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THE DUKE'S HOSPITABLE RETURN IN *MEASURE FOR MEASURE*

Shakespeare's Measure for Measure (1604) reveals the psycho-geographic importance of the city gates and their importance in the practice of hospitality. The Duke, his body disguised as a friar, demands his substitute Angelo to 'meet him at the gates and redeliver our authorities there' (IV. iv. 4-5).¹ When next the Duke appears at the beginning of Act Five, he is at 'A public place near the city gate [...] in his own habit' (V. i. 0 SD). That is, his true body is revealed and his corporal significance transformed by coming into the city: he is returned as (sovereign) host by virtue of crossing the city threshold *dressed as himself*, instigating his interpellation as 'royal grace' (V. i. 3) by Angelo and Escalus. The Duke's deliberate 'ceremonial entry' at the gates, in Felicity Heal's terms, had social precedent, and 'these [ceremonial] gestures were as carefully contrived, and as sensitive to status, as any of those' acts taking place in 'the great household'.² The city is thought of as an enlarged *oikos* (οἶκος, household), where the laws (*nomoi*, νόμοι) of hospitality are readily applicable: the laws of the household (*oikos nomos*, economy) take hold in the city.

Of course, the return of Duke Vincentio to Vienna in Measure scuppers the normal scheme of hospitality: a guest/stranger/foreigner welcomed by the host into the city-as-household. Having temporarily suspended his sovereign hold over the city in the play's opening scene, he is not *de facto* host in the city until his return in the figure of a Duke in Act Five. He then returns *as* a host, and receives his 'lent' (I. i. 19) powers back from Angelo as a

¹ References are to the Arden Second Series, revised edn, ed. J. W. Lever (London: 1965).

² Felicity Heal, Hospitality in Early Modern England (Oxford, 1990), 344.

matter of course. When, however, the Duke is standing at the city gate in Act Five as a friar, he is even accosted by the judicious Escalus (V. i. 286-7). By the time the Duke is finally revealed as himself when his hood is removed by Lucio, the audience can begin to understand why the Duke chose the gates as a meeting point in the first place (a request that confused Angelo at IV. iv. 4-5), for they represent a space of conversion and rehabilitation: a stranger friar is converted to a sovereign Duke; a hosting lord (Angelo) is transformed into a penitent husband; and a guilty Claudio is transformed into an innocent lover.³ ‘Through commensality’, the abiding practice of hospitality, ‘the sharp boundaries between social groups could temporarily be abolished, a process that was even more necessary in the enclosed environment of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century town than elsewhere.’⁴ There is an element of carnival made available by the practice of hospitality, especially in the city, notably visible in Measure.

But, moreover, just as with *stasis* – the civil war in which warring factions contest power in ancient cities – in moments and places of hospitality host can become guest, guest become host, lords prisoners and prisoners free. This overlap lends credence to Louise Halper’s contentious argument that Measure condones anti-monarchic narratives in which law predominates and ascends above the power of the sovereign, well in advance of the English Civil War of the mid-seventeenth century.⁵ This interrelation between *stasis* and hospitality merits further exploration in Shakespeare.

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³ In Acts of Religion Derrida stresses that ‘substitution [...] is the first movement of absolute hospitality’, and elaborates on the importance of substitution in hospitality – an idea that is applicable both to the moment of revelation in *Measure*, and also in the bed-trick in Act Four, when the Duke orders the substitution of Mariana for Isabella, whom Angelo awaits. Jacques Derrida, Acts of Religion (New York, NY: 2002), 376.

⁴ Heal, 304-5.

⁵ Louise Halper, ‘Measure for Measure: Law, Prerogative, Subversion’, Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature, xiii, 2001.