of her virtue, and assimilates her passionate pleading to the narrow moralism that she herself confronts in the deputy: "Better it were a brother died at once / Than that a sister, by redeeming him, / Should die for ever" (II.iv.107–09). And the contagion spreads

13. Larry S. Champion explores the scene as a specific burlesque of Angelo's judgment of Claudio, in *The Evolution of Shakespeare's Comedy* (1970; rpt. Cambridge, Mass., 1973), pp. 139–40. My intention here, of course, is to suggest several possibilities in the Elbow-Pompey burlesque: Duke-Angelo, Angelo-Claudio, either man to his darker self, and intention-execution in the play and in man.

still further, as the virulence in Isabella induced by Angelo turns to hurl itself on Claudio in the prison scene, suggesting a displaced vulnerability in Isabella as powerful, and as troubling, as Angelo's own.[14]

The principals in *Measure for Measure* are no less affected by substitution than their substitutes: they find their selves dissociated by it. The complexity of the Duke and Isabella breaks down into partial, and even competing selves, a state that defines a liberation from substitution as the re-emergence of unity from discord, achieved, perhaps, by both principals in this play by climactic mercy, a kind of union with the substitute. The Duke's act of substitution begins, of course, at the opening, making the crux in him that constitutes the play's most notorious problem.[15] Like Helena, the Duke is bifurcated into two selves, uneasily connected: Friar Lodowick, the reassuring comic impersonator whose presence portends happy endings, and the self-confessedly lax ruler, the Duke of dark corners whose ultimate motives and nature remain unknown, and whose questionable status is continually brought to mind by the hyperboles of Lucio. The first identity, defined in secrecy with Friar Thomas in Act I, scene iii, establishes the Duke as an impersonator in sure control of his disguise, of the "sway" of his deputy, and of his reasons for the substitution. Lodowick's encounters with Lucio (III.ii, IV.iii, and V.i), on the other hand, shape a counter-identity, the lax Duke that we, and perhaps Lucio, can recognize beneath the cowl. The exchanges between Lodowick and Lucio arise in the half-absurd collision of hyperbole with anger, and the fantastic vanity of the slander meets its match in the outraged vanity of the re-

14. A. P. Rossiter illuminates Isabella's vulnerability by analogy to Claudio's: his fear of death and her "analogous cry of the reluctant flesh," and their common "self-preservation, without insight into the cost to another," in *Angel with Horns*, pp. 160–61.

15. For a summary of the text's enigmas about the Duke, see Champion, pp. 146–53; for classic and persuasive argument in his behalf, see Harold S. Wilson, "Action and Symbol in *Measure for Measure* and *The Tempest*," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 4 (1953), 379, and Ernest Schanzer, *The Problem Plays of Shakespeare* (1963; rpt. New York, 1965), pp. 113–17; for classic prosecution, see Clifford Leech, "The 'Meaning' of *Measure of Measure*," *Shakespeare Survey*, 3 (1950), 66–73. Two recent interpretations argue that the Duke realizes a transformation of his identity. They maintain the classic discord about the Duke by the means they so divergently assign for his self-realization. For Jocelyn Powell, the Duke grows by the exercise of his spiritual function "as a man holding a divine office" ("Theatrical *Trompe l'oeil* in *Measure for Measure*," in *Shakespearian Comedy*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies 14 [London, 1972], pp. 181–209). By contrast Donna B. Hamilton believes that the Duke is remade by the trial of his vulnerable humanity, the breakdown of his plans, and his subjects' own persuasions toward mercy ("The Duke in *Measure for Measure*: 'I Find an Apt Remission in Myself,' " *Shakespeare Studies*, 6 [1970], 175–83).

sponse. Lucio creates a counter-image for the true Duke which almost makes Lodowick look false: "the fantastical Duke of dark corners," who would have spared Claudio, and therefore Isabella, and whose "feeling for the sport" is witnessed by one spared by the Duke for Claudio's crime —one Lucio, the Duke's "inward." Indeed, Lucio himself comes to embody something like the Duke's alter ego, attacking the benignity of the cowl with the hypocrisy and duplicity which remain its possible meanings until the play's last moments.

The Duke's behavior as Friar sustains the bifurcation that forms our ambiguous response to him. Friar Lodowick is surely charming enough in his half-studied, half-improvised plans for reunion and ransom, and clearly he succeeds in his role of re-former of spirits and dissolver of follies. Yet shiftingly he does appear in dark corners: falsely preparing Claudio for death, falsely reporting that death to Isabella, and strangely willing to use Barnardine's head for Claudio's, until Barnardine's intransigent refusal to die and the presence of the pirate Ragozine, conveniently just dead of a cruel fever, make everything turn out right. Lodowick also warns us, properly, of the theatricality of the ending he has planned, yet he sustains ambiguity by protracting it enormously. To many in the audience, perhaps, the principal, though unmasked, never emerges from his substitutive guise: he is either the benign or the duplicitous Lodowick, never the true Duke.

Isabella's character retires to uncertain definition by the substitutive action of the last three acts, while she is replaced by Mariana. Provisionally, Isabella is spared by the bed-trick from facing the consequences of her decision to let Claudio die. Momentarily, the presence of a surrogate offers her justice, mercy, and chastity; by it, the Duke tells her, "you may most uprighteously do a poor wronged lady a merited benefit, redeem your brother from the angry law, do no stain to your own gracious person, and much please the absent Duke" (III.i.196–200). But this promise of a unified self, combining justice, mercy, and chastity, and symbolized by the surrogate's act, is abruptly withdrawn. The "Friar's" false report of the execution of Claudio, troubling in itself, has an equally troubling counterpart in Isabella's response: "O, I will to him and pluck out his eyes!" (IV.iii.117). This cry of revenge against Angelo is so closely linked to her earlier outburst against Claudio, both witnesses to a virtue strained beyond its limits, that we feel not only outrage for the Duke's cruelty but a shaking of our faith in Isabella's promised re-formation through the substitute's action. This, of course, discredits the Duke's purpose, and it

is difficult to understand Isabella's continued willingness to be guided by the Friar, which follows a moment later (IV.iii.135). If the Friar's supervision is the "more strict restraint" she initially desired from the sisterhood, she finally cannot be released from the rigors that perplex her virtue until she freely chooses to become a substitute in the closing moments of the play.

In the long final scene, substitution, which has prompted the partial dissolution of everyone's identity, becomes the medium by which identity can be re-formed. Each of the major characters is asked to perform a new act of substitution, which enacts a transformation of a hidden and vulnerable self to an open and amended one. That amendment may be no more, and no less, than to be kind, to be sorry, or to be flexible, but in every case it means also to be married. Marriage, of course, means what it means in Shakespeare's romantic comedy, but in this problem comedy, substitutions must come first.

Isabella, before she is betrothed to the Duke, must twice take Mariana's place. The first substitution, and perhaps the second, are in the Duke's plans for her, yet her freedom seems to grow in the scene until her fully voluntary choice becomes its climax. In the first place, Isabella must take on the burden of defamation which Mariana endured as Angelo's slandered betrothed, for the Duke's plans require her fiercely contested exposure of Angelo's dishonor and injustice. Her second act of substitution is harder: to beg the Duke's mercy for Angelo. Unlike her "choice" in the prison scene with Claudio, this decision demands a full acceptance of its consequences, and a difficult confrontation between the claims of justice and mercy. This inward effort is made explicit by her gradually eroded withholding of the necessary gesture, kneeling. When Mariana asks Isabella to "lend me your knees" (V.i.427), the Duke intervenes, challenging Isabella by taking the position of her initial self, a novice at mercy: "Against all sense you do importune her" (V.i.429). Mariana replies by renewing her plea (V.i.432ff.) in a way that makes Isabella's hesitation clear, and then Mariana has to ask a third time. Only after the Duke repeats the sentence of Angelo does Isabella actually decide. In finally kneeling, though, she does reunify herself and her virtue, and equally makes restitution for Mariana's substitution in bed, an act which has made Mariana vulnerable to the Duke's sentence on Angelo by reawakening her hope to have him.

Angelo, meanwhile, must continue his role as the Duke's deputy while also becoming a substitute for Claudio, as the Duke tells him directly:

"be you judge / Of your own cause" (v.i.167–68). As judge, continuing his substitution for the Duke, Angelo defames his accusers and seeks the "scope of justice" for himself (v.i.232); this extends his perverse mimicry of justice and exonerates the Duke from any charge of entrapment while Angelo proceeds to entrap himself. As Claudio's substitute, which he becomes at last upon the unmasking of the Duke, Angelo, torn apart by guilt if not remorse, goes even further than Claudio in taking the "Friar's" advice to "be absolute for death." Claudio longs for life after accepting death; Angelo accepts his death, and continues to crave death even after his marriage to Mariana, even, most importantly, after his ransom by Isabella. Tellingly, his release from this condition, marked by "a quick'ning in his eye" (v.i.491), takes place only when Claudio's "resurrection" frees him from his new substitute's role. He can will to live, forgiven, only after he has re-formed his identity through his act of substitution for Claudio, and then only when Claudio's presence displaces him, as if by a sudden grace, back into himself. For Angelo, as perhaps for Isabella, substitution is finally the most literal possible form of Christian charity: the act of being in the other's shoes.

Finally, the Duke defines the ultimate form of his identity in the comedy by two new acts of substitution. First, the principal figuratively replaces his deputy in the dealing out of death sentences and the tormenting of women. This begins as theatrical solution, assented to by the participants and justified by the action, yet it becomes uncertain in the affair of Angelo's sentence and deadly serious in the case of Lucio's. Summing up Angelo's re-formation, and by implication those of the others who have been pardoned by his actions, Isabella, Mariana, Claudio, and Juliet, the Duke turns his attention inward to himself: "I find an apt remission in myself, / And yet here's one in place I cannot pardon" (v.i.494–95). The first line confirms the movement of the comedy; the second line seems to subvert it. The identity of the true Duke, just postulated by the pardons and marriages as mercifully rigorous, not tyrannically so, is threatened by a stubborn, perhaps permanent, comparison with Angelo. The "true" Duke who so plays Angelo now seems no different from the "false" Duke who played sidekick to his deputy in tormenting women earlier in the scene, a Duke unredeemed by the benignity of any mercy in his impersonations. We can no longer regard even the unmasking of Friar Lodowick as the welcome turn toward the happy ending. The "Lodowick" just past, in this new context of unjustified severity, seems nothing more than the setting on of corrupted purpose, the new Duke no more than the old Duke, taking another Angelo—Lucio by name—to

scapegoat his own flaws. The Duke has become Lucio's Duke, in a striking second act of substitution: the self assigned to him by an amusing but extravagant cynicism.[16]

The tortured moral ambiguities make effective theater: the new Duke must prove who he is—and isn't—to the audience once more, and do it immediately. His decision about Lucio must enact the final form of the Duke, the "true Duke" who marks the genuine end of the substitutive process, and so defines the play's meaning. Whatever our judgment, the Duke's mitigation of Lucio's penalty from death to distasteful marriage must make it. For some interpreters, Lucio can be spared excessive severity only if the Duke acknowledges that a little of the "fantastical Duke" embodied in Lucio has lived for a time in him, that Lucio, the "deputy" of his own lax self, which the Duke has grown beyond, can evoke harshness but deserve relenting. For others, the Duke's swift relenting may only acknowledge the larger comic purpose into which the Duke is half-reluctantly drawn; for still others, the mitigation may be the Duke's deliberate repression of the hypocrisy in himself that Lucio has implied. Given that the Duke's re-formed self is as new, and perhaps as tentative, as the others', I incline to the first position, but the play requires no one to surrender its ambiguity. Angelo and Isabella have been made to realize that substitution can mean becoming one's own scapegoat; perhaps the Duke comes to this, too. It is such reciprocity of substitution that confers newly made identities in this play, freeing even Barnardine "for better times to come," without necessarily assuming that they will.

There is space left for a brief reflection. Shakespeare's substitutions are, of course, comic conventions, which derive from the traditional sources of his material. Yet the substitutions as Shakespeare handles them become startlingly original by taking on meanings that compel interpretation without confirming it. Shakespeare uses the deliberate uncertainty created by substitution to reinterpret comic form, expanding the possibilities of comedy by denying a sense of closure. His substitutions do not only replace one character by another; they replace acceptance by judgment and familiarity by risk.

BARD COLLEGE

16. Hamilton also argues for Lucio's important role in the final scene's shaping of the Duke's emerging identity, but she finds in the Duke's plans for the scene a genuine revenge-motive that makes him too much Lucio's Duke, and argues for him a "conversion" to mercy that makes him too much an Angelo (pp. 180–82).