Measure for Measure

Essay questions

1. Find the following speeches: II.1 17-31; II.2, 162-187; II.4, 1-17. How are Angelo's thoughts and emotions conveyed in these speeches, and how do their language and structure reflect his changing moods?

2. What does the Duke learn by assuming a disguise?

3. Explain the significance of the title.

4. ‘The Duke is essentially a wise and noble man who has erred from an excess of good will .. Angelo, on the other hand, is guilty of a too harsh enforcement of justice.’ How far do you agree with these comments?

5. ‘This play offers a direct insight in to Shakespeare’s mind and heart, a mind working along the lines of Christian ethics and a heart full of sympathy for even the lowest forms of life.’ Discuss.

6. ‘In the person of Isabella the theme of forgiveness is focused.’ Discuss

7. In the play there is a ‘near tragic conflict between anarchy and order’. Discuss

8. How far would you agree that the play centres on the relationship between desire, law, money and the body?

9. Explore the nature of desire in the play.

‘Desire in Shakespeare, is often a kind of obsession.. a fixation on another which tends to paralyse the self to a rigid posture.’

‘Desire must find its own natural, stable form, known as the institution of marriage.’ (Eagleton, William Shakespeare)

10. Explore the ways in which Shakespeare’s characters ‘act and speak by the influence of those general passions and principles by which all minds are agitated.’

11. ‘Look closely at the Duke’s discussion with Claudio (III.1.) Contrast the attitudes of each towards life and death.

12. Explain the resolution that is reached in the final act of the play. How satisfactory is this in your view?

13. Explore and explain the roles of Isabella, Mariana and Juliet in the play.

14. ‘Angelo is not a hypocrite but only a man sadly lacking in self-knowledge.’ Discuss.

15. How far is the Duke ‘an emblem of upright authority’?

16. ‘Measure for Measure is not in a technical sense one of Shakespeare’s best plays, but in terms of the issues raised it is one of the most relevant to modern audiences.’ How far do you agree? (Look at: problems of government, law, justice, judgement, mercy, morality, human freedom, social justice, and the preoccupation with sexual matters)