

# Face-to-Face in Shakespearean Drama

---

Ethics, Performance, Philosophy

Edited by Matthew James Smith and  
Julia Reinhard Lupton

EDINBURGH  
University Press

## The Face of Judgement in *Measure for Measure*

Kevin Curran

As Bruce Smith points out in his lead essay to this volume, ‘face’ is both a noun and a verb – a thing and an action. Accordingly, the word denotes two different kinds of physicality. First, it names an object, one that can be seen, touched, listened to, even tasted (think of kissing). Second, it describes a way of orienting oneself in space and in relation to other objects (face me, face the wall, face forward, face each other). This verbal use of the word face – in which its noun-form, its thing-quality, is also always active – frequently carries some kind of ethical freight, a sense of being called to account, of taking responsibility or of acknowledging what has yet to be acknowledged. We see this most vividly in common figurative uses of the word, such as ‘face the facts’ or ‘face the music’. In these phrases, face and facing have something to do with judgement and the kind of moral, social and practical calculus we all practise everyday, and which hopefully leads to the good, the right or at least the expedient outweighing the bad, the wrong or the undesirable.

This connection between facing and judging is central to this essay. Specifically, I am interested in how the spatial, object-oriented grammar of the face invites us to think of judgement less as an individual decision or rational cognitive procedure than as a physical, dimensional event that involves orientating oneself in space and time. I will be referring to this as the ‘physics of judgment’ and my case study will be Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure*, in particular Act V, scene i, in which two faces – Mariana’s and Duke Vincento’s – are crucial to the play’s final scene of condemnation and forgiveness. The theatre provides an especially compelling locale for thinking about the physics of judgement. Indeed, judgement shares with theatre its most basic raw materials: people and things arranged in space and time.

The face is crucial to this discussion because in *Measure for Measure* it stands at the crossroads of theatre and judgement, indexing their shared fields of location and duration and their common orientation toward the future.

By following this line of inquiry, we stand to recover a version of judgement that has been largely missing from the intellectual discourse of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, one that is positive, future-oriented and world-making. As Vivasvan Soni has shown, both Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu viewed judgement as one of our most vexed inheritances from the Enlightenment – on one hand, an expression of reason and autonomy; on the other, a normative and normalising force used to police behaviour and identity.<sup>1</sup> This account has had remarkable staying power. Even in everyday life we tend to be uncomfortable with the idea of judgement, to view it, explicitly or implicitly, as *judgemental*. Right-or-wrong/this-or-that interpretations are unsophisticated at best, boorish or unfair at worst. Humanities classrooms are primary sites for such thinking. Since the appearance of influential New Critical work like William Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, and certainly since the rise of deconstruction, a commitment to multiplicity and open-endedness has prevailed in higher education.<sup>2</sup> This is hardly a problem in and of itself, but there are more troubling versions of this habit of thought. For example, we have all seen in recent years how clear instances of police brutality are sometimes met with admonitions to resist judgement and avoid jumping to conclusions as there are always two sides to every story. Discomfort with judgement does not belong solely to either the political left or the political right. Hannah Arendt was famously chastised by both liberals and conservatives when she publicly condemned a range of groups and individuals for the roles they played in the Holocaust. She recalls in a subsequent essay, 'I was told that judging itself is wrong; no one can judge who had not been there.'<sup>3</sup>

It may seem strange to claim that a play whose final scene of judgement is known for courting darkness, irrationality and ambiguity offers us a chance to recover a positive version of judgement. Modern critics have been uneasy about several aspects of the denouement, including the arbitrary betrothal of Isabella and the Duke and the near executions of Angelo and Lucio.<sup>4</sup> But in arguing that the close of *Measure for Measure* models a positive version of judgement I am not suggesting that the denouement itself is uniformly positive or optimistic. More precisely, I wish to suggest that the play of faces in Act V, scene i of *Measure for Measure* usefully exposes one aspect

of Renaissance theatre's unique and largely overlooked place in the history and theory of judgement. It does so by generating a choreography of adjudication grounded in the physical and ethical dynamics of mutual recognition and the corresponding possibility of new social formations.

### Mariana's face and the physics of judgement

I will begin by mapping out how the physics of judgement works in Act V, scene i. The scene brings together two deception plots. In both cases, the deception is justified by the greater good for which it is committed. The first of these involves Duke Vincento who throughout the play dresses as a friar to observe the behaviour of his subjects undetected. The other involves Mariana, a woman who was betrothed to, then abandoned by, Angelo, the hypocritically puritanical deputy filling in for the Duke. Mariana, Isabella and the Duke trick Angelo into consummating his marriage to Mariana by sending her to a garden-house where Angelo thinks he is having a tryst with Isabella. The collision of these two plots in the final scene of the play leads to a series of revelations in which the face plays an essential role.

The first of these revelations occurs when, in the wake of Isabella's accusations of sexual blackmail, Mariana is led onstage, supposedly to absolve Angelo of Isabella's charges. Here is the initial part of the scene:

DUKE: Give us some seats.  
*[Seats are brought in]*  
Come, cousin Angelo,  
In this I'll be impartial; be you judge  
Of your own cause.  
*[The Duke and Angelo sit]*  
*Enter [Friar Peter with] Mariana [veiled]*  
Is this the witness, friar?  
First let her show her face, and after speak.  
MARIANA: Pardon, my lord, I will not show my face  
Until my husband bid me.

(V, i, 164–9)<sup>5</sup>

This is clearly a scene of arbitration. A charge has been made and a witness is being brought in to testify. The Duke even has some seats

set up to make the exchange feel more like a trial with judge and jury presiding. We should also note that Mariana's face is at the centre of this judgement-event. The Duke's command, 'First let her show her face, and after speak', seems to assume that the forensic and moral evaluation integral to judgement is only possible under certain baseline conditions of collective ethical orientation: the mutual acknowledgement and recognition intrinsic to the face-to-face encounter. But Mariana refuses: 'I will not show my face / Until my husband bid me'. A little further on, Angelo echoes the Duke's request at which point Mariana finally acquiesces:

ANGELO: This is a strange abuse. Let's see thy face.

MARIANA: My husband bids me; now I will unmask.

*[She shows her face]*

This is that face, thou cruel Angelo,

Which once thou swor'st was worth the looking on . . .

(V, i, 200–3)

There are two aspects of this exchange that are important for understanding the physics of judgement. To begin with, the component parts of this judgement-event consist predominantly of actions and reactions centred on Mariana's veiled face. This stage business is marked verbally throughout: 'give', 'come', 'show', 'not show', 'let's see', 'shows'. That is to say, Mariana's face indexes the way the judgement-event unfolds in space. In addition – and this is the second aspect – Mariana's face indexes the way the judgement-event unfolds through time. All terms pertaining to temporal positioning – what linguists call 'time deixis' – are used in reference to Mariana's face: 'first', 'after', 'until', 'now'.<sup>6</sup> Here is the relevant passage once again, this time with time deixis marked in bold and references to Mariana's face underlined:

Is this the witness, friar?

**First** let her show her face, and **after** speak.

MARIANA: Pardon, my lord, I will not show my face

**Until** my husband bid me.

(V, i, 166–9)

. . .

ANGELO: This is a strange abuse. Let's see thy face.

MARIANA: My husband bids me; **now** I will unmask.

*[She shows her face]*

(V, i, 200–1)

Marking the exchange in this way highlights the peculiar theatrical role played by the face in this scene. Though obviously part of the actor's and character's body, the face also functions almost like a prop. It is instrumentalised in a way that exceeds the demands of character in order to advance elements of plot and theme. To this extent, the face muddles some of the standard categories of theatrical semiotics established by scholars such as Patrick Pavis, Erika Fischer-Lichte and Keir Elam. Consider some basic examples of these categories: linguistic signs, paralinguistic signs, kinesic signs and proxemic signs. Linguistic signs function both rhetorically and acoustically. They comprise both the meanings of individual words spoken on stage and the tone and pace of delivery. Paralinguistic signs, meanwhile, include such things as props, music, scenery and lighting. Kinesic signs are self-contained bodily movements such as gestures. Proxemic signs, on the other hand, are movements of bodies through the space of the stage.<sup>7</sup>

Mariana's face does not fit in a straightforward way into any of these categories. Instead it performs two different kinds of signification simultaneously – kinesic and proxemic – while also challenging received wisdom about how these signifying units are supposed to work. Mariana's face is a kinesic sign in the way that all faces always are on stage, but the fact that it remains veiled for most of the exchange seriously undercuts its ability to do what kinesic signs are supposed to do: express or gesture. Mariana's face is a proxemic sign to the extent that it occasions the scene's primary actions and reactions. Indeed, it is at the centre of the scene's orbit of movement. And yet it does very little in the way of significant movement through space itself. A full semiotic reckoning of Mariana's face would also require the addition of a new sign-category, the 'chronemic', which would allow us to isolate the face's time-indexical function in the scene. As a chronemic sign, Mariana's face is consistently pointing to the temporal context in which it appears. It creates a scene of judgement which does not manifest itself in a flat present of decision, but rather unfolds sequentially through a linear process of action and response: 'First let her show her face, and **after** speak'; 'I will not show my face / **Until** my husband bid me'; '**Now** I will unmask'.

The face in *Measure for Measure* bursts the seams of our received systems of theatrical interpretation. It demands a more flexible and expansive set of critical concepts. As the material anchor in the final scene's culminating moments of punishment and forgiveness, it offers a vantage point from which we can observe the physics of

judgement at work, the way in which adjudication unfolds through the space and time of a mimetic environment comprised of bodies, voices and objects. From this perspective, judgement takes the form of a collaborative event. It has less to do with individual evaluation than with the collective application of knowledge toward a specific end. And as with all forms of applied knowledge – geometry, mechanics, even rhetoric – the aim of judgement is to *make* something: in this case, a livable future, a shared sense of truth and new conditions of social possibility in Vienna. We see the beginning of this process unfolding gradually during the scene of Mariana’s unveiling: collective appraisal of the situation evolves as false knowledge and misperception gives way to true knowledge. The revelation of Mariana’s face is the hinge on which the former swings toward the latter. Here is the scene with references to knowledge – first false, then true – set in bold:

MARIANA: Why just, my lord, and that is Angelo,  
 Who thinks he **knows** that he ne’er **knew** my body,  
 But **knows**, he thinks, that he **knows** Isabel’s.

ANGELO: This is a strange abuse. Let’s see thy face.

MARIANA: My husband bids me; now I will unmask.

*[She shows her face]*

This is that face, thou cruel Angelo,  
 Which once thou swor’st was worth the looking on;

...

DUKE: **Know** you this woman?

...

ANGELO: My lord, I must confess I **know** this woman,  
 (V, i, 197–203, 208, 212)

This moment – the first phase of Act V, scene i’s extended judgement-event – marks the beginning of a shared coming-into-knowledge that I will continue to trace in the next section of this essay. Mariana’s unveiling and the acknowledgement it triggers – ‘I know this woman’ – establishes a new truth about the relations among the characters on stage that will lead eventually to fundamental changes in the social fabric of Shakespeare’s Vienna. We may tend to think of judgement as a singular decision or decree, something that ends or resolves things. But the dynamics of the face in *Measure for Measure* shows us something different: a version of judgement that is collective and creative, and which has as much to do with the future as with the past.

## Practical judgement: facing, managing, making

So far I have made two connected claims. The first is that in *Measure for Measure* the face is at the centre of something we might call the physics of judgement. The second is that by looking closely at how this process works on stage we can recover a version of judgement that is social and world-making. In this section, I will give more attention to the second claim. I will show, in particular, how theatrical judgement functions as a form of collective knowledge-management and conclude with some thoughts on the face as the source of judgement's future-oriented trajectory.

On the Renaissance stage, judgement forms communities of knowledge. It does so by realigning the varying levels of information possessed by characters and play-goers around a single, shared Truth. The friar is actually the Duke; there are two young men named Antipholus in town, not just one; this person who you thought was a boy is actually a young woman: these are all things that are disclosed through scenes of judgement. They constitute a specific version of the theatrical *anagnorisis* that Matthew Smith discusses in his contribution to this volume. These particular examples also indicate that creating, maintaining and finally redressing disparities in knowledge is especially important in comedy. At a basic mechanical level, humour is generated in stage comedy through the uneven evolution in the way sensory information is distributed among characters and play-goers. What makes a play like *The Comedy of Errors* funny is the disconnect between what audience members see (Antipholus of Syracuse) and what characters on stage see (Antipholus of Ephesus). The relationship between sense perception and knowledge is different for each of the two groups that together constitute theatrical experience. The same can be said for Act III, scene ii of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in which Robin Goodfellow hides while imitating the voices of Lysander and Demetrius. Humour, again, is generated by a simple sensory disconnect: the play-goers can hear and see everything; Demetrius and Lysander can hear but not see. Typically, this disconnect is remedied in the play's denouement. The end of *The Comedy of Errors* feels like a resolution because characters and spectators at last see and hear the same thing (*this* is Antipholus of Syracuse, *that* is Antipholus of Ephesus). Likewise at the end of *Twelfth Night* when Duke Orsino slowly comes to terms with the truth about 'Cesario', or the final act of *All's Well that Ends Well* where vision and hearing are once again revelatory. Shakespearean comedy depends for its effects on this carefully managed economy of perception and knowledge.<sup>8</sup>



In *Measure for Measure*, perception and knowledge are framed by the dynamics of judgement. That is, judgement is both the impetus for and the result of the facial revelations that finally distribute knowledge evenly among each character on stage and the play-goers in the audience. The faces of Act V, scene i – the first unveiled, the second unhooded – remind us that judgement is a fundamentally sensory and communal event: it begins with showing or revealing and ends with seeing, *really* seeing, together. We will recall that in the final scene of *Measure for Measure*, the Duke says of the veiled Mariana, ‘First let her show her face’. Angelo agrees: ‘Let’s see thy face’. When Mariana concedes she says bitingly, ‘This is that face, thou cruel Angelo, / Which once thou swor’st was worth the looking on.’ First perception, then judgement, and somewhere in between a coming-into-knowledge for all present and the establishment of a new truth. Something similar happens when Lucio demands of the Duke (who he thinks is a friar), ‘Show your knave’s visage . . . Show your sheep-biting face’ (V, i, 337–8). When he ‘*pulls off the Friar’s hood, and discovers the Duke*’, the latter says, ‘Thou art the first knave that e’er made’st a duke’ (V, i, 340). In a brief moment that cannot quite be parsed into sequential units, judgement descends on Lucio, a shared truth is established and a new community of knowledge is formed.

In our own time, in everyday contexts, to judge is to make a decision in response to information. But what we tend to miss is the way judgement also involves managing and distributing that information. This dimension of judgement would have been familiar to many early moderns whose understanding of the concept derived primarily from the Aristotelian rhetorical tradition that was central to humanist education. In oratory, especially in legal contexts, judgement was defined as the capacity to put information in the right order. Thomas Blundeville, for example, explains in *The Art of Logicke* (1599) that once ‘invention finds matter’, judgement ‘frameth, disposeth, and reduceth the same into due forme of argument’.<sup>9</sup> There are a variety of subspecies of judgement within the rhetorical tradition, some of which, like *modestia*, show us how judgement’s core functions of framing and disposing, managing and curating, were not restricted to oratorical or compositional contexts, but were also essential to an orderly and ethical life-practice. In Cicero’s *De Officiis*, for example – which was along with Aristotle’s *Nichomachean Ethics* the most influential study of virtue in the Renaissance – *modestia* is described as ‘the essence of orderliness and of right-placing’. Cicero also invokes the Stoics’ definition

of *modestia* as the “science of disposing aright everything that is done or said” . . . “the arrangement of things in their suitable and appropriate places”.<sup>10</sup> The term Cicero uses for ‘right-placing’ and “disposing aright” is *collocation* (*collocationis* and *collocandarum*, respectively, in Latin). For Cicero, collocation is a practice at once technical and ethical, both correct *and* good. It is essential to his notion of *modestia* as ‘the science of doing the right thing at the right time’. ‘Such orderliness of conduction’, he continues, ‘is, therefore, to be observed, that everything in the conduct of our life shall balance and harmonize.’<sup>11</sup> In *Measure for Measure*, the face is at the centre of a process of collocation, of setting things right. The unveiling of Mariana and the unhooding of the Duke provide object lessons in accountability and occasion the redistribution of knowledge that restores order to Vienna. This also reminds us how, in a general sense, comic *dénouements* are always moments of embodied collocation. They represent one of several ways in which the rhetorical tradition of judgement became part of the genome of theatrical form.

This much we know, then: the face of judgement in *Measure for Measure* is part of a dynamic, dimensional process of knowledge-making and knowledge-management. This process involves both actors and audience and, as such, is fundamentally collective and collaborative. I want to conclude this section by reflecting on how under these conditions judgement is also creative and future-oriented. Toward this end, I return to the exchange between Lucio and the Duke:

LUCIO: . . . you must be hooded, must you? Show your knave’s visage, with a pox to you! Show your sheep-biting face, and be hanged an hour! Will’t not off?

*Lucio pulls off the Friar’s hood, and discovers the Duke . . .*

DUKE: Thou art the first knave that e’er mad’st a duke.

(V, i, 337–40)

The revelation of the Duke immediately changes the epistemological, legal and social conditions of the play-world: Mariana and Isabella are confirmed as truthful while Angelo is confirmed as false; Angelo and Lucio are promptly assigned punishments; and marriages are arranged for Angelo and Mariana, Lucio and Kate Keepdown and the Duke himself and Isabella. For the characters assembled on stage, then, the judgement occasioned by the Duke’s

face completely remakes the world they had known. It leads to a new truth, a new source of moral authority and a new set of social relations. Judgement takes the raw materials of one world – people, ideas, connections and obligations – and reassembles them to form another. Through an extended judgement-event that begins with showing ('let her show her face'; '*she shows her face*'; 'show your knave's visage'; 'show your sheep-biting face': '*He . . . discovers the Duke*') and ends with adjudication, condemnation and forgiveness, the lines of inclusion and exclusion are redrawn to form a version of community that did not exist when the play opened. Bastards are accommodated (the child of Lucio and Kate Keep-down), the forsaken are acknowledged (Mariana), the guilty are forgiven (Angelo), the condemned are welcomed back (Claudio) and – more dubiously – the self-exiled are reintegrated (Isabella). This is the sense in which judgement is creative and future-oriented in *Measure for Measure*. Adjudication may, in one sense, be concerned with assessing the past (past actions, past claims), but in so far as it triggers changes in behaviour, social arrangements and (in a juridical setting) legal precedent, judgement is also always directed toward the future; it is always about *making*.

The capacity of judgement to make and create, thrown into sharp relief in *Measure for Measure* by the dynamics of the face, again finds its source in the rhetorical tradition. The Blundeville quotation cited above illustrates the well-established conceptual link between judgement and invention: while 'invention finds matter', judgement 'frameth, disposeth, and reduceth the same into due forme of argument'. This formulation derives from Roman rhetorical theory which has deeper roots in Aristotle. Texts like Cicero's *De inventione*, the anonymous *Rhetorica ad Herennium* and Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* describe invention as the skill of deciding which line of reasoning is most likely to strike a particular audience as especially compelling. Judgement's role is to break that line of reasoning down into component parts and then arrange them in a sequence calculated to achieve maximum persuasiveness. Judgement, in other words, turns ideas into arguments by lending them organisational form. Along with invention, it was an essential component of what Aristotle termed the *genus iudiciale*, the kind of speech typically found in the law courts.<sup>12</sup> In Shakespeare's time, anyone with a grammar school education was likely to have encountered rhetorical handbooks like *De inventione*, *Rhetorica ad Herrenium* and *Institutio oratoria*, or vernacular manuals like Thomas Wilson's *The Art of Rhetorique* (1553) which drew on the Roman handbooks.<sup>13</sup>

With this in mind, we can begin to see how judgement might be conceived as one crucial point along a continuum of creative endeavour. For those with some training in rhetorical theory, judgement was a form of production rather than a form of decision, as we would now tend to view it. As a component of theatrical form, therefore, judgement's role in plays like *Measure for Measure* is not simply to end things, but also to start things anew, to plot a future course and craft another world – a world that must finally take shape beyond the fictional parameters of the play itself.<sup>14</sup>

## Conclusion

My aim in this essay has been to determine what we can learn about judgement by attending to the dynamics of the face in *Measure for Measure*. This has involved working in the opposite direction of conventional literary criticism. That is, rather than using a concept to give a reading of a play, I have tried to use a play to give a reading of concept. Accordingly, the take-away is not so much a new interpretation of *Measure for Measure*, but rather a new way of thinking about judgement and its relationship to theatricality. As we have seen, the face in *Measure for Measure* functions as a deictic component of judgement, an action-object whose verbal and nominal capacities transform judgement into theatre by orienting it in time and space. Indeed, the face reminds us that judgement is fundamentally theatrical, though not in the ways typically asserted by cultural criticism: judgement is not theatrical because courtrooms are kind of like theatres or because juries are kind of like play audiences. Instead, judgement is theatrical because it is constituted by the same basic raw materials as theatre: time, space and action. The face indexes this shared physics of experience.

When we look judgement in the face, we see that it is not simply a unidirectional administrative procedure (as in law) or a singular confrontation with absolute authority (as in religion). More accurately, judgement is a participatory practice that forms communities by translating common sensory experience (seeing, showing, looking, hearing) into common axes of value (a shared sense of right and wrong, good and bad). In the arch of its unfolding, judgement starts as *evaluation* and ends as *values*, reminding us that the etymological link between those two words finds its source in a common conceptual space where calculation and community are neighbours. The particular determinations of Act V, scene i – Mariana is owed

something, Lucio owes something to others, Claudio is innocent, Angelo is guilty – reinforce general ethical principles of obligation, responsibility and justice that make social life possible. The close of *Measure for Measure*, in other words, shows us how assessment can generate the shared standards that form the moral scaffolding of community. This positive and creative notion of judgement, iterated theatrically through the dynamics of the face, may have been familiar to early moderns trained in rhetoric. But it is far removed from the more punitive, categorical and normative sense of judgement that dominates the discourse of our own time.

### Notes

1. Vivasvan Soni, 'Introduction: The Crisis of Judgment', in *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*, Special Issue on 'The Crisis of Judgment', Vivasvan Soni (ed.). See also Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* and Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*.
2. Soni, 'Introduction: The Crisis of Judgment', pp. 66–71.
3. Hannah Arendt, 'Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship', p. 18. See further Arendt, 'The Crisis in Culture', 'Truth and Politics', 'Some Questions of Moral Philosophy' and *The Life of the Mind*, pp. 69, 93–5, 193.
4. See, for example, Cynthia Lewis, "'Dark Deeds Darkly Answered": Duke Vincentio and Judgment in *Measure for Measure*'; Janet Adelman, 'Bed Tricks'; and Michael D. Friedman, "'O, Let Him Marry Her!": Matrimony and Recompense in *Measure for Measure*'.
5. William Shakespeare: all citations of Shakespeare are from *The New Oxford Shakespeare: Modern Critical Edition*, ed. Gary Taylor et al.
6. There is a great deal written on this topic, but good starting points are John Lyons, 'Deixis, Space, and Time' and Geoffrey Nunberg, 'Indexality and Deixis'.
7. See further Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*; Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Semiotics of Theatre*; Patrice Pavis, *Languages of the Stage* and 'Performance Analysis: Space, Time, Action'.
8. Kevin Curran, 'Shakespearean Comedy and the Senses'.
9. Thomas Blundeville, *The Arte of Logicke* (London, 1599), p. 1; Quentin Skinner, *Forensic Shakespeare*, pp. 11–25, and Henry S. Turner, *The English Renaissance Stage*, pp. 45–55.
10. Cicero, *On Duties*, p. 145. This paragraph draws on Turner, *The English Renaissance Stage*, pp. 230–1 and Neal Wood, 'Cicero and the Political Thought of the Early English Renaissance'.
11. Cicero, *On Duties*, p. 147.

12. See further, Turner, *The English Renaissance Stage*, pp. 45–55; Jon Hesk, ‘Types of Oratory,’ pp. 150–6; and Skinner, *Forensic Shakespeare*, pp. 11–25.
13. Peter Mack, *Elizabethan Rhetoric*, pp. 11–47; Skinner, *Forensic Shakespeare*, pp. 25–41.
14. See further, Kevin Curran, ‘Prospero’s Plea: Judgment, Invention, and Political Form in *The Tempest*’.



EDINBURGH  
University Press