

Blocking Out Emotions
Act IV, Scene II
Melissa Mott

Provost enters stage right, pulling Pompey by the chain connected to his shackles so that they can discuss the beheading of Claudio and Barnardine. Provost stops and stands with his arms crossed as he asks Pompey if he can cut off a man's head, and Pompey is surprised but replies, "If the man be a bachelor, sir, I can." Then, he hesitates and looks down at his feet while he says, "But if he be a married man, he's his wife's head, and I can never cut off a woman's head" (Shakespeare 55). Provost grows angry and yells back to give him a direct yes or no answer immediately. At this, Pompey's head shoots back up, looking at Provost, and takes a step back from him. Provost looks directly into Pompey's eyes and tells him sternly that if he helps in the beheading of Claudio and Bernardine, he will be released and not have to serve his sentence. "If not," he voices and then takes a dramatic pause, "you shall have your full time of imprisonment, and your deliverance with an unpitied whipping, for you have been a notorious bawd" (Shakespeare 55). Provost gives Pompey a little smirk, knowing full well that he will choose to cut off the other prisoners' heads instead of being imprisoned himself in addition to receiving even more punishments than before. Pompey looks back down at his shackled ankles and says so gloomily, "Sir, I have been an unlawful bawd time out of mind; but I will be content to be a lawful hangman." He looks back up with such sad eyes and says to Provost in a quiet voice, "I would be glad to receive some instruction from my fellow partner" (Shakespeare 55). Provost shouts out excitedly, "What ho! Abhorson? Where's Abhorson, there?" (Shakespeare 55).

Abhorson enters stage left. Provost states pretty matter-of-factly that Pompey is going to help with the execution the following day. He tells him that if he thinks Pompey will do well as an assistant executioner, to let him be his partner for the year. "If not, use him for the present, and dismiss him," Provost says, as if it's no big deal. "He cannot plead his estimation with you; he hath been a bawd," he says in a ridiculing manner while simultaneously looking at Pompey out of the corner of his eye and with a smirk on his face (Shakespeare 55). Abhorson is appalled that Provost brought such a man to come take

part in hangings when that man himself should have such a punishment. Provost walks back stage right, standing tall and proud. Pompey immediately tries to find a way out of executing Claudius and Bernardine. He pleads to Abhorson, “Pray, sir, by your good favour—” Abhorson grimaces. Pompey sees this and says, “for surely, sir, a good favour you have, but that you have a hanging look, —do you call, sir, your occupation a mystery?” (Shakespeare 55). Abhorson is beginning to get irritated and firmly states, “Sir, it is a mystery” (Shakespeare 55). Pompey asks for proof of this and Abhorson increasingly grows more and more aggravated with every question Pompey asks about his occupation as an executioner. The conversation stops when Provost comes back into the room from stage right.

Provost parades into a room in the prison from stage right, side by side with Pompey in his shackles from the hallway to discuss the beheading of Claudio and Barnardine. Provost pulls up two chairs, faces them towards one another, and they sit. Provost asks Pompey if he can cut off a man’s head, and Pompey brags, “If the man be a bachelor, sir, I can.” However, he grows wide-eyed while he says, “But if he be a married man, he’s his wife’s head, and I can never cut off a woman’s head” (Shakespeare 55). Provost grows angry at his hint of doubt and yells back to give him a direct yes or no answer immediately. Provost stands up and proclaims, “Tomorrow morning are to die Claudio and Barnardine,” as if he’s announcing some kind of game. Provost decides to make a deal with Pompey and says that if he helps in the beheading of Claudio and Bernardine, he will be released and not has to serve his original sentence. “If not, you shall have your full time of imprisonment, and your deliverance with an unpitied whipping, for you have been a notorious bawd,” Provost chuckles (Shakespeare 55). Pompey looks directly in Provost’s eyes and proudly says, “Sir, I have been an unlawful bawd time out of mind; but I will be content to be a lawful hangman.” He stands up, also, and takes one step closer towards Provost and feels honored as he says, “I would be glad to receive some instruction from my fellow partner” (Shakespeare 55). Provost shouts out excitedly, “What ho! Abhorson? Where’s Abhorson, there?” (Shakespeare 55).

Abhorson enters from stage left with Provost and Pompey. Provost announces that Pompey is going to help with the execution the following day. He tells him that if he thinks Pompey will do well as an assistant executioner, to let him be his partner for the year. "If not, use him for the present, and dismiss him," Provost says, as if it's no big deal. "He cannot plead his estimation with you; he hath been a bawd," he says to Abhorson right before he lets out a hearty laugh (Shakespeare 55). Abhorson is worried that Provost brought such a man to come take part in hangings when that man himself should have such a punishment. Provost skips back off stage right to let Abhorson discuss this with Pompey. There are a few moments of silence before Pompey begins pestering Abhorson's morals about his job. He wonders to Abhorson, "Pray, sir, by your good favour—" Abhorson's head lowers. Pompey sees this and says, "for surely, sir, a good favour you have, but that you have a hanging look, —do you call, sir, your occupation a mystery?" (Shakespeare 55). Abhorson is beginning to get defensive and states, "Sir, it is a mystery" (Shakespeare 55). Pompey asks for proof of this and Abhorson increasingly grows more and more upset with every question Pompey asks about his occupation as an executioner. The conversation comes to an immediate halt when Provost comes back into the room from stage right. Abhorson lets out a big sigh of relief.

In the first blocking of the scene, it is shown right away that Provost is treating Pompey as just another prisoner by the way that he is pulling him by the chains. He is clearly showing his dominance over Pompey and the ability he has to easily change the rest of his life. He expresses this by simply smirking when offering Pompey the deal he knows Pompey doesn't want, but he'll take. He also walks back out standing tall and proud, as if he's happy about the fact that he's making Pompey do something he's not comfortable with. Pompey is visibly upset the entire time and it's easy to see his feeling of inferiority to Provost when he steps back and looks down while speaking with him. Abhorson also seems to like his job and gets irritated when Pompey keeps asking him about the trade of execution. In the second blocking of the scene, when Provost parades in with Pompey side by side with him, it shows how easy-going he is about Pompey as a prisoner and that he's excited about what's going to happen next.

Every time he speaks, he makes it sound like the life of others is merely a game to him and Pompey is just another game piece. Pompey talks proudly about being able to cut off a man's head and the feeling of Provost being superior to him is not here in this scene because Pompey keeps looking directly into his eyes and even takes a step closer to him. Abhorson also seems to not enjoy his job and dislikes talking about the subject. This shows when he lets out a big sigh of relief on Provost walks back in so he no longer has to talk about it anymore. It is very easy to see the distinct differences in the character traits in both scenes. In the first, the scene is much more tense and scary while in the second, it becomes almost a joke to Provost.

Works Cited

Shakespeare, William. *Measure for Measure*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1999. Print.