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## Hunt, Millais, and *Measure for Measure*

In this article I shall investigate a group of literary texts, taken from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* and two of Tennyson's lyrics, and two painted interpretations of those texts. I shall show that Holman Hunt and John Everett Millais seem to have been influenced stylistically by the play's tough, indeed, somewhat squalid *Realpolitik* and, in their use of iconography, even by its plotting technique. Such an understanding of the two works also reveals their deep-lying interdependence.

The disadvantage of my approach, of course, is that the reader has to go over familiar ground. But the advantage resulting from that disadvantage will, I hope, be some new insights into the achievements of early Pre-Raphaelitism. At the very least it can be said that my procedure, involving as it does the intense scrutiny of the familiar, is in itself rather "Pre-Raphaelite."

Holman Hunt's *Claudio and Isabella* of 1850 (fig. 1, Tate Gallery) and John Everett Millais's *Mariana* of 1851 (fig. 3, Makins Collection) portray successive events in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*.<sup>1</sup> Hunt's picture depicts the interview between Isabella and her brother Claudio in his prison cell. He is there because he has made a girl pregnant. Unfortunately, Juliette, the girl, is now without dowry, and the marriage they had planned cannot legally take place.

Millais, on the other hand, depicts Mariana's longing for the fiancé who has deserted her—he being the very governor, Angelo, who has sentenced Claudio to death. Hence the two pictures represent two aspects of the same situation, involving two related pairs of lovers: Claudio and Juliette and Mariana and

Angelo.<sup>2</sup> At the end of the play, a third pair of lovers is formed, consisting of Isabella and the duke. This final piece of pairing-up marks the happy end of the tribulations suffered by the other two couples.

I will begin with the texts that Hunt illustrates. On the upper part of the frame of *Claudio and Isabella* are inscribed two lines of dialogue from Act III, Scene 1 of the play:

*Claudio:* Death is a fearful thing.

*Isabella:* And shamed life a hateful.

Claudio's sister had left her nunnery—this is the very day she is to take her vows—to plead her brother's case before Angelo. Unfortunately, in appealing to Angelo (who, if he is an angel, is very much a fallen one), she only succeeds in arousing his lust. He makes her a counter-proposition—fully aware that he is proposing to commit Claudio's sin: if she will sleep with him, he will commute her brother's sentence to life imprisonment. (Let us note that this dreadful offer is made at the moment of Isabella's impending marriage to Christ.) She denounces Angelo, saying she would suffer torture and death rather than yield her body to shame: the scene ends, however, without her having made a definitive response one way or the other.

There are other complications. Angelo is only deputy governor. The real governor, the duke of Vienna, is officially absent, which gives Angelo full powers. But the duke is not really absent; he is lurking around the city disguised as a friar to spy unrecognized on his people. He is, in fact, eavesdropping on Claudio and Isabella at this very moment—an absent presence in Hunt's picture.