

Chapter 6: “We’ll Strive To Please You Every Day”: Prostitution As Theatrical Metaphor in *Measure for Measure*

In practical terms, the freedom women gained to play themselves on stage was to a large extent the freedom to play the whore.

(Harold M. Weber, *The Restoration Rake-Hero: Transformations in Sexual Understanding in Seventeenth-Century England*)¹

Introduction

Although queer theory has posited a destabilisation of the hetero/homosexual divide in its project to ‘queer’ all forms of sexuality, the majority of the work in the field has been concerned primarily with lesbian and gay sexualities and, more recently, with bisexual and transgender sexualities. This is perfectly understandable given the extent to which these sexualities had previously been under-theorised. However, it does mean that less attention is paid to dissident forms of heterosexuality. These would include open marriages or relationships where women are the dominant sexual or economic partner or a whole number of different ways of living heterosexuality that conflict with what is, after all, an incredibly narrow definition of the heterosexual norm. This represents something of a step backwards in relation to earlier work on sexuality which was more interested in effecting these types of crossings.²

Therefore, the next two chapters focus upon what might be labelled the margins of the heterosexual norm. This particular chapter deals with prostitution and, despite the fact that prostitution is by no means an exclusively heterosexual phenomenon, solely

¹ Harold M. Weber, “The Restoration Rake-Hero: Transformations in Sexual Understanding in Seventeenth-Century England”, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), p. 152.

² I am thinking, for example, of the feminist work of Gayle Rubin and Carol Vance on sexual dissidence in Carol S. Vance (ed.) *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), or of Adrienne Rich’s notion of a lesbian continuum which includes non-sexual relationships between women. In the field of Shakespeare studies, the work of Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield has also consistently examined sexual dissidence within heterosexuality and homosexuality.

with heterosexual prostitution. It ‘revisits’ the early modern notion of theatre as a form of prostitution and recasts it in order to analyse what stage representations of prostitution in *Measure for Measure* might reveal about the contemporary theatres which produce such representations today. It also ‘revisits’ critical work on the role of the prostitutes in the Shakespearean text to discuss how a focus on performance might endorse, but also complicate understandings of their role in the play.

The focus of the chapter is on the character of Mistress Overdone, the bawd in *Measure for Measure*, as well as the stage (non-)representation of her prostitutes and very occasionally on her pimp, Pompey.³ In the text, Pompey has the most lines to speak, Mistress Overdone has a small speaking part and the prostitutes have no lines at all. They do not even appear in the *dramatis personae*. Productions can choose to reproduce this textual marginalisation in performance or, as some recent productions have done, use performance to give the prostitutes a more central role. This tendency to emphasise the role of the prostitutes has resulted from a sense that although they are peripheral in terms of the action of the play, they are nevertheless symbolically central to its concerns. Yet it has also resulted from a sense that they are characters who give pleasure to theatre audiences both visually and through their comically deconstructionist take on those in authority. This can make the tendency to enlarge the stage role of the prostitutes paradoxical, for whilst it makes them more visible, this visibility often relies upon the increased commodification of the sexual appeal of the actresses who play them. The productions chosen for analysis in this chapter have taken different approaches to the question of the representation of prostitution which, it is argued, are explained to some extent by the types of theatre they are.

³ I am taking Mistress Overdone to have been once or to still be a prostitute herself, basing myself on Pompey’s comment about her having “worn your eyes almost out in the service” (I, II, 91-2). The edition of *Measure to Measure* used throughout this chapter is The New Cambridge Shakespeare, Brian Gibbons (ed.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. First published in 1991).

I. Prostitution in *Measure for Measure*

Anne M. Haselkorn has characterised Shakespeare's treatment of prostitution in his comedies as "Cavalier".⁴ By this she means that his purpose is neither reformist nor satirical, it merely accepts prostitution as a fact of life and portrays it as such. She also notes the broadness of definitions of prostitution in drama of the period, which ran from the common professional Alice in Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) to Frank Thorney in Dekker, Ford and Rowley's *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621) who describes his wife as a whore because she has married him unaware that he already had a wife.⁵ Bruce R. Smith discusses the idea of a continuum of sexual behaviour bordered at the male end by the sodomite and at the female end by the whore. However, as Smith points out, this does not suggest that the two poles of the continuum are equal:

At the "male" end, sexual offence is very narrowly defined; at the "female" end, it could hardly be broader. In early modern England, it was very hard for a male to be branded as a sodomite, but it was very easy for a woman to be branded as a whore.⁶

This is seen throughout the Shakespearean canon, where wives are consistently subject to denunciation as whores.⁷ Jonathan Dollimore has also pointed to the operation of the sexual double standard in the Shakespearean representation of prostitution. He notes that whereas there are no slang terms for the prostitutes' male clients in the Shakespearean canon, there are a great variety of colloquial names for the prostitutes themselves, including:

⁴ Anne M. Haselkorn, *Prostitution in Elizabethan and Jacobean Comedy*, (New York: Whitston Publishing Company, 1983), p.20.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁶ Bruce R. Smith, "L(o)cating the Sexual Subject" in Terence Hawkes (ed.) *Alternative Shakespeares: vol. 2* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 100.

⁷ Examples include Hermione in *The Winter's Tale* and Desdemona in *Othello*.

bawd, strumpet, callet, courtezan, drab, harlot, punk, stale,
 public commoner, fitchew, flirt-gills, skains-mate, galled
 goose of Winchester, quean, Amazonian trull, housewife.⁸

The particular interest of *Measure for Measure* (1604) lies in the wide range of sexual subject positions for women represented in the play, ranging from virgin to pregnant betrothed to married woman to prostitute. This is compounded by the fact that although each of these subject positions is constructed as distinct, the borders between them are highly permeable. The normative heterosexual transition from virgin to bride is undermined by unplanned pregnancies and the breaking of marriage contracts. In Act II Scene I, the influence of the brothels is extended to married women as the shadowy Mrs Elbow is tempted into one in her search for stewed prunes. Mistress Overdone, though a bawd, is also described as “a poor widow”, who has already buried nine husbands, and who has brought up Kate Keepdown’s child. Isabella is tried by Escalus and Lucio in the Final Act as if she were a common prostitute, as they “go darkly to work” with her (V, I, 275). It is not even certain that Isabella will make the transition from virgin to bride at the end of the play.

In the dramatic text, Mistress Overdone has a small but well-defined role. One of her functions as a character is to introduce information for the audience. In Act I Scene II, she prepares the audience for Claudio’s entrance by telling those assembled that Claudio has been arrested and is to die for making Juliet pregnant. In Act III Scene II, she introduces the information that Lucio has made one of her prostitutes, Kate Keepdown, pregnant, that she herself has bought up the child, and that this is why he is seeking to have her arrested. Such information is important for the ending where

⁸ Jonathan Dollimore, “Shakespeare Understudies: the Sodomite, the Prostitute, the Transvestite and their Critics” in Jonathan Dollimore & Alan Sinfield (eds.), *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994, 2nd. edition. First edition 1985), p.136.

marrying Kate Keepdown and accepting his paternity of the child constitute Lucio's punishment. However, like all woman characters in the play, Mistress Overdone has difficulties being believed. Although she introduces both pieces of information, it is only when they are endorsed, in the first case by the appearance of Claudio, and in the second through Lucio's own admission of his guilt, that this information achieves the status of fact.

Her more important function in the play is conventionally considered to be to provide evidence of the moral decay of Vienna. Act I Scene II is mainly concerned with the detrimental physical and moral effects of continued visits to her brothel by Viennese gentlemen, where Claudio is also apparently well-known. The teasing about disease extends to Mistress Overdone herself who has, according to Pompey, "worn your eyes almost out in the service" (I, II, 91-2). The contingent effects of corruption are also suggested through the "wise burgher" who has intervened to stop the brothels in the city being destroyed by Angelo's proclamation. This approach to the role of Mistress Overdone and the prostitutes invariably stresses the way in which such moral laxness makes the Duke's intervention inevitable and also plays down the strong element of repression in the Duke's subsequent actions. In a short episode in Act III Scene II, the arrested Mistress Overdone is brought before Escalus and the disguised Duke before being taken off to prison. The notion that Mistress Overdone is immune to punishment and reform after so long in the trade is meant to show that for the Duke, no other course of action is possible.

Yet her role in the play is more ambiguous than this moralistic approach suggests. Mistress Overdone and those who work with her are not painted darkly in the play, but comically. Although they show the Duke that his leniency has had severe consequences, they also make clear that a project of sexual severity like that of Angelo

can only fail. If sexual activity is bound to continue, then inevitably, the play seems to argue, so will prostitution. This means that the resistance of sexuality to authoritarian control tends to become linked also with the naturalisation of prostitution.

Feminist criticism has analysed the character of Mistress Overdone as one who voices an alternative narrative to the state's moralistic view of prostitution. Kate Chedgzoy, for example, has noted Mistress Overdone's "perception of prostitution as an aspect of social existence that intertwines with other important aspects of city life".⁹ Jyotsna Singh goes even further and makes of Mistress Overdone "a contestatory voice" in the play, one who strives to tell a story about the practice of prostitution not as "an abstract moral evil", but as determined "by social, political and economic factors within a specific historical moment".¹⁰ In this alternative scenario, prostitution is supported not by a lack of moral fibre in the prostitutes, but financially, through the support of the gentlemen and "wise burghers". Equally, the detrimental effects of wars, the plague and sexual disease suppress it far more effectively than any of Angelo's proclamations. Prostitution becomes naturalised as just another trade and the prostitutes are no more than early modern working girls. Yet this view ignores the fact that the character who more consistently contests the reading of prostitution as a moral evil and who sees no reason why prostitution cannot just be legalised like any other trade is Pompey rather than Mistress Overdone. When Pompey comments on the events taking place at the time of the proclamation, for instance, Mistress Overdone plays the 'straight man' in their comic exchange, feeding Pompey with questions that will allow him to provide witty answers. Pompey makes an appearance before Angelo and somewhat carries the day, while Mistress Overdone enters only indirectly in this scene as a widow who has

⁹ Kate Chedgzoy, *Measure for Measure*, (Tavistock: Random House, 2000), p.51.

¹⁰ Jyotsna Singh, "The Interventions of History: Narratives of Sexuality" in Dymphna Callaghan *et al* (eds.) *The Weyward Sisters: Shakespeare and Feminist Politics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 42. Singh also describes Mistress Overdone as a "feminist historiographer" because of the way in which she enables a different narrative about prostitution to be told, p. 46.

buried nine husbands but who has been “Overdone by the last” (II, I, 173). The alternative scenario that Singh raises is a valid indication of how Mistress Overdone can be read, but not one that the character is able to voice directly. Indeed, her scripted role in the play emphasises more the precariousness of her position. She is not instinctively believed, not as able to live off her wits as Pompey, older and more exposed to disease than her younger prostitutes, as well as being continually subject to arrest. This makes it difficult to accept a reading of her as a “contestatory voice” in the play, though the point both Chedgzoy and Singh make about the stress on the social and economic basis of prostitution is well-made.

This brings me to the work of Jonathan Dollimore, who has written two important critical articles on the prostitutes; “Transgression and Surveillance in *Measure for Measure*” (1985) and “Shakespearean Understudies: The Sodomite, the Prostitute, the Transvestite and Their Critics” (1994). In the former, Dollimore illustrates how the prostitutes’ very lack of a voice enables others in authority to displace culpability for the state of affairs in Vienna onto them. He argues that the supposed moral decay of Vienna is a convenient smokescreen behind which the Duke and his deputy can act with impunity to introduce repressive political measures.

(p)rostitution and lechery are identified as the causes of crisis, yet we learn increasingly of a corruption more political than sexual (...) The play discloses corruption to be an effect less of desire than of authority itself.¹¹

The depiction of Vienna in the grip of a moral rather than political crisis diverts attention away from the fact that it is those who occupy positions of authority like Angelo who are bringing Vienna to a state of chaos. In this reading, Dollimore does not

¹¹ Jonathan Dollimore, “Transgression and Surveillance in *Measure for Measure*” in Jonathan Dollimore & Alan Sinfield, (eds.), *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 73.

imply that the prostitutes are to be celebrated, because this would be to celebrate their disenfranchisement. He does not view them as contestatory figures. However, he does make their disenfranchisement meaningful to the concerns of the play. Indeed, his argument is that the ability of the play to articulate the need for social and sexual order relies explicitly on the voicelessness of the prostitutes.

In his later article, Dollimore reflects upon why analysis of marginalised characters like the prostitutes had mattered to him:

the prostitutes seemed invisibly representative of the broken, the powerless and the silenced. The reasons for speaking about them were several: to remember them; to recall that their miserable fate has been that of many sexual minorities throughout history; to indicate how even the fact of historical effacement can be the point of entry into history.¹²

Thus, concern with the prostitutes as representative of those who are “broken, powerless and silenced” is tied in with the fates of other marginalised groups and also with a more general focus on mechanisms of exclusion from history and from theatrical texts. Yet this also raises an intriguing problem for stage representation. For productions that emphasise the prostitutes’ marginality, there are few mechanisms which can bring out the dramatic power of powerlessness or voicelessness onstage. There is, therefore, a risk that in maintaining their marginality, the audience will also accord them marginal attention. On the other hand, if a production works with Dollimore’s suggestion that the continuing marginality of the prostitutes is central to the performance of authority in the play, how might productions represent this undoubted importance of the prostitutes without obfuscating the mechanisms of exclusion which have made them marginal in the first place? This is where the character of Mistress Overdone, whom Dollimore does

¹² Jonathan Dollimore (1994), *Op. Cit* p. 137.

not discuss in either article, seems to me to be relevant. She does have a speaking part in the play, albeit a small one, and her multiple sexual identity as bawd, ex-prostitute, ex-married woman and surrogate mother troubles attempts to confer centrality on certain types of sexual behaviour in women and consign others to the margins.

II. Prostitution as Theatrical Metaphor in Contemporary Performance

Joseph Lenz's 1993 article "Base Trade: Theater as Prostitution" examines the construction of the metaphor of theatre as prostitution in the early modern period.¹³ He notes the basis for the metaphor in their common location and the fact that prostitutes were found often in theatre audiences and as characters in the plays. More generally, he argues that the metaphor revealed a distrust of the spec(tac)ular as itself a form of intercourse and that this aligning of sight with sexuality was compounded by a second analogy between theatre and trade. As Lenz points out, professional theatre was "doubly damned because it sells such pleasure for profit" and this reinforced its connection with the other "base trade" of prostitution.¹⁴ Therefore, despite the attempts of early modern theatre practitioners to gain respectability, Lenz concludes that this respectability often eluded them, for:

(...) by definition the professional theater is a fabricator of pleasurable illusions for profit, in a culture that conceives the act of seeing as copulation and the transaction of trade as base. The more it succeeded at attracting, pleasing and profiting from audiences by making a spectacle of itself, the more it resembled a prostitute.¹⁵

¹³ Joseph Lenz, "Base Trade: Theater as Prostitution" in *ELH*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), Vol. 60, 4 Winter 1993 pp. 833-855.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 841.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 842.

This chapter's project to redraw a postmodern parallel between theatre and prostitution could be seen to be subject to similar paradoxes, and it is by no means certain to what extent this metaphorical connection can be explored productively. There is, after all, a case for arguing that theorists of sexuality and performance should lay the metaphor to rest, seeing that it was invariably invoked to discredit both theatre and prostitution. Furthermore, (re)positing the connection runs the risk of recreating an unequal parallel, for the almost complete absence of the prostitutes in shaping this metaphor suggests the argument was principally about the status of theatre and had very little to do with prostitution. Luce Irigaray points out that in the process of creating metaphor, women are invariably relegated to a secondary role. She notes that woman "is the resource of reflection" for men and "the living mirror for man's reflection and speculation."¹⁶ As such, metaphor is made possible by women but is conditional also on their effacement. In this instance, the metaphor of theatre as a form of prostitution certainly did the early modern theatre no harm, but it left the prostitutes, literally, speechless. The question is raised, therefore, as to whether it is possible to maintain the metaphorical connection between the two without rendering the prostitutes once more invisible. It might also be objected that the linkage of theatre and prostitution is now historically obsolete. Few would make a direct connection between prostitution and theatre nowadays, as they operate in distinct physical environments and the theatre has achieved a measure of respectability which prostitution has not. Finally, there are also important differences in the way the metaphor might be drawn in England and in Portugal due to the different religious traditions of Protestantism and Catholicism.

However, this section argues that although the metaphorical connection between theatre and prostitution implies a necessary process of deconstruction for the reasons

¹⁶ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. G.C. Gill. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 221.

outlined above, exploring contemporary connections between theatre and prostitution can raise important questions. These include the relationship between the state and theatre, the status of women in theatre and the ambiguities of theatrical pleasure. Against the tendency of metaphor to efface women in its desire to speak about something else, this chapter places its emphasis on the living, breathing, moving presence of the actresses playing the prostitutes, for it is this embodied female presence that is most subject to ‘borrowing’ by the more abstract processes of metaphor construction. Yet it also acknowledges that just by entering into the sphere of representation, this simple presence is necessarily mediated by discourses of gender and sexual norms. Keeping the actress centre stage, while acknowledging the constraints upon her representation, it is then possible to analyse what the work of that particular actress playing this particular prostitute might tell us about the theatre that has produced it. In this way, the chapter forms part of a wider theoretical project outlined by Luce Irigaray which highlights the importance of “reopening the figures of philosophical discourse (...) in order to pry out of them what they have borrowed that is feminine, from the feminine, to make them ‘render up’ and give back what they owe the feminine”.¹⁷

Although current configurations of both theatre and prostitution are vastly different from the early modern period, there are elements common to both even in contemporary culture. Firstly, both theatre and prostitution continue to be defined by a particular dynamic of liminality. Although the contours of such dynamics are historically specific, now, as in the early modern period, they are characterised by paradox, inconsistency and often incoherence. Currently, discussion about the desirability of eradicating prostitution and occasional outbreaks of moral panic are

¹⁷ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. C. Porter. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 74.

interspersed with unofficial tolerance and periodic proposals to institutionalise it for more effective control. Similarly, governments veer between asserting the vital role of theatre in their cultural politics to dismissing it as a minority pastime or a luxury which they are unwilling to support financially. In both cases, there is a continuous movement between centrality and marginality. Central to defining the contours of this movement in particular historical periods is the state apparatus, already visible in the early modern theatre, but now a fully-developed bureaucracy of control and regulation. As a contemporary institution, the state cannot effectively decide whether its role should be permissive or heavy-handed. Prostitution is alternately controlled and vilified, while in relation to Portuguese state sponsorship of culture, João Teixeira Lopes notes that such inconsistency is translated in:

(the) oscillation in the role of the State between a figure that guarantees the independence of artistic creation and the old patronising temptation of interference and the imposition of canons which seeks in the arts a mirror where power can see itself reflected in all its majesty.¹⁸

In a more extreme vision, it could even be argued that the current battle for ever decreasing state subsidies in Portugal among an ever increasing number of theatre projects has forced theatre companies into a client-prostitute relationship with the state. Money is awarded on the basis of the prostitute (company) meeting the client's (the state's) expressed demands in terms of types of plays, venues, audiences and especially, profits. Analysis of the 1997 Comuna production of the play in this chapter is focused particularly on this complex relationship between the state and theatre.

¹⁸ “(...) a oscilação do papel do Estado entre a figura que garante a independência da criação artística e a velha tentação mecénica de interferência e imposição de cânones que traduzem a tentação de procurar nas artes um espelho onde o poder se reveja na sua majestade”. João Teixeira Lopes, *A Cidade e a Cultura: Um Estudo sobre Práticas Culturais Urbanas*, (Porto: Afrontamento & Camara Municipal de Porto, 2000), p.110.

The distrust of the spec(tac)ular among anti-theatricalists in the early modern period was part of a wider suspicion about the effects of theatrical pleasure, which was expressed in overtly sexual terms. It would be difficult to find those who would argue today that cross-dressed actors encourage lust in their audiences and a desire for sexual encounters of all persuasions. However, contemporary arguments about commercial theatre and the use of new technologies are often conducted in similarly moralistic terms. Lavish spectacles like *Les Misérables*, or, in the Portuguese case, Filipe la Féria's *Minha Linda Senhora* (*My Fair Lady*), tend to make theatre critics and practitioners uncomfortable. They charge such shows with being inferior, or deceptive, forms of theatre. In both scenarios, the audience are cast as willing dupes for those who wish to capitalise on their manipulability for commercial purposes. Often this suspicion results from a sense that the politics of such representations are deeply reactionary. In the case of prostitution, for instance, theatrical representations often employ a double strategy which criticises, often sentimentally, the demonisation of prostitution at the same time as it exploits their appeal in order to please audiences. This chapter analyses a 2002 production by The Lisbon Players which attempted to balance a critical attitude towards representations of prostitution with an enjoyment of the specifically theatrical aspects of their roles.

The early modern connection between theatre and prostitution also revealed a profound ambivalence about the relationship between women and the stage, where it was thought that women onstage or even performances of women by men made women available to the public *as if* they were prostitutes. Harold Weber's comment at the beginning of this chapter is made in relation to the first English actresses in the 17th century, but a focus on the sexual availability of the actress continues to haunt stage roles for women even now. The media attention given to Nicole Kidman or Jerry Hall's

moment of nakedness in David Hare's *The Blue Room* is one contemporary illustration of this. Yet contemporary theatre can also be quite prudish in its representation of women's sexuality, especially when it is concerned with how its audience will react. Representations of independent women who are sexually active and are not punished for this are still quite rare. This ambivalence towards women is particularly acute when actresses actually play the roles of prostitutes. The theatrical vocabulary of the prostitute tends to be incredibly stereotyped – the skimpy clothing, the 'heart of gold', the self-deprecating humour - and it is invariably incredibly outdated. It still has a turn of the century feel and bears little relation to the cross-national, diversified world of prostitution today. Even more recent theatrical attempts to make the role of the prostitutes more central are by no means ambiguously positive. Kate Chedgzoy, for instance, suggests that this performance trend may actually be at odds with the aims of feminist analysis:

(t)he theatrical effects created by the staging of these prostitutes can run counter to the direction of critical analysis. In appropriating the commodification of sexuality for theatrical ends rather than critiquing it, they run the risk of reproducing stereotypical images of prostitutes.
¹⁹

This chapter analyses a 1994 RSC production of the play which brought out some of this ambiguity with particular force. Although the production programme gave prominence to a more contemporary perspective on prostitution, the stage representation of the prostitutes was stereotypical and outmoded. Similarly, with the exception of one highly evocative image of voicelessness, these representations downplayed any critical potential generated by an increased focus on the prostitutes in favour of an opportunistic foregrounding of their sexuality.

¹⁹ Kate Chedgzoy, (2000), *Op. Cit.* p.53.

III. I. Transformation through Transgression : A Brief History of Teatro Comuna (1972-1997)

The history and trajectory of Teatro Comuna from its foundation in 1972 to its celebration of twenty-five years existence in 1997 have been quite distinct, but also in many ways representative of the history of independent theatre in Portugal. In their twenty-five years, Comuna have moved from the margins of theatrical and social life, with their productions subject to censorship, into one of the most respected independent companies which came to receive 60,000,000 escudos every year for three year periods from the state government.²⁰ It might be expected, therefore, that if any company had an understanding of what it means to be a marginal figure like a prostitute, it would be Comuna. It might also be expected that given the company's own transition from marginality to a form of centrality that their representation of prostitution in 1997 might reflect these changes in some way. This section provides a detailed history of the company's several metamorphoses and reads the representation of *Mistress Overdone* by Cristina Cavalinhos against these transformations in order to elucidate certain choices made about the role.

Comuna were created by five actors on 1st May 1972 out of a split in an existing theatre company, the 'Bonecreiros'. They called themselves a 'Teatro de Pesquisa' (an experimental theatre) to emphasise the centrality of continued investigation into the theatrical process within their theatrical practice. Their 1972 Manifesto conceives of their beginnings as a rebirth rather than an emergence *ex nihilo*. This rebirth is conditioned by the need for a clear-sighted critique of the current state of affairs in the theatrical, as well as the political, world:

²⁰ This figure is roughly equivalent to 300,000 euros.

We are alive and we know that being alive is highly dangerous. (...) (W)e were courageous enough not to make a pact with false illusions or fictitious challenges, and remain faithful to the seriousness which was our starting point. The Bonecreiros have been transformed. Comuna is born.²¹

Initially, the group performed in a garage converted into a theatre in the Praça José Fontana. Their first production in that year was *Para Onde Is*, based on texts by the 15th century dramatist Gil Vicente. Vicente is Portugal's most well-known early dramatist and it is not surprising that a new group would begin by establishing a perspective on its own national canon. Yet it is a risky and courageous choice for a first production, nevertheless, and illustrates their commitment to a particular ideal of theatre right from these early stages. Many of their early productions were devised collectively by the company as part of a wider emphasis on theatre as a form of communal engagement between actors and audience. The group were influenced by the work of the Argentinian Adolfo Gutkin, who was working in Lisbon at the time and by Peter Brook, who had a particular influence on founding member João Mota, and also by Grotowski, whose vision of a poor theatre chimed with the circumstances in which Comuna found themselves to begin with. They received a grant from the Gulbenkian Foundation in that year of 160,000,000 escudos, which was awarded once more in the following year, together with a 20,000,000 escudos grant from the Theatre Fund.²² Nevertheless, Mota recalls this initial period as a difficult one, where they were rumoured to be card-carrying communists and often received bomb threats.

The 1974 Revolution was fundamental in establishing Comuna and an audience for their theatre work. In the immediate aftermath of the revolution, audiences for text-

²¹ “Estamos vivos e sabemos que viver é muito perigoso. (...) tivemos a coragem de não pactuar com falsas ilusões nem com desafios fictícios, permanecendo fiéis à seriedade que foi o nosso ponto de partida. Os Bonecreiros transformaram-se. Nasceu a Comuna”. Comuna Manifesto, 1st May 1972, printed in Cecília Sousa *et al.* (ed.) *Comuna – Teatro de Pesquisa 25 anos 1972-1997*, (Lisboa: Ministério da Cultura, 1998), p. 9.

²² These sums are roughly equivalent to 800,000 and 100,000 euros.

based theatre dropped while those for the *revista* (revue theatre) increased. This was due to the reputation of some revue theatres as centres of veiled opposition to the Salazar regime. However, the period was also characterised by more forms of theatre performed in a variety of venues for a wider variety of people, often for free. This had important longer term effects as, around 1976-77, it was audiences for text-based theatre like that of Comuna that were increasing and the *revista* that was in crisis. If the revolution thus helped to create an audience for Comuna, it also provided them with their premises. They had moved to an abandoned beer warehouse off the Avenida Almirante Reis in 1973, and during a performance in March 1975, they invited spectators to go with the actors and occupy an abandoned Home for Single Mothers belonging to Lisbon local council in Praça de Espanha. This pink building continues to be their premises to this day, and much of their work has been directed towards the communities in this area of Lisbon. In terms of funding, 1974 also saw the first ‘great’ State subsidy given to the group of 240,000,000 escudos.²³

However, it soon became clear that the group’s oppositional stance would not end with the overthrow of fascism. Indeed, they were one of the first victims of *post* 25th April censorship. Performing as part of the commemorations for the 10th June (Portugal day, formerly Race Day), in a play symbolically called *Cegada* (Masquerade), they caricatured various figures from the former regime like Américo Tomas, Marcelo Caetano and Cardeal Cerejeira. Although the performance continued until it had finished, the State channel, RTP, very visibly cut the televising of the performance after three minutes, scandalised by the representation of a President in briefs. This censorship later led to strike action by RTP workers.²⁴

²³ This is roughly equivalent to 1200,000 euros.

²⁴ This episode is recounted in Tito Lívio’s article “A Comuna é Uma Ilha” in *A Capital*, (1/5/1997), p. 22.

Comuna began to establish their reputation as one of the more distinctive independent theatres. Yet, to what extent did this desire to be independent and *not* like other theatres lead to the creation of an identifiable *corpus* of their own work? How was their work transformed by the regular awarding of subsidies from the state? The celebration of twenty-five years existence in 1977 led to the publication of a photobiography of the group, which included a detailed article by Eugénia Vasques on their theatre work. Vasques's article divides their work into particular time periods. Between 1972 and 1978, she characterises their theatre productions as having "a notable emphasis on creative work that is radically collective", and this remained an important part of their theatre practice from then onwards.²⁵ From 1979-85, Vasques notes the company's exploration of Portuguese dramatists and attempts to improve working conditions in the theatre, after a split in the company in 1979 where several founder members left. Between 1979 and 1985, they alternated text-based theatre work with an extremely popular *café-teatro*, which maintained some of the satirical impulse of the now almost defunct *revista*. This two-pronged approach was also to characterise their work in the future. Some of their most popular shows with the public, such as *A Castro* were created in the early 80's and the period between 1979-85 was also one in which Comuna were one of the most heavily subsidised theatre companies in Lisbon. Nevertheless, this should be placed in a context where few theatres outside the national theatre received subsidies of any note or on any permanent basis.

Between 1986 and 1993, Comuna widened their repertoire to include several Anglo-American dramatists such as Marlowe, Ford and Tennessee Williams. They also travelled abroad often, particularly to European Theatre Festivals. Productions from this time included Camus' *Caligula* (1980), Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* (1988), Williams' *A*

²⁵ Eugénia Vasques, "O 'Primeiro Teatro Na Garagem': 25 Anos Depois" in Cecilia Sousa *et al* (eds.) (1998), *Op. Cit.*, p. 25.

Streetcar named Desire (1990) and Marlowe's *Edward II* (1992). Vasques notes an interesting tension developing during this period between the collectivist, ritualistic ethos of their beginnings and the emergence of a more individualising, psychologically-based approach. Acting and directorial styles attempted to hold these two tendencies in a creative tension, and Vasques concludes that from this period onwards, this creative tension was expressed in "the transgressive and affirmative defence of an identity based on individualisation and difference".²⁶ The company also began to perform Portuguese dramatists like Natália Correia, whose *A Pecora* (1989) had previously been censored and considered unperformable, and encouraged new dramatists, most notably Abel Neves, whose *Touro* and *Terra* were performed respectively in 1986 and 1991. Important changes were also taking place within Comuna's audience, as social changes led to an increasingly diversified public.²⁷

Within this important and diverse period, Vasques identifies a sub-phase in the company's history between 1991 and 1993, characterised as a time of reflection. Theatrical activity during this period actually decreased. In 1993, the company restaged a collective production from 1975 *Bao* (restaged once more in 2003 as *Black Bao*.) Yet, as Vasques points out, the way in which the two productions differed was itself indicative of changes within the company. The first time it was staged, the emphasis of the production had been on the class struggle between the rich and the poor clown. In 1993, the production was accented differently with a focus on "the creative artist asphyxiated by the arbitrariness of power".²⁸ It is a period where, for Vasques, João Mota:

²⁶*Ibidem*

²⁷ C.f. Paulo Filipe Monteiro, "Os Públicos dos Teatros de Lisboa: Primeiras Hipóteses" in *Análise Social: Revista do Instituto de Ciências Sociais da Universidade de Lisboa*, vol. XXIX (129), 1994 (5°): 1229-44. Monteiro notes the heterogeneity of Comuna's audience and their eclectic theatrical interests, but he also notes, for example, how many young people were now attending performances at Comuna.

²⁸ Eugénia Vasques, (1998), *Op. Cit.*, p.27.

(...) concentrates in himself the history of the company and its main programmatic objectives: the recovery of lost innocence through a continued stress on theatrical teaching and an investment in the training of new actors to whom he will one day pass on the baton of his ethical rather than aesthetic theatrical utopia. This utopia is collective and committed to social critique.²⁹

Between 1993 and 1996, such reflection became a practical concern. Comuna became a subsidised company in 1996, funded for periods of three years at a time by the Socialist Government. Yet if this seems to indicate a new place within the theatrical mainstream, they have nevertheless remained committed to maintaining a certain distance from the structures of power. As the poet Pedro Tamen has said of them “Comuna definitely have given us a body of work, but they have resisted, and continue to resist, becoming an institution”.³⁰ During this period, they established a new theatre space for experimental work (the New Tendencies theatre) and encouraged new company members such as Alfredo Brissos and Álvaro Correia to direct Michael Frayn and Pinter respectively.

Both these actor/directors figure in the production that marked the 25th anniversary of Comuna in 1997, *Medida por Medida*, their first production of Shakespeare. One of the original founding members of Comuna, Carlos Paulo, returned to play Duke Vincentio, yet the production’s mixture of older and younger actors seemed to indicate that Comuna were experiencing something of a renewal. It was a period that also saw the company looking to outside scenographers and stylists, as well as renewed attempts to get their training courses operational once more and attempts to diversify their public. However, in interview, Mota revealed an awareness that different

²⁹ “(João Mota) concentra em si o historial da companhia e os seus objectivos programáticos capitais: o reencontro da inocência perdida (por meio de uma sempre recomeçada acção de pedagogia teatral) e o investimento na formação de novos actores aqueles a quem um dia poderá passar o facho da sua utopia de um teatro (eticamente mais do que esteticamente) colectivo e empenhado na crítica social”. *Ibidem*.

³⁰ Quoted in Sousa *et al.* (ed.) (1998), *Op. Cit.* p. 210.

problems had arisen as a result of their closer connections to the state. Speaking with Marina Ramos in a *Público* interview on 3 April 1997, Mota acknowledged that one of problems of creating under democracy is the tendency to “stick” to power and the abandonment of “the only valid form of creation, which is transgression”.³¹

With their 25th anniversary celebrations, several theatre critics sought to define the particular trajectory of Comuna. Maria Helena Serôdio stressed the collective aspects of their work in her summary of the main characteristics of Comuna’s theatre:

Comuna’s creations distinguished themselves by stressing corporeality in its acting style and by creating a kind of spatial and affective complicity with the audience. It also tended towards a kind of ritualistic ceremony where the focus is laid on excessive and transgressive features, expressed by the atmosphere, choreography, music and litany. Another important trait of Comuna’s was a sense of political protest, not divorced from a poetical element, which can be perceive (*sic*) in its repertoire and artistic procedures and has favoured a kind of satirical café-theatre.³²

Eugénia Vasques identifies two main characteristics of their work which explain the longevity of the collective. On the one hand, there is a belief in the power of the actor and the truthfulness of his/her interpretation. On the other hand, there is a belief in the ‘great text’ as a means of passing on a theatrical tradition based on the actor. Simultaneously, it was this very tradition that demanded of the actor/actress maximum rigour with the text.³³

Vasques concludes that Comuna remain on the Portuguese theatre scene because of their differences from other groups. From my own perspective, it also seems true that Comuna have survived because although they have retained a commitment to

³¹ Marina Ramos, “25 Anos de Comuna” in *O Público*, (3/4/1997), p.27.

³² Helena Serôdio, “Theatre as a Social System: Portugal” in & H.van Maanen & S.E.Wilmer (eds.) *Theatre Worlds in Motion: Structure, Politics & Development in the Countries of Western Europe* (Amsterdam & Atlanta: Rodopi,1998), p.16. The article is written in English so I have maintained the author’s words here.

³³ Eugénia Vasques (1998), *Op. Cit.* p.29.

identifiable ways of working, they have consistently been able to reinvent themselves. Their work has remained recognisable yet consistently open. Indeed, this transformational ability is built into the way they work. It can be seen in their desire to pass on what they have learnt, and to listen to and incorporate new voices. It can also be seen in their willingness to allow newer groups like Teatro Meridional and Artistas Unidos to use their theatrical spaces. In this respect, they are one of the few groups who are still held in high esteem by a younger generation of actors, precisely because they have been willing to offer them support and advice. This ability to remain open to change allows them to balance elements that are more often seen as incongruous. Álvaro Correia, for example, has commented that “at Comuna, poetry and transgression walk hand in hand”.³⁴ Whilst such a tendency could be said to be characteristic of several independent theatre groups of Comuna’s generation, it is a contradiction that has been explored with particular force by them.

A key question for this chapter is to what extent Comuna’s changing relationship with the state has prompted changes in their theatrical practice. Certainly, their funding has become more secure, their premises larger and better to work in and their ability to communicate their particular vision of theatre greater. Performances in one of their four theatres now are very different from performing in a garage and accumulated experience in itself leads to a certain institutionalisation of working practices as a ‘house style’. Mota himself is well aware of the pressures that accompany becoming a subsidised company, together with the possibility that external pressures will lead to a less oppositional stance. However, the company’s gradual progress towards a new centrality does not seem, fundamentally, to have altered their theatrical vision or practice. Such transformations as there have been seem to have owed as much to the internal dynamics of the company as to the needs of funders. They continue to take risks and seem to resist

³⁴ Quoted in Sousa *et al* (1998), *Op. Cit.*, p. 169.

institutionalisation. In this respect, the production of *Medida por Medida* is interesting, because it seems to be at once a consolidation of their twenty-five years, as well as a stripping away of what is no longer useful for the future. It is, at this intersection between celebration and transformation that I wish to locate my analysis of the representation of Mistress Overdone in this production.

III. II. Cristina Cavalinhos as Senhora Recozida

When Cristina Cavalinhos played the part of Mistress Overdone (Senhora Recozida) in the 1997 Comuna production of *Medida por Medida*, she was part of their permanent company. Her previous theatrical background had been quite diverse and had included work with one of the other main independent theatre companies 'Teatro Cornucópia'. From them, she had learnt the centrality of the text in constructing a dramatic role, and this emphasis on the text also informed her roles with Comuna. She felt that she was chosen to play Mistress Overdone because she was the actress within the company most suited to it, despite being younger than the role implied. She noted that she tended to be cast in roles which were *à la limite*, such as the 'dangerous' mother in Tennessee Williams' *Not about Nightingales* or, in this case, Mistress Overdone.³⁵ Nevertheless, when I spoke to her in 2003, she was no longer working with Comuna, and her theatrical projects had become more diverse.

Cavalinhos spoke of the difficulty of creating a character who appears so little in the play. This had made her realise that she could not give full rein to her imagination in the creation of the role. Yet within these limits, careful thought had gone into her textual

³⁵ Personal interview with Cristina Cavalinhos, (1/2/ 2003). All subsequent references from this interview are indicated in single quotation marks.

preparation for the role and physical creation of it onstage. She spoke of a two-stage process, whereby her initial perception of the character as grotesque and perverse had given way to a vision of the character as a confidante who hears things from her clients that they would not tell their wives. When I mentioned that the theme of the doctoral thesis was sexual transgression, she spoke about the enormity of the transgression for those schooled in the Catholic faith of a woman whose profession makes her the antithesis of the wife and mother, but who has been married and raised Kate Keepdown's child herself. She came to see Recozida as a character who has had much experience of life and is therefore not surprised by anything. She was someone who was 'knowledgeable about the human condition' because of her experiences, but also 'fun-loving, pragmatic'.

For the role, she began by observing real-life prostitutes, and read and discussed the play with other members of the company. From this, Cavalinhos built up what she called the 'sub-text' or psychological depth of the character, a process she likened to adding muscles and flesh to a skeleton. She wanted to create a character where the burden of being a prostitute was combined with the burden of growing old. To do this, Cavalinhos lowered her normal speaking voice to make it sound 'graver, wearier'. She relaxed her body posture, lowering herself onto the sexual organs and the hips. Her concern to keep her body posture open was most evident in the fact that she kept her legs always open onstage in an attitude of 'uncomfortable sexuality'. Her costume was made out of what had been a large curtain wrapped around her body, and was far from comfortable as it itched throughout performances. Indeed, João Carneiro in his *Expresso* review, singled out this costume as one that "bordered on disrespect for the actress wearing it" (see photograph no. 9 at the end of this chapter).³⁶

³⁶ João Carneiro, "Crimes e Castigo" in *O Expresso*, April 1997.

Any translation of the play has to tackle the question of how to translate the name of *Mistress Overdone* into Portuguese. The Centro Cultural de Évora/TAS 1977 production used the name “Dona Esturricada” (dried out, toasted, over-roasted) and Maria João da Rocha Afonso maintained the culinary connection by translating *Mistress Overdone* as “Senhora Recozida (overbaked, overboiled, overdone, reheated) for the Comuna production.³⁷ M. Gomes da Torre’s recent translation of the play preferred to emphasise the wear and tear of her professional life and translated *Mistress Overdone* as “Dona Desgaste”(worn out, used up).³⁸ Cavalinhos liked the name *Senhora Recozida* as it gave her the sense of someone who has lived and then relived her life all over again. It conveyed a notion of the character as a bit mischievous and with a slightly twisted sense of humour. Yet in terms of the translation overall, Cavalinhos felt it was occasionally ‘dubious’ and sometimes a little too populist and colloquial. As her character had a colloquial form of expression, Cavalinhos had not felt the need to alter the translation, but she admitted that several other performers had changed their speeches during rehearsals without this being considered problematic.

When questioned about working with such a minimalist set, Cavalinhos noted that at the beginning of rehearsals, it had provided more difficulties than opportunities. Working against a wall with a bare, steel structure, she found the onstage atmosphere ‘cold’ and a little frightening. The bare stage also tended to amplify all her gestures. However, as she became more comfortable in the role, the benefits became more apparent. The minimal set encouraged greater interaction with the other actors and she

³⁷ The expression ‘recozida’ in Portuguese is used to refer euphemistically to someone who is ‘past it.’

³⁸ M. Gomes da Torre, *Medida por Medida*, (Porto: Campo das Letras, 2001). Gomes da Torre had originally wanted to call her “Dona Desgasta,” but this created problems for Pompey’s famous description of her as “Overdone by the last,” for her husband would have had the masculine form (Desgasto). He therefore decided to call her “Dona Desgaste,” so that the pun in the later scene could be maintained. Translation problems also extend to the name of Kate Keepdown who is mentioned by *Mistress Overdone* in the text. Rocha Afonso introduces a religious dimension by translating her as “Catarina Santas Noites,” while Gomes da Torre focuses on the horizontal needs of her profession by calling her “Catarinha Deitadinha”.

enjoyed the simplicity and risk of performances where ‘everything was laid bare’ and where people performed ‘without a safety net’.

Cavalinhos said she had noticed, like Carla Chambel, that there were different theatrical generations within the production. Having been part of Comuna for two years, she knew the ‘house style’ of the company. She didn’t necessarily agree with their way of working, but didn’t voice her dissent. She enjoyed the role and was sure if she played it again it would be different as the performance depends very much on the people who come together for that specific performance.

In what sense, therefore, can Cavalinhos’s representation of the role of Senhora Recozida be read usefully against Comuna’s own history? A first point might be that her own trajectory in the company embodies the constant process of renewal that characterises Comuna. She came from another independent group to work as part of the permanent company at Comuna. Two years later, her experience within the company had established a continuity which was to include the role of Senhora Recozida. Here, she found herself in a mediatory position between those who had been in the company for much longer and those who were working in it sometimes for the first time. By 2003, she was working on her own projects outside Comuna.

Secondly, Comuna’s focus on the collective work of the actors can be seen in her sense that the character was only a small part of the production and that it was not appropriate to transgress those limits. Comuna has never been a theatre of stars, but an ensemble venture that relies on all working together as a group to ensure the success of the production. Thirdly, her interest in the social role of Senhora Recozida and the mechanisms of her exclusion are evidence of Comuna’s commitment to creating theatre out of recognisable social realities. Similarly, her broadly sympathetic approach to the character is indicative of Comuna’s instinctive alliance with the dispossessed. In terms

of acting styles, the way in which Cavalinhos made *Overdone* a representative social type, but also individualised her as an older prostitute with a very particular bodily stance exemplifies the way in which Comuna have come to balance individuality and type in the creation of character. Yet one feature of her performance can be seen to be more pertinent than all of these - the fact that no attempt was made to alter the textual marginality of *Senhora Recozida* in performance. She was given no more lines, appeared only where she does in the text and was not accompanied by any prostitutes. On the one hand, this indicates the immense respect at Comuna for great texts. Even in a first production of Shakespeare, there were no garish costumes or wild hairstyles and no gimmicks to distract from the text, just the work of serious character actresses like Cavalinhos to bring that text to life. Yet this continued focus on the marginalisation of the character also seems to reflect something of Comuna's historical experience as a company. They are now increasingly well-known and respected on the Portuguese theatrical scene, but choose to maintain what might be considered a tangential position in relation to structures of power and particularly the state. As João Mota noted, transgression becomes more difficult when a company comes closer to structures of power. Making *Mistress Overdone's* role more central to the production, therefore, would not only go against the collectivist ethos of the company, it could also be seen as diffusing the transgressive charge associated with its marginality.

It is typical of Comuna that a production intended to be celebratory of their theatre work was used to critique what they saw as urgent problems in Portuguese society rather than to look back at their history in a self-congratulatory way. Mota spoke of "promiscuity" being one of the signs of the degradation of contemporary society in the press release accompanying the production, yet it is symptomatic that this does not include blaming those like *Senhora Recozida* who are more often its symptoms than its

causes.³⁹ The production did not suggest that Senhora Reozida was some kind of popular heroine, but it did remind those watching that this ageing prostitute had also looked after another woman's child and was engaged, like them, in the daily struggle for survival. She was the sort of figure the audience might have seen on a street corner themselves; fat, comically gruff, hands on hips, wondering when the next client will come so that she, her prostitutes and her adoptive daughter can make their living.

IV. Sleaze and Sensationalism: the RSC Production of *Measure for Measure* (1994)

Comuna's production of *Medida por Medida* owed its success to the long-term transformations that had characterised their history as a company. However, the RSC's 1994 production of the play owed much of its success to the timing of the production. A Conservative Government under Prime Minister John Major, having recently launched a 'Back to Basics' campaign to promote a return to family values, was rocked by a series of high-profile sex scandals involving Conservative politicians. On the other side of the Atlantic, Paula Jones was accusing Bill Clinton of sexual impropriety. The BBC were allowed to choose one Shakespearean play to televise in this period and it is significant that they also chose to screen *Measure for Measure*, in a production directed by David Thacker and starring Juliet Aubrey, Corin Redgrave and Tom Wilkinson.

Newspaper reviews of the RSC production were quick to draw parallels between these sex scandals and the events of the play. *The Daily Telegraph*, for instance, saw the Duke as a John Major figure who was unable to control members of his party. In this media coverage, the fact that the production included three walk-on parts for actresses as prostitutes received perhaps more attention than it would have done in other circumstances. *The Daily Telegraph* saw the "tarts in leopard-skin mini-skirts" and

³⁹ Comuna Press Release April/May 1997.

“punters in leather biking gear” as crucial elements in bringing the production up to date.⁴⁰ *The Coventry Evening Telegraph*, however, saw the function of the “bevy of suspender-belted ladies of a certain profession” as being solely to generate laughter.⁴¹ The performance of Caroline Blakiston as Mistress Overdone was reviewed with similar schoolboy titillation. *The Stratford-upon-Avon Herald* described her as “a philosophical French Madam syphilitically confined to a wheel-chair and further handicapped by a Franglais accent”.⁴² Michael Billington in *The Guardian* also remained unsure about her “mittel-Europa accent”, while the *Daily Telegraph* described her as “apparently auditioning for a part in ‘Allo, ‘Allo.”⁴³ One feature of the representation of prostitution, however, did prompt reviewers to go beyond this generally dismissive tone. At a certain moment in the production, Pompey brought on a young woman who was to become one of the prostitutes in the brothel. The young actress was more of a child, for she couldn’t have been more than ten or eleven. The impact of such a moment onstage was quite shocking, for a small child looks intensely vulnerable in such an environment. The stark picture of a young girl who was not yet an adolescent embarking on a career in prostitution was the kind of image that makes performance temporarily stand still as audiences are forced to acknowledge their own complicity in constructing stereotypical images of who a prostitute is and what she does. It remains etched on the mind long after the performance has ended. Michael Billington praised this moment when “the sleaze of Shakespeare’s supposedly Viennese sub-world is perfectly caught”, although Paul Taylor in the *Independent* was more unsettled by it. He wrote “I was unsure about

⁴⁰ Charles Spencer, “Trip Down Lust’s Sour Byways” in *The Daily Telegraph*, (22/10/ 1994). All subsequent quotations from this newspaper are taken from this review.

⁴¹ Barbara Goulden, “Players in the Power Game” in *The Coventry Evening Telegraph* (22/10/1994)

⁴² Paul Lapworth, “The Playmaker Duke” in *The Stratford upon Avon Herald* (27/10/1994). All subsequent quotations from this newspaper are from this review.

⁴³ Michael Billington, “Made-to-Measure Confusion” in *The Guardian*, (22/10/1994). All subsequent quotations from this newspaper are from this review.

the suggestion that the children had become prostitutes in Vienna, since this implies that grinding poverty not years of lax rule has depraved the population".⁴⁴

It could be argued that this may have been precisely the point the production was seeking to make. In an article entitled "Truly, sir, I am a poor fellow that would live", the production programme reprinted two pages of excerpts from Nick Davies' reports in *The Guardian* between August and September 1994 about contemporary low-life in Britain. The reports painted a bleak picture of homelessness, drug abuse and prostitution and pointed out how the nature of prostitution had changed in the last ten years in just the way this production moment highlighted:

All through the 1980's, as the poorest 10% of the population became more poor, the prostitution industry boomed: the number of women prosecuted quadrupled between 1981 and 1991. In the late 1980's, these adults were joined by adolescents, aged 16 to 18, who had been pushed out of their homes by the poll tax and then stripped of their benefits.⁴⁵

Davies' reports made clear how easy it was to find children for sex in Britain's cities:

In London, there's a skinny prostitute, who is known as Twiggy, who has three young daughters working the pavements between Stamford Hill and King's Cross. There's Trudy. She says she's 15; her friends say she's 13. Whatever the truth, she is supposed to be living in a children's home, but she has been selling herself on the streets and sleeping at night with a small-time crack dealer who makes porn videos in his house. He says he doesn't screw her, he's just trying to keep her off the streets for her own good.⁴⁶

These were the stories circulating around the time of the production that the media were less interested in telling about the sex industry, namely, its connections with increasing poverty and the increasing vulnerability of children. Although they reported with glee

⁴⁴ Review by Paul Taylor in *The Independent*, (22/10/ 1994).

⁴⁵ From RSC production programme for *Measure for Measure*, 1994, unpaginated.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

the salacious details of the sex lives of Conservative politicians caught with their pants down, they were less willing to expose the ways in which Conservative policies were themselves leading to increased homelessness, drug abuse and prostitution.

Beside the programme's cast list, there was a striking image of a naked pregnant woman. Her face and mouth were covered by a bandage so that only her eyes could be seen. She was carrying an apple in an obvious reference to the story of Adam and Eve. This was clearly a critique of Christian prurience and its role in controlling women's sexuality. Yet it also evoked the by then infamous naked photographs of Hollywood actress Demi Moore's naked, pregnant body which had been printed in several glossy magazines around the same time. As such, it illustrated the extent to which even the previously taboo pregnant female body had become commodified. It was indicative of the battles being fought over women's bodies in the period, and, along with Davies' articles, created a contemporary context for the historical concerns of the play.

As mentioned in Chapter Four, the *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald* described the RSC production as being "notable for images of female power".⁴⁷ This was primarily a reference to Isabella fighting to make her voice heard amid male scorn and derision, yet the *Herald* did explicitly include *Mistress Overdone* within such images of female power. Nevertheless, the brothel scenes in the production were more notable for their emphasis on the vulnerability of *Mistress Overdone* and her prostitutes than their power as women. This was signalled most explicitly in the fact that *Mistress Overdone* was confined to a wheelchair throughout the production.

In fact, the prostitutes and their Madam actually appeared onstage very little. Their first scene was the one scripted as Act I Scene II, with the 'gentlemen'. There was a prostitute onstage in the first part of the scene, dressed in a very short mini-skirt and suspenders, but all she did was to move between the gentlemen and put her hand on

⁴⁷ See Chapter 4 for further discussion of Stella Gonet's *Isabella* in this production.

their shoulders. She spoke no words. In the latter part of the scene, three prostitutes stood to one side and watched as the gentlemen pushed Mistress Overdone in her wheelchair backwards and forwards between them. They listened as she voiced her fears about the future, centre-stage in her wheelchair, spotlit, but again they did not speak (see photograph no. 10 at the end of this chapter). The scene ended with the moment when Pompey brought on the young child prostitute.

Later, two prostitutes returned with Pompey when he was arrested, but after some screaming and fighting with the officials arresting them, they were removed before the scene itself began. They returned once more for the scripted scene where the arrested Mistress Overdone is brought before Escalus. Visually, the beginning of this scene focused upon a highly arresting image. Mistress Overdone's wheelchair remained centre-stage, but was now empty. Overdone pleaded with Escalus from the floor, her destroyed legs splayed out in front of and behind her. This was a potent image of vulnerability before authority, where the physical consequences of the diseases that accompany life as a prostitute made the now old Madam even less able to protest at yet another arrest. Yet after the prostitutes screamed and fought to avoid arrest once more, none of these characters appeared again onstage.

Michael Billington's review of the production argued that although there were some interesting and intelligent touches, these did not add up to a coherent view of the play. This appears to be the case in relation to the representation of Mistress Overdone and her prostitutes too. The power of individual images, such as Mistress Overdone splayed helplessly on the floor or the image of the young child being brought into prostitution created highly effective performance moments, but these were intermittent and constructed no overall sense of the type of world the prostitutes inhabited or who the individual characters were. Instead, the representation of prostitution was based

upon stereotypical images of women in short skirts who did and said nothing. Mistress Overdone's 'foreign' accent represented a rather superficial attempt to signal otherness. Such representations had more in common with the salacious stories and images of the sex scandals that filled the media at this time than the more harrowing depiction of the social factors leading to prostitution in the production programme. This fall-back onto the clichéd and the stereotypical was itself characteristic of the work of the RSC at this time. John Major's government had continued the previous Thatcherite policy of public disinvestment in the arts. By 1994, the consequences of such policies were visible in previously heavily-subsidised theatrical institutions like the RSC. As Carol Chillington Rutter has pointed out in relation to their 1992 production of *Anthony and Cleopatra*:

With the company's body and soul evidently deep in hock to the accountants – and corporate sponsors – the voice of the RSC ventriloquized market forces: 'The RSC,' Noble admitted, had 'lost' – some said sold – 'the right to fail'. With it went the company's right, its duty as a maker of contemporary cultural meaning, to take risks, to be controversial, dissident, oppositional, avant-garde. The RSC had to play safe.⁴⁸

In this 'play safe' theatrical climate, the company recycled ideas from previous productions. The introduction of the prostitutes as a visible stage presence, for instance, had already been used in Paola Dionisotti's 1978 production as a way of giving more actresses in the company a role. The use of a television comedy star (Caroline Blakiston) was clearly a way of bringing in audiences. The representation of the prostitutes in such a stereotypical way was thus able to make use of the topicality of the Tory sex scandals without upsetting the RSC's audiences. It functioned as a semi-licensed jibe at the Tory government which had consistently diverted money away from

⁴⁸ Carol Chillington Rutter, *Enter the Body: Women and Representation on Shakespeare's Stage*, (London & New York: Routledge, 2001), p.83. Adrian Noble was at the time Artistic Director of the RSC and had made this comment in an address to The International Shakespeare Conference, Stratford-upon-Avon, August 1992.

them, at a moment when that government found itself in an embarrassing and awkward situation. All that linked the production with a less superficial view of prostitutes and their clients was the silent entrance of a 10-11 year old actress onstage as a character about to be introduced to a life-long career in the brothel.

V. “That She May Not Be Raw In Her Entertainment”: The Lisbon Players’ *Measure for Measure* (2002)

The Lisbon Players have nothing like the resources or the experience of producing Shakespeare that characterise the RSC. They are an amateur theatre group that performs English drama in Lisbon throughout the year. Historically, as resources have been scarce and heavily concentrated in a few areas of the country, amateur theatre has, however, played an important role in Portugal. Eduarda Dionísio notes that in the period from the Revolution to 1975, amateur theatre productions doubled and Carlos Porto makes the point that in many areas of the country, amateur theatre effectively substituted for a professional theatre.⁴⁹ At a Festival of Amateur Theatre in 1993, 51 theatre groups from Lisbon alone were involved, there were 42 shows presented and 750 actors and 750 spectators involved. The performances came mainly from secondary school theatre groups.

The Lisbon Players do not form part of this network. However they do fill a gap not catered for elsewhere, as they are the only theatre group in Lisbon that regularly performs in English. As a result, their productions of Shakespeare occupy a niche that is not filled by professional foreign-language productions or by visiting English companies. In the early years, the group had a strong expatriate feel of English performers playing to mainly English audiences, and this was also reflected in the

⁴⁹ Eduarda Dionísio, *Títulos, Acções, Obrigações: Sobre a Cultura em Portugal 1974-1994*, (Lisboa: Salamandra, 1993), p. 228 and Carlos Porto, *10 Anos de Teatro e Cinema em Portugal 1974-1984*, (Lisboa: Caminho, 1985), p. 129.

choice of repertoire.⁵⁰ Portuguese speakers of English were not allowed to perform central roles as it was thought that their Portuguese accents would detract from the ‘quality’ of the production. Yet the company’s performances have become more diverse over time, with performances like the first English language production of Fernando Pessoa’s *The Mariner* alongside productions of Shakespeare and Wilde. Their 2002 production of *Measure for Measure* reflected some of these transformations. It included Serbians, Norwegians, Brazilians and several Portuguese actors and technicians, although the main parts continued to be played by English-speaking actors. The synopsis of what can be a difficult text for those whose first language is not English was also translated into Portuguese for the programme. The language of the initial workshops and of rehearsals was English and the performance styles of the group tend to be based on English theatrical training. However, recent years have also seen a greater diversity in performance styles, which is best exemplified by the director of this production, Keith Harle. Harle had previously directed a surreal production of Jim Cartwright’s *Bed* and currently travels around Portugal with another member of the group, Keith Escher Davies, producing theatre in English for secondary schools.

The Lisbon Players might seem to work with a very homogenous audience, but it is in fact, also quite diverse. It includes native English speakers and a whole range of people for whom English is not their first language. Some have quite extensive knowledge of the theatrical canon, some know very little about it. This encourages quite a distinct set of performance styles which reflect the group’s intercultural positioning. Performance of *Measure for Measure*, for example, had to work on a variety of levels. It had to create new moments of interest for those familiar with the play but also make the

⁵⁰ Having said this, it is also true that during the period of censorship, the company could perform plays that Portuguese theatre companies could/would not perform. An example of this was their production of *Waiting for Godot*. The PIDE (secret police network) actually came to the play but allowed it to be performed because it was in an “idioma estrangeiro” (foreign language).

play's somewhat tortuous narrative clear to those who were not. Many of the scenes worked simultaneously on a verbal, physical, visual and aural level, which helped increase understanding, but also introduced the possibility of greater complexity in onstage representation.⁵¹

One of the director's concerns was that certain characters, particularly Mistress Overdone, were "underwritten" in the Shakespearean text. As a result, he imported two scenes from the slightly later play *Pericles* (1607-8) and reworked them in order to give speaking parts to two prostitutes (Cláudia Pereira as Doll Drophand and Vicki McMillan as Kate Keepdown) as well as to enlarge the role of Mistress Overdone (see rewritten scenes below). The incorporation of these scenes from *Pericles* indicates how the group's sense of its own role as a theatre company performing in English had been changing. Although there was extensive concentration on the language of the text and its phrasing onstage during rehearsals, it was not a reverential production of Shakespeare where 'the text' to be performed was assumed to be a stable *fait accompli*.

The first of these reworked scenes transformed Act I Scene II of the Shakespearean text. The verbal humour of Act I Scene II as it exists is almost incomprehensible for modern audiences. The references the gentlemen make are no longer accessible and even less so for those in the audience whose first language is not English. An option would be simply to cut the first part of the scene, (as the Comuna production did) but this removes something of the background against which the Duke

⁵¹ The mother of Cláudia Pereira, (Doll Drophand) who does not understand English, made the interesting comment that watching the production was like watching opera. In other words, even when the words were not understood, other elements of the production helped to convey meaning. Cláudia Pereira herself stated in interview that having both movement and spoken text in her role was particularly helpful. The movements meant that the prostitutes could put their arms around each others' waists or tease Lucio rather than just deliver their lines, while having text to speak helped get over some of the initial embarrassment of being onstage with little clothing and being asked to make quite sexual gestures and movements. Indeed, she felt that there was a certain freedom in playing a prostitute in that they were not expected to be modest or to be conscious of honour and status like the main characters. Personal interview with Cláudia Pereira, (6/3/2004).

and Angelo make their decisions. Reformulating the scene not only included lines for both Kate Keepdown and Doll Drophand, it also maintained an element of verbal as well as visual humour.⁵² The scene evoked the darker side of prostitution as the two prostitutes prepared Lucio for the entrance of a young virgin. The arrival of the young woman onstage, in a short, brightly-coloured dress, produced complex emotions as the obvious attractiveness of the young actress was counterbalanced by a rather uncomfortable sense of her youth. Yet the rewritten scene also suggested that it was the two prostitutes who were controlling Lucio here, and the verbal and physical repartee of this scene emphasised that the two prostitutes were by no means their clients' victims. Moreover, their discussion with Mistress Overdone of Claudio's fate and of the proclamation revealed some knowledge of state business.

Act I Scene II. A Street

LUCIO

If the duke with the other dukes come not to composition with the King of Hungary,
why then all the dukes fall upon the king.

DOLL DROPHAND

Heaven grant us its peace, but not the King of Hungary's!

KATE KEEPDOWN

Amen.

LUCIO

⁵² It should be said, however, that the problem of meaning of Shakespearean language was not resolved by the inclusion of these two scenes. Cláudia Pereira spoke of her confusion when confronted first with the text, as she did not understand what the character was saying, to whom and with what attitude. She also mentioned that the text was often difficult to speak on stage.

How now! A dozen of virginities?

DOLL DROPHAND

Now, the Gods do bless your honour.

KATE KEEPDOWN

I am glad to see your honour in good health.

LUCIO

You may say so; 'tis better for you that your resorters stand upon sound legs. How now, wholesome iniquity, have you that a man may deal withal, and defy the surgeon?

DOLL DROPHAND

We have one, sir, if she would – but there never came the like in Vienna.

LUCIO

If she'd do the deeds of darkness, thou wouldst say.

KATE KEEPDOWN

For flesh and blood, sir, white and red, you shall see a rose; and she were a rose indeed, if she had but –

LUCIO

What, prithee?

DOLL DROPHAND

O, sir, I can be modest.

Enter YOUNG WOMAN

KATE KEEPDOWN

Here comes that which grows to the stalk; never pluck'd yet, I can assure you.

DOLL DROPHAND

Is she not a fair creature?

LUCIO

Faith, she would serve after a long voyage at sea. Well, there's for you. Leave us.

Enter MISTRESS OVERDONE

DOLL DROPHAND

I think I have done myself wrong, have I not?

MISTRESS OVERDONE

Yes, thou hast, whether thou art tainted or free.

LUCIO

Behold, behold. Where Madam Mitigation comes! I have purchased as many diseases under her roof as come to;

YOUNG WOMAN

To what, I pray?

LUCIO

Judge.

KATE KEEPDOWN

To three thousand dolours a year.

DOLL DROPHAND

Ay, and more.

LUCIO

A French crown more.

KATE KEEPDOWN

Thou art always figuring diseases in me; but thou art full of error; I am sound.

LUCIO

Nay, not as one would say, healthy; but so sound as things that are hollow: thy bones are hollow; impiety has made a feast of thee. How now! which of your hips has the most profound sciatica?

MISTRESS OVERDONE

Well, well; there's one yonder arrested and carried to prison was worth five thousand of you all.

YOUNG WOMAN

Who's that, I pray thee?

MISTRESS OVERDONE

Marry, girl, that's Claudio, Signor Claudio.

DOLL DROPHAND

Claudio to prison? 'tis not so.

MISTRESS OVERDONE

Nay, but I know 'tis so: I saw him arrested, saw him carried away; and, which is more, within these three days his head to be chopped off.

LUCIO

But, after all this fooling, I would not have it so. Art thou sure of this?

MISTRESS OVERDONE

I am too sure of it: and it is for getting Madam Julietta with child.

LUCIO

Believe me, this may be: he promised to meet me two hours since, and he was ever precise in promise-keeping.

KATE KEEPDOWN

Besides, you know, it draws something near to the speech we had to such a purpose.

DOLL DROPHAND

But, most of all, agreeing with the proclamation.

LUCIO

Away ! Let's go learn the truth of it.

Exeunt LUCIO and WOMEN.

The rest of the scene continues as written.

The second scene, which became Act II Scene V, provided a narrative background for the later appearance of both Pompey and Mistress Overdone under arrest. However, it also had a more important strategic value in the play. The scene emphasised the commodification of women involved in the business of prostitution, as the bodies of women and their virginity in particular become the subject of financial transactions. In performance, Mistress Overdone circled the young woman proprietorially in the discussion of her "qualities". As the scene is set immediately after Isabella's encounter with Angelo and before the scene with her brother, it helps to make Isabella's decision to value her chastity over her brother's life more understandable. In essence, in a

context where virginity is being bought and sold as a commodity, Isabella refuses to give her chastity a price.

Act II Scene V

Enter POMPEY and MISTRESS OVERDONE indicated by LUCIO to TWO OFFICERS in disguise (who pay him) accompanied by YOUNG GIRL

LUCIO withdraws

POMPEY

Come your ways, my masters, you say she is a virgin?

FIRST OFFICER

O, sir, we doubt it not.

SECOND OFFICER

Master, I have gone through for this piece you see. If you like her, so; if not, I have lost my earnest.

MISTRESS OVERDONE

But, has she any qualities?

FIRST OFFICER

She has a good face, speaks well, and has excellent good clothes; there's no further necessity of qualities can make her refus'd.

MISTRESS OVERDONE

And, what's the price?

SECOND OFFICER

We cannot be bated one doit of a thousand pieces.

POMPEY

Well, follow me, my masters; you shall have your money presently.

MISTRESS OVERDONE

Then, take her in; instruct her what she has to do, that she may not be raw in her entertainment. Take you the marks of her hair, complexion, height, her age, with warrant of her virginity, and cry “He that will give most shall have her first.” Such a maidenhead were no cheap thing, if men were as they have been. Get this done as I command you.

OFFICERS reveal themselves arresting POMPEY and MISTRESS OVERDONE

FIRST OFFICER

Performance shall follow.

SECOND OFFICER

Performance shall follow.

Exeunt. ⁵³

The production also included several vibrant extra-textual episodes which involved prostitution, robbery and drug abuse. ⁵⁴ In a pre-scene before the play began, for instance, Mariana made her way through streets where she was continually subject to being attacked or propositioned. This created an accessible contemporary context for the appearance of the prostitutes and also created a link between the sexual exploitation of

⁵³ These scenes are printed courtesy of Keith Harle and the Lisbon Players.

⁵⁴ The production had a back wall covered in graffiti which was exposed for these scenes. The prostitutes, including Pompey, wore costumes of red and black to distinguish them from other characters. Musically, their scenes were signalled by Manu Chao’s *Promiscuity*, a lively anarchic ‘lament’ on the misfortune that accompanies too much sexual activity.

Isabella and Mariana by Angelo and the Duke and the sexual exploitation of life on the street.

The role of Mistress Overdone was played by an actress (Adrienne Thomas) with a fine comic gift. Her backcombed red hair, garish make-up and the fact that she tottered visibly on her high heels resisted commodification, for they parodied through excess the stage stereotype of the prostitute.⁵⁵ Her comic phrasing of not obviously comic lines like “What shall become of those in the city?” encouraged the audience to laugh with as well as at her. However, this empathy was complicated by the prominence given to her business in young virgins and her iron grip over her own prostitutes. The two prostitutes themselves were distinguished as characters both verbally and visually. Kate Keepdown was young, energetic, smart and eagerly came forward in the final act to claim Lucio as her ‘prize’. Doll Droghand was older, more obviously glamorous and more interested in the money to be made from clients like Lucio. Thus, although all three were portrayed as comic characters and retained elements of the theatrical stereotype of prostitutes, these stereotypes were parodied through excess (Mistress Overdone) or inverted through a sense that the prostitutes were taking advantage of the clients (Kate Keepdown and Doll Droghand). Nevertheless, these representations were not romanticised because the audience was kept aware that, even as women, they were also deeply involved in the business of sexual exploitation. This knowledge was embodied in the figure of the nameless young woman being bought and sold.

The final act of the play reinforced the intersection between the world of the prostitutes and that of the main characters. Act Five is something of a nightmare on stage. There are long speeches involving all of the major characters and the action is often repetitive. To deal with this, the director decided to have all the actors onstage

⁵⁵ The actresses playing Mistress Overdone and Kate Keepdown came perhaps closest to the director’s original desire for a visual image for the production “where Breughel meets the Cure”.

during the final act. The prostitutes and Mistress Overdone became onlookers at the Duke's return from behind a barrier constructed by police officers (see photograph no. 11 at the end of this chapter). This suggested that there was no place in Vienna from which they were absent and reminded the audience that the Vienna the Duke was attempting to reform contained not only Angelo and Lucio, but also Pompey, Mistress Overdone, Doll Droghand and Kate Keepdown. Their presence in this scene was highlighted throughout the act by interspersed sounds of amazement, bewilderment and protest as they listened to the narration of events. Although they were kept physically separate from the Duke and other main characters and they had no lines to speak, they were seen, therefore, to be listening to and commenting on affairs of state through parodic jeers or even signs of complete disinterest. Whereas the RSC production used the assembled citizens of Stratford to illustrate the sexual politics of this act, the Lisbon Players production worked to discredit the narrative propounded by the state through the continuing physical and verbal presence of those whom the state was claiming to have removed and silenced by this stage. For their part, the prostitutes illustrated how not having lines does not reduce a character to voicelessness. Their costumes made them stand out from the other characters, which meant the attention of the audience was often drawn to them. They absorbed the state's narrative of containment and the restoration of sexual order and deformed it through parody, laughter and signs of protest. Although this, like several other decisions involving the prostitutes, was primarily a decision of theatrical practicality, it thus encouraged a representation of the prostitutes which was more threatening and disruptive than most productions of the play.

Conclusion

What is at stake, it seems to me, in the metaphorical connection between theatre and prostitution is the thorny question of theatrical pleasure. In the early modern period, anti-theatricalists argued that the visual splendour of the actors' costumes would deceive the audience into believing a boy was a woman or a poor man a king and that this would encourage political and sexual chaos. In its current formulation, as Jonathan Dollimore and Kate Chedgzoy have pointed out, the visual pleasure and humour which characterise contemporary representations of prostitution are often built upon (hetero)sexist stereotypes. This encourages a deep suspicion of theatrical pleasure as somehow akin to a debased form of sexual pleasure.

Undoubtedly, the sexual politics of most representations of *Mistress Overdone* and her prostitutes in the theatre do not hold up well to close scrutiny. Giving actresses walk-on roles as prostitutes is undermined by making them wear short skirts and revealing tops and giving them very little to do. An audience tends to laugh with Pompey and the gentlemen as they discuss their diseases, but laugh at the rather pathetic attempts of *Mistress Overdone* to avoid arrest and imprisonment. Yet does this mean discarding such important theatrical resources as audience laughter and visual pleasure as irretrievably reactionary? Will all *Mistress Overdone*s have to be dressed, like Cristina Cavalinhos, in an itchy costume made out of an old curtain so that they avoid making themselves objects of desire? Do we want to lose *Mistress Overdone*'s particular edgy, self-deprecating humour that so characterises women who live life on the margins? Surely it is not impossible to appropriate theatrical pleasure for radical ends. Indeed, there is an honourable queer theatrical tradition stretching from Genet's *Le Balcon* to Mark Ravenhill's *Mother Clapp's Molly House* which manages to

combine a focus on the oppressions and transgressions of prostitution, both heterosexual and homosexual, with pleasure in the texture and colours of materials, the temporary freedom offered by sexual role-playing, and the wit of the prostitutes themselves.

All three productions analysed here provide indications of how theatre speaks through its representations of prostitution. Cavalinhos's careful, committed representation of an ageing prostitute who is not so very different from other wives and mothers illustrates Comuna's concern with the creation of clearly-delineated characters who will be instantly recognisable to a contemporary audience. Her marginal status in the production echoed Comuna's own sense that radical work demands a certain distance from power. Caroline Blakiston's distraught Mistress Overdone paralysed on the floor might in itself be an apt metaphor for the diseased state of subsidised theatre in England after many years of disinvestment by Conservative governments. The decontextualised, wordless prostitutes similarly illustrated the lack of an effective response to this in an atmosphere in which the RSC sought to play safe and ensure audiences. Finally, forced to make good use of the visual, the physical and the aural to ensure audience understanding, the Lisbon Players used a whole arsenal of theatrical techniques that reinforced connections between representations of prostitution and the giving of theatrical pleasure. Yet such moments were never divorced from a feeling of discomfort that this pleasure went hand-in-hand with the buying and selling of women for profit and that this commerce in women's bodies was by no means confined to the prostitutes.

In terms of the relationship between written text and performance text, it is interesting that all three productions followed the lead of the text and constructed prostitution as an *identity* rather than just a profession or a series of sexual acts. This identity ranged from Cristina Cavalinhos' 'woman of the people', to the pampered,

foreign *Mistress Overdone* of Caroline Blakiston to the loud, garish bully of Adrienne Thomas. All three performances, however, contained elements which worked to destabilise notions of identity, whether through the overstepping of the traditional dichotomy between wife/mother and prostitute in *Cavalinhos*, the very visible effects of disease in *Blakiston* or the parodic excess of Adrienne Thomas' representation. Such destabilising moments were prompted by the written text and a wider social text in the case of *Cavalinhos*, by a literalisation of the text in performance in the case of *Blakiston* and a performance text backed up by a re(written) text in the case of *Thomas*. These various reconfigurations of the relationship between written text and performance text reflected the particular priorities of the theatres producing them. However, none of them used these reconfigurations to further destabilise notions of prostitution as an identity. Perhaps, therefore, what can be concluded from this is that theatre continues to have an investment in the metaphorical connection between prostitution and performance. The reluctance to deconstruct notions of prostitution as an identity would thus reflect something of theatre's own unwillingness to put its mechanisms for the creation of illusion fully on show. Nevertheless, only when theatre deconstructs its representations of prostitution through a deconstruction of its theatrical tools, will it be able to contribute more fully to Luce Irigaray's wider project for metaphor that it "give back" what it owes to the feminine.

9. Mistress Overdone (Cristina Cavalinhos), standing next to Pompey (João Mota), learns of Claudio's (Pedro Saavedra) arrest in Teatro Comuna's *Medida por Medida*. Courtesy of Teatro Comuna.

10. Mistress Overdone (Caroline Blakiston) speculates on the future with her prostitutes in the background during the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) *Measure for Measure*. Copyright Ivan Kogel. Courtesy of the RSC Archives.

11. Kate Keepdown (Victoria MacMillan), Doll Drophand (Claudia Pereira) and Mistress Overdone (Adrienne Thomas) look on at events in Act V of the Lisbon Players' *Measure for Measure*. Copyright Ana Catarina Mendes. Courtesy of the Lisbon Players.

