

UNMASKING RELIGIOUS RULE IN SHAKESPEARE'S  
*MEASURE FOR MEASURE*

A Thesis  
by  
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## **Abstract**

### UNMASKING RELIGIOUS RULE IN SHAKESPEARE'S *MEASURE FOR MEASURE*

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The aim of this study is to investigate both the historical context surrounding the first productions of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* and the present social and cultural climate that we live in today. Through this comparative analysis, I demonstrate how *Measure for Measure* is a product of the extreme uncertainties from the public during the time in which it was originally written, where James I's ascension to the throne was a major catalyst in provoking questions towards the type of patriarchal and religious rule he would enforce after the death of Elizabeth I. Because we are now living in a similar cultural situation where Donald Trump's 2016 presidential election has resulted in the heightened awareness and widespread magnification of issues concerning racism, sexism, homophobia, and xenophobia that are, and have always been, present in the United States, recent and future performances of this play have the ability to call upon these issues to critique and satirize current figures of political power who base their patriarchal rule in the manipulation of religion and the attempted control over women and their bodies. My thesis ultimately focuses on how women in *Measure for Measure* navigate

such patriarchally dominant spaces within the play, and how current productions can base their performances within the #MeToo movement to make Shakespeare relevant and influential in our society today.

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this project to the whole of my family. Thank you for being there.

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## Introduction

Among the list of “timeless” Shakespeare plays, names such as *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello* are some of the few that the general public would probably recognize, but perhaps *Measure for Measure* would not ring the same bells. Recently, however, there has been a growing popularity in performances of Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure* because of the extent to which it speaks to our current social and political climate. In her article for Brookline High School’s student newspaper, Sidonie Brown identifies the play as “one of Shakespeare’s lesser-known pieces,” but goes on to describe the success of their school’s production which was performed in the same year that the #MeToo movement gained significant strength in response to Christine Blasey Ford’s sexual assault allegations against the newly appointed Supreme Court Justice, Brett Kavanaugh. Other professional productions have followed with an attention to similar inspirations such as The Antaeus Theatre Company’s production, which draws on the Harvey Weinstein case in that the play “centers on a woman who is sexually blackmailed by a powerful man” (Jacobs), as well as Gregory Doran’s 2019 RSC production where he also relates the line “Who will believe thee?” to the #MeToo movement during an interview. The importance of this play has grown so substantial that even the University of Colorado Boulder’s Department of Theater and Dance endeavored to perform the play formatted through Zoom just as the COVID-19 pandemic began to hit in the spring semester of 2020. Each of these productions shares the same attention using the play’s troubling content to negotiate our current social climate.

From this cluster of pieces, we can see one powerful way that a Shakespeare play written over four hundred years ago is deemed relevant to and hence marshalled into contemporary

critical and popular discourse about the most pressing issues of our historical moment. My thesis bases itself in the #MeToo moment to explore the similarities and differences between the constellation of issues surrounding and informing the play at the time of its composition and earliest performances to those finding most urgent and forceful expression in the present. While noting crucial gaps and wide temporal and cultural distances, the overriding focus of this thesis is to demonstrate *Measure for Measure*'s uncanny capacity to bring under fresh scrutiny, for audiences and historical moments Shakespeare never could have anticipated, crises of religious authority and creeping authoritarianism/tyranny and both the structural and interpersonal violence authorized and enacted along lines of gender and sexuality, creed and class, among other axes of difference. In other words, it is not so much historical accuracy or cultural specificity that gives *Measure for Measure* its performative power, but rather the opposite, insofar as the play explores themes and crises that are structural or perennial rather than culturally contingent. For precisely this reason, the play is readily adapted and remade across periods and cultures.

To illustrate the historical context that shaped *Measure for Measure*'s original production, I will begin by detailing how the abrupt cultural changes prompted by the Reformation would contribute to the kind of society upon which Shakespeare is commenting. Henry VIII's Act of Supremacy in 1534 was the main catalyst for the English Reformation, and his dissolution of Catholic monasteries in the years that followed caused significant concern for members of "the old faith" and sparked noteworthy controversy over the morality of destroying religious symbols. As Alison Shell explains in her book *Oral Culture and Catholicism in Early Modern England*, "Henry VIII's dissolution of religious houses was held by many to be the worst example of sacrilege that England had ever seen," and although secular landowners were

able to capitalize on this acquisition of religious property, “their families’ moral claim to it . . . was felt by many to be considerably more dubious” (23-24). To further problematize these landowners’ seizure of property, Shell also notes that not all of them “adhered to the reformed religion; though many later became Protestant, others were more mixed in their allegiance and some stayed Catholic, sometimes even receiving papal absolution for any wrong done” (24).

In keeping with Christopher Haigh’s assertion that the Reformation was an event that “came (and went again) as the accidents of everyday politics and the consequences of power struggles” (13), Mary I sought to reverse the policies implemented through the Reformation after she took the throne after the death of young Edward VI. Her reign was subsequently followed by Elizabeth who wanted to be viewed as the “Protestant hope for the future” (Bassnett 81). Yet when she succeeded to the throne, Elizabeth “maintained . . . [a] canny position of non-commitment for the first few weeks of her reign, while she picked a team of advisers whose first loyalty would be to her, whatever her religious preferences” (Bassnett 81). Needless to say, this diplomatic approach was not well received by everyone. As Robert Harkins reports in his article “‘Persecutors Under the Cloak of Policy’: Anti-Catholic Vengeance and the Marian Hierarchy in Elizabethan England,” many were displeased with the Elizabethan government for their handling of Marian political leaders after Elizabeth took the throne. Puritan leaders believed that Elizabeth did not execute justice properly, which drove tension during her reign, and they “warned the government that failure to fulfill divine vengeance by killing the Marian persecutors would bring about ‘some sore plague’” (Harkins 358). This critique of her policies decreased over her reign, as she would later enforce stricter persecution against Catholics in England, especially after Mary Queen of Scot’s alleged assassination attempt against her. A new flux of cultural anxiety would rise towards the end of Elizabeth’s reign as talks were in place concerning Mary’s son,

James VI of Scotland, to act as her successor. When James finally did take the throne, his potential Catholic sympathies and differing political perspectives regarding the monarchy casted uncertainties over his reign.

Recent scholarship regarding Catholicism in the early modern period has largely been inspired by Alison Shell's work on Catholicism and anti-Catholicism. She, as well as other contributors in Arthur Marotti's *Catholicism and Anti-Catholicism in Early Modern English Texts*, proposes an alternative reading of early modern work with attention to avoiding the anti-Catholic bias that has been so prevalent in approaches to work during the time. Marotti's *Catholicism and Anti-Catholicism in Early Modern English Texts* is a collection of chapters that examine the early modern period and the significance of Catholic and anti-Catholic rhetoric during that time while also unpacking how the shaping of English Protestant national identity was intentionally oppositional to Catholicism, where "antipopery is depicted as a rational response to situations in which values central to the Protestant self-image came under threat" (Marotti 85). As Marotti explains, "harsh anti-recusancy laws were designed not only to prevent the spread of Catholicism, but also, mainly, to force external (patriotic) conformity to the ceremonies of a national Protestant Church. They and the required loyalty oaths were intended to terrorize Catholics into conformity: even those sentenced to death were often given the opportunity to save themselves by attending a Protestant service, hearing a Protestant sermon or even praying with Protestants" (Marotti 2). This enforced conformity was not necessarily meant to strengthen the Protestant faith, seeing as converts would have been motivated through extrinsic forces such as "imprisonment and, possibly, exile or execution as well, if they stood by their belief in papal supremacy (including the right to depose monarchs), refused to enter a Protestant church or engage in any religious practices with Protestant Christians, or would not

acknowledge the moral and legal authority of the state to demand oaths of allegiance from them or to judge them in matters of religion and religio-political activity” (Marotti 2), rather than a holistic reconsideration of their beliefs.

While the same religious issues between Protestantism and Catholicism no longer drive our cultural direction, we in the United States are experiencing a cultural divide with a similar intensity. One way our cultural situation resembles that of early modern England that is worthy of note is the fact that our current social upheaval has also been largely prompted by the election of a new political leader—in this case Donald Trump in 2016. While we do not necessarily have to experience the type of absolute rule that would enforce a particular hegemony in the same way that early modern citizens would have faced execution for something so treasonous as heresy, Trump’s election did help uncover and bring to light serious societal issues concerning racism, misogyny, homophobia, and xenophobia that have always existed in the fabric of our nation. We merely began to lose focus on these issues until Trump utilized them in his daily rhetoric in his ascension to presidency, empowering members of the public to similarly make their voices heard through their tyrannical leader who they perceived as a fearless advocate for freedom and traditional American values.

Religion still has an impact on our culture as well, and just as it did in early modern England and throughout a vast expanse of history, religion still finds its way heavy-handedly into political discourse. Politicians typically use it as a façade to gain favor from their supporters, and this in turn leads them to base their policies in misogynistic practices rooted in controlling women’s bodies. Because these men are in positions of power, they have the potential to knowingly harm the general public through both their policies and their rhetoric they use to promote those policies. And because information is so readily available to us and we are able to

convey messages to large audiences at once, the spread of harmful misinformation from these people in positions of power has contributed greatly to the seemingly hopeless cultural divide we are still experience today. The patriarchal rule that was very much in place during James's reign in the early 17th century still exists today in a way that strongly resembles the structures of power represented in *Measure for Measure*. Performing Shakespeare in the present allows use to imagine these realities on stage as we can utilize the play to critique the structure of power in our social order.

Because Shakespeare employs extreme and consistent ambiguity throughout his work, he has been a cite of scrutiny among many Shakespearean and early modern critics. In *Shakespeare and Religion*, Allison Shell outlines the complexity of Shakespeare's use of religion in his writing and how his portrayals of Catholicism are far less negative than many of his fellow writers during the time. In doing so, Shell responds to this growing popularity of theorizing that Shakespeare himself was a Catholic and the suggestions that his work "address[es] the beleaguered Catholic community by means of codes and allegories" (80). Rather than disregarding these notions, Shell acknowledges that there is some value that can be derived from them as they help to pose the question: "how would one write as Catholic?" (84). Of course, as Shell explains, there is not necessarily an exact answer to this question, but in her other book, *Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination*, Shell addresses anti-Catholic writing during the early modern period and demonstrates how anti-Catholicism was used as "imaginative stimulus" (i). Because anti-Catholicism was used by writers (even by those who did not express overtly Protestant beliefs) in this way, the implied answer to the question, "how would one write as Catholic?" would be that one would not utilize anti-Catholicism at all as "imaginative stimulus."

Most Shakespearean scholars do, however, note Shakespeare's sympathetic portrayals of Catholicism through his depictions of Catholic figures such as Friar Tuck in *Romeo and Juliet* and Isabella in *Measure for Measure*. However, it is important to remember that Shakespeare's Catholic figures that he writes are not necessarily intended to be accurate representations of Catholicism. Additionally, rather than attempting to argue over what Shakespeare is aiming to support in his writing and trying to prove his religious beliefs based off evidence that can only be regarded as speculation, it seems more appropriate to investigate what Shakespeare is critiquing. Huston Diehl addresses this issue in her article "Infinite Space: Representation and Reformation in *Measure for Measure*" by declaring that "efforts to read the play as either pro-Catholic or nostalgic for a Catholic past fail to address the ways in which Shakespeare appropriates the representational strategies of English Calvinism, distancing his theater from a fraudulent theatricality widely associated in Protestant England with the Roman Catholic Church while also challenging the vehement antitheatricality of radical Protestants" (396).

To call upon this overarching religious identity crisis within early modern England, *Measure for Measure* is set in the Catholic city of Vienna while simultaneously presenting the social issues and symbolic portrayals of power that much more accurately resemble Protestant London. Scholars have noted this potential choice of Vienna as the setting from Shakespeare as being a way to "free himself to represent the here and now of his London in disguised form, opening up the possibility of commenting on the political, moral, and social life of the city without fear of direct challenge or censorship" (Chedgzoy 25). One of these commentaries being made in the play is based in London's own handling of prostitution or sexual dissidence. The courts associated with the Church of England were often criticized during the late 16th century for their leniency in punishing sexual misconduct, giving them the identity of "Bawdy Courts"

(Flanigan 37). It was common practice for the courts to lean towards public shaming as punishment, parading convicted prostitutes and fornicators around the streets, or forcing those who were convicted to pay fines for their “sexual crimes” (Flanigan 37).

James Ellison instead takes the stance that Shakespeare exposes relevant issues during the time concerning the executions of Catholics and how this would have affected the audience’s perception of the play: “the plot’s protest against Puritan plans to introduce the death penalty for sexual crime is only part of the story, and Puritan intolerance toward Catholics would have been recognized by a contemporary audience as an equally important, perhaps even dominant theme of the play” (Ellison 45). Barnaby and Wry situate their reading of *Measure for Measure* by focusing on the significance of James’s translation of the bible which is also relevant to the Catholic executions discussed in Ellison’s article. They argue that the play explores the conflict between morality and social practice while critiquing the intermixing of religion in the political setting and propose that the play “marks Shakespeare’s obsessive fascination with exposing the mechanisms of power that produce and sustain a cultural order” (Barnaby and Wry 1237). Just as Shakespeare seems to be drawing from extreme responses to social issues during his time period, where his audiences would recognize political wrongdoings, so too can we use his works to analyze and negotiate our own. A common reading among each of these scholars about the play is that there is a stark resemblance and apparent symbolic connection between James and the Duke. David Stevenson approaches this similarity from the standpoint that Shakespeare would have needed to impress James with his play and write the Duke in a way that he would perceive as flattering because of the fact that his first performance was set during James’s first Christmas celebrations.



Aside from discussions on Shakespeare's intent behind writing this play, most scholars focus on Isabella's character and view her in resoundingly positive light because of her resistance to the abuse of power. One of the main issues discussed in the literature is her forced marriage with the Duke at the end of the play. Barbara Baines argues that Isabella's choice to remain chaste grants her power even when being forced into marrying the Duke because "authority privileges chastity and depends in turn upon chastity to authorize authority. Whether or not Isabella is free to keep the convent key, she clearly holds the Duke's 'key' in her pocket" (299). Here, Baines displays the agency that Isabella is afforded at the end of the play, but Mary Thomas Crane interprets this final scene slightly differently in her article "Male Pregnancy and Cognitive Permeability." Like most scholars, Crane acknowledges the play's interrogation of the power of "ruling ideologies to shape early modern subjects" (269), which is self-justified through the idea that those subjects are inherently unruly. In her argument, Crane focuses on the language of permeability as it relates to embodiment. Crane sees the Duke's lines "I have a motion which imports your good, / Whereto if you'll a willing ear incline, / What's mine is yours, and what is yours is mine" (5.1.535-37) as his attempt to fertilize Isabella's mind, but Isabella's silence illustrates that she remains impermeable. However, as Crane suggests, ultimately the "cost of eschewing contamination is exactly such silence, a silence that, if it can be read as resistance, also literally marks the end of her existence as a character" (291). Through this crucial point, Crane argues, "Although the play seems to suggest that the body is on some level resistant to politicization and control, no one in Vienna is liberated by the possession of an open and vulnerable body" (291).

In what follows, I will draw from this information to suggest that *Measure for Measure* is affected by its historical context while making connections towards how we could use the play to

have an affect on our current social climate. Through chapter one, I will further build on the similarities outlined by previous scholars concerning the comparison between James I and the Duke while also demonstrating how other figures of power in the play such as Escalus and Angelo can be viewed with the same lens. Informing my reading of *Measure for Measure* in this chapter where I critique patriarchal power is James I's *True Law of Free and Religious Monarchies*, which I use to compare the type of rule that we see in the play with James's insistence on the "divine right of kings." In my second chapter, I resituate my reading on the women in the play as they navigate the patriarchal society so firmly held in place in Shakespeare's Vienna. As I formulate my reading, I consider the concept of forced marriage as a form of prostitution which is demonstrated through Emma Goldman's "The Traffic in Women" and utilize this text to analyze the forced coupling seen at the end of the play. I then merge these readings from chapters one and two to consider how these historical realities women faced in the early modern period can be performed today on stage to provide commentary on modern day issues.

**Chapter One: *True Law* in Vienna: The Weight of James I on  
*Measure for Measure***

When approaching Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, understanding the historical context of early 17th century England is crucial to forming our interpretations of the text. With the passing of Elizabeth I in 1603 and the coronation of James I shortly thereafter, anxieties about the accession of a new monarch, and with him a new Royal House, reverberated across the country. Along with a new and unfamiliar monarch being imposed, the people of England would have had to say goodbye to a queen who had reigned for forty-five years, a queen who was constantly imagined and illustrated as a mother figure to her people (Coch 424). Furthermore, discussions of James VI of Scotland taking over Elizabeth's reign after her death would have provoked thoughts about James's mother's (Mary Queen of Scots') assassination plots against Elizabeth, for which she was executed in 1587. This attempt on Elizabeth's life was motivated by the fact that Mary Queen of Scots viewed herself as the rightful heir to the English throne and had been given affirmation and approval by the pope who intended to restore Roman Catholic rule within England. Therefore, and imaginably so, James's reputation even as a Protestant ruler would have elicited some form of fear towards the notion that James would carry along with him Catholic sympathies that would have once again shifted the religious identity of England from Protestant to Catholic (Smuts 48).

To a large extent, this perception of James as someone who could reignite Catholicism within England worked against his favor. As equally as his potential to rekindle Catholicism would have raised anxieties among the Protestant population, so would this have proved disappointing for the small portion of the Catholic population in England who had imagined he

would do more to reinstate their liberties that were suppressed by Elizabeth. Although James tolerated, or at least posed himself as tolerant towards Catholicism before he had taken the throne largely for the purpose of promoting unity, English Catholics quickly became displeased with the level to which James did not re-legitimize Catholicism within England. In response, Catholics in England planned the infamous revolt against the crown and parliament in 1605 known as the Gunpowder Plot, which was an attempted attack on James's life in addition to Protestant members of parliament. This attack was thwarted, but as a result, the Protestant fear of Catholics once again rose substantially. James's response to these attacks was to implement the Oath of Allegiance where Catholics would be subjected to swearing allegiance to James as their King and leader over the Pope.

Although the Gunpowder Plot took place a year after *Measure for Measure* was written and first performed, the fact that the mass assassination attempt took place at all is indicative of the type of tension that would have been present within England. Therefore, it would still be reasonable to assume that Shakespeare's Catholic setting of Vienna within the play is meant to at least play upon the societal awareness of the Catholic implications James carried as the new leader of England. Despite the fact that James intentionally marketed himself as a Protestant ruler in order to gain the favor of the English court, his name still carried with him a certain recognition of potential uncertainties regarding his new position as monarch. Because *Measure for Measure* is a play that concerns itself with the articulation, operation, and deep entanglement of power structures, legal frameworks, and religious principles, I call on these uncertainties and anxieties towards accepting a new ruler as a way to analyze how the transition of power works within the play.

In this chapter, I will explain how Shakespeare utilizes the transitory time of the early 17th century in England to obscure the central message of the play where the action depicted in *Measure for Measure* can work both to gain the favor of James I while also managing to provoke the anxieties of audience members who have recently gained a new monarch. In this way, the play maintains multiple conflicting personas that resemble early modern England while the corresponding characters also display similar fractured identities, especially the Duke. Through my analysis of the three authority figures—Vincentio, Angelo, and Escalus—in Shakespeare's Vienna, with particular attention to how they align with or mimic with James's political ideologies, I argue that religious authority as delineated by James in his *True Lawe of Free and Religious Monarchies* produces a fallen society that situates itself in submission to that authority. In subsequent chapters, I utilize this analysis of how power is constructed and conceptualized by figures of authority within the play to investigate where resistance to that power is produced.

The Duke's plotting and level of authority in *Measure for Measure* is indicative of the divine right of kings and that the Duke's political philosophy is derived from and akin to what is described in James's *True Lawe of Free Monarchies*. Notably in his *True Lawe*, James I cites scripture to justify his understanding of the purpose of the monarchy under God which he believes holds absolute power:

Kings are called Gods by the propheticall King *Dauid*, because they sit vpon GOD his Throne in the earth, and haue the count of their administration to giue vnto him. Their office is, *To minister Iustice and Iudgement to the people*, as the same *Dauid* saith: *To aduance the good, and punish the euill*, as he likewise saith: *To establish good Lawes to his people, and procure obedience to the same*, as diuers good Kings of *Iudah*

did: *To procure the peace of the people*, as the same *David* saith: *To decide all controuersies that can arise among them as Salomon* did: *To be the Minister of God for the weale of them that doe well, and as the minister of God, to take vengeance vpon them that doe euill*, as *S. Paul* saith. And finally, *As a good Pastour, to goe out and in before his people* as is said in the first of *Samuel: That through the Princes prosperitie, the peoples peace may be procured*, as *Ieremie* saith. (James 3)

Through this idealized conception of the monarchy's purpose, the play offers an interrogation of what it means to "administer justice and judgement," "advance the good and punish the evil," "procure peace of the people," "decide controversies that arise among them," and "take vengeance upon them that do evil." In applying this passage to *Measure for Measure*, I will extract these key principles from the scripture James offers and highlight where me might find them symbolically played out in the text.

As indicated in the scholarship on *Measure for Measure*, the connections that can be made between James and Duke Vincentio are unmistakable. In his article "The Role of James I in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*," David Stevenson cites a few reasons to consider as to why it would make sense for Shakespeare to include elements of James within the play. Firstly, Stevenson explains how Shakespeare's reasoning behind writing *Measure for Measure* was to secure a relationship with the King, whose patronage of Shakespeare's company in the formation of the King's Men represents yet another departure from the previous monarch and royal house: "Theatrical enterprise, then, as now, was highly competitive, and the greatest asset of his acting company in 1603-1604 was its new status as the King's men. As one of the principal directing members of this company, Shakespeare undoubtedly wished to foster its recently acquired royal

sponsorship and to encourage, if possible, a direct personal attachment of the King for the royal players” (Stevenson 189). Because *Measure for Measure* was Shakespeare’s first play to be performed within the bounds of James’s reign, it would have been crucial for him to make a good impression.

Stevenson believes that Shakespeare, in order to accomplish a play that would impress or convince James I of his worth as a playwright, “deliberately sketched in Duke Vincentio a character whose behavior as a ruler would be attractive to James (and therefore to a Jacobean audience) because it followed patterns which the King had publicly advocated” (Stevenson 189). In providing an example of a particular behavior that closely resembles James, Stevenson cites the lines from the Duke towards the beginning of the play where the Duke expresses his distaste towards loud public gatherings which was a uniquely Jamesian trait:

I’ll privily away. I love the people,

But do not like to stage me to their eyes.

Though it do well, I do not relish well

Their loud applause and Aves vehement. (1.1.68–71)

This behavior from the Duke that Stevenson relates back to James is further discussed in greater detail by Jeffrey Doty in his article “*Measure for Measure* and the Problem of Popularity,” where “in place of interactive demonstrations of love, James wants stillness and silence, behaviors that signify awe and deference to his majesty” (33). According to Doty, James’s reasoning for condemning such outward projections of love is because “it produced him as a performer, who by demonstrating good cheer and interacting with his subjects, would win his people’s love” (50). This ideology shared between James and the Duke also holds a functionality as well. The Duke attempts to partially justify his reasoning for going into hiding by citing his need to escape

from the public's "loud applause," but he makes this statement just as he is knowingly going to upset the public through his employment of Angelo as ruler. If the Duke were to remain in place and therefore staged in front of the eyes of Vienna while the law was enforced to the extent that Angelo takes it, the "loud applause" from the public would be a site of lacking control over the public.

Fearing a lack of control over the public similarly seems to be a driving force for James in *True Law* which can be seen directly in the onset of the treatise:

As there is not a thing so necessarie to be knowne by the people of any land, next the knowledge of their God, as the right knowledge of their alleageance, according to the forme of gouvernement established among them, especially in a Monarchie (which forme of gouernment, as resembling the Diuinitie, approacheth nearest to perfection, as all the learned and wise men from the beginning haue agreed vpon; Vnitye being the perfection of all things,) So hath the ignorance, and (which is worse) the seduced opinion of the multitude blinded by them, who thinke themselves able to teach and instruct the ignorants, procured the wracke and ouer-throw of sundry flourishing Common-wealths; and heaped heauy calamities, threatening vtter destruction vpon others. (James 4)

Here, James weighs the need for people to acknowledge their allegiance to their monarch as being equal to the level of "ignorance" the public has upon the monarch, which he believes ultimately leads to "heauy calamities." Throughout the text, James attempts to enlighten those who would otherwise cast doubt on the monarchy by citing scripture to justify his divine right, often utilizing it to liken himself to God: "Kings are called Gods



by the propheticall King *Dauid*.” The act of likening himself to God through citing the fact that he sits upon God’s earthly throne because he was supposedly pre-ordained to do so is a convenient way for a monarch to justify their divine right as king, but here I want to focus on the significance of the symbolic nature of the power one holds over their people.

Through this divinity which he applies onto himself, James explains how he is not subjected to earthly law: “a good King, although hee be aboue the Law, will subiect and frame his actions thereto, for examples sake to his subiects, and of his owne free-will, but not as subiect or bound thereto.” Here, James attempts to mitigate the obvious tyrannical nature of his claim that Kings are not subjected to the law by ensuring that “good Kings” would follow the law not necessarily because they *have* to, but because they *want* to. But what if a King does break the law? Is he then no longer good? Would it be possible for Kings to not be good if they are truly “called Gods by the propheticall King *Dauid*?” These potential objections to James’s ideologies are exactly what inform the (whom he deems) “ignorant,” but James’s reasoning is that the morality of the monarchy transcends that of the public legal system and therefore should not be a concern. The Duke exhibits a similar temperament towards the public where he imagines himself to have a higher sense of being in 4.1:

O place and greatness, millions of false eyes  
 Are stuck upon thee; volumes of report  
 Run with these false, and, most contrarious, quest  
 Upon thy doings; thousand escapes of wit  
 Make thee the father of their idle dream  
 And rack thee in their fancies. (4.1.62-8)

Here, the Duke is troubled by the burden he feels as ruler in Vienna where the public supposedly misjudges his “doings,” implying that the public simply cannot begin to fathom the justness of his rule.

The Duke’s fear of how the public will perceive him is what also leads him to take on the disguise as a friar, as he demands from Friar Peter: “Supply me with the habit, and instruct me / How I may formally in person bear / Like a true friar” (1.3.40-8). The Duke’s act of disguising himself to manipulate the direction of the plot in the play is meant to escape the “calamities” that James also fears. By enforcing his rule through his disguise, the Duke avoids the possibility of rebellion. While allowing himself the option and ability to hide from the public’s view as he keeps an eye on Vienna, the Duke’s disguise also allows him to subvert the power he has afforded to Angelo in the first place. Functionally, the Duke’s disguise works as a type of safety net for the purpose of maintaining order if anything should go wrong during Angelo’s time as ruler. In his conversation with the friar in 1.3, the Duke foreshadows the possibility that Angelo might fail in his task of cleaning up the city:

Lord Angelo is precise,  
 Stands at a guard with envy, scarce confesses  
 That his blood flows or that his appetite  
 Is more to bread than stone. Hence shall we see,  
 If power change purpose, what our seemers be. (1.3.5-54)

In the Duke’s outlook on Angelo’s rule, the Duke foresees the possibility that the attainment of power is something that could potentially corrupt Angelo’s sense of self. What is ironic about this passage is the fact that the Duke prophesizes this change in Angelo’s personality while he himself is in the position of altering his identity as well.

The Duke's decision to disguise himself as a friar is complex, serving a few important purposes and inviting multiple interpretations. In his article "Vincentio's Selves in *Measure for Measure*," Maurice Hunt views the Duke as being a complicated character because of "the interaction of his various selves in their attempt to represent and harmonize his being, finally unsuccessfully however" (703). In this reading, Hunt highlights the fact that the Duke seems at war with himself as an insufficient leader in Vienna who has allowed the law to slip, but also as someone who longs for "the quiet life removed" (1.3.9). If we were to read the Duke as a representation of James I, as scholars have previously suggested, and even if we were to read the Duke as a positive image of a ruler, the Duke's disguise still could act as a way to engage with the potential uncertainties of James as a new ruler. By illustrating the Duke as an undercover agent in the play who ultimately controls the outcome of events, Shakespeare demonstrates how monarchical power (and especially the monarchical power proposed by James) subverts the power of the court. In order to obscure this reading of the Duke into something more positive, Shakespeare writes the Duke as the "hero" who is responsible for saving Claudio's life while enforcing merciful rule towards the end of Act 5.

Furthermore, the Duke's disguise also allows other characters to exhibit their own perceptions of the Duke as Lucio comically demonstrates while speaking to the Duke disguised as a friar: "It was a mad fantastical trick of [the Duke] to steal from the state, and usurp the beggary he was never born to. Lord Angelo dukes it well in his absence; he puts transgression to't" (3.2.87-90). While there are other ways Lucio unknowingly bashes the Duke in front of his face, this passage introduces the idea that the Duke himself is an illegitimate ruler in Vienna as well. This conversation between Lucio and the Duke feels initially odd for a few reasons. Firstly, it seems out of place for Lucio to bring up such a topic to, who we believe he perceives the Duke

as, a friar whom he has never met before. In their analysis on how slander works within the play, Carla Beatriz Rosell discusses how some scholars such as Ward Risvold have taken the viewpoint that Lucio recognizes the Duke in his disguise and knowingly asperses him to perform “the outward and discursive counterpart to . . . the Duke’s hidden plan and subsequent disguise” (Risvold 116). However, as Beatriz Rosell attests, if Lucio were to actually recognize the Duke and subsequently critique his leadership, then Lucio would be openly exposing himself to being punished for that crime of slander and “would raise questions about the Duke’s later decision to spare Lucio’s life” (375). Read in connection with M. Lindsay Kaplan’s suggestion that “the duke condemns Lucio not because the latter’s slanders malign the ruler’s good government, but because Lucio exposes the state’s own slanderous practices” (24), the implication of sparing Lucio’s life is that ultimately there will be no fundamental changes in the commonwealth after the play’s end.

The visualization of the Duke as both a political figure in power as well as “a brother of [the Catholic] order” is additionally significant in a few ways. Firstly, by the Duke’s act of disguising himself as a friar, we are given a physical symbol and image of the inseparability of religion and political power that appropriately resembles James I’s political philosophy. What this image also does is mock the Catholic sacrament of Holy Orders where the Duke enforces his own path towards priesthood as a false actor. This mockery extends further throughout the *Measure for Measure* as well as the Duke meets with members of the public who have been imprisoned where he offers them the opportunity to fulfill their sacrament of Penance through confessing their sins to him.

In his conversation with Juliet in Act 2.3, the Duke, who is disguised as a friar, begins their notably brief conversation by forcefully asking “Repent you, fair one, of the sin you carry?”

(2.3.19), to which Juliet replies, “I do, and bear the shame most patiently” (2.3.20). There are a couple of ways in which we might read Juliet’s replies in this scene, and productions of the play might choose either. One manner in which we might perceive Juliet’s responses in this scene is through a sense of sincerity that Juliet truly feels ashamed of sleeping with and getting impregnated by Claudio outside of wedlock. This reading of Juliet’s responses in the scene would liken her to the type of purity displayed by Isabella within this play, but it would also contradict Claudio’s perception of their mutual sin. While Claudio feels as though their extremely mild form of fornication was justified by the fact that Juliet was “fast [his] wife” (1.2.135), Juliet at least portrays herself as repentant for her sins. Another reading of Juliet’s responses to the Duke in this scene is that she is either expressing a certain amount of sarcasm or a disguised sincerity towards her sin in order to protect herself from further persecution. Whether or not Juliet is sincere in her sense of shame, the Duke offers an important exchange of advice after being told by Juliet that she repents her sins:

‘Tis meet so, daughter, but lest you do repent  
 As that the sin hath brought you to this shame,  
 Which sorrow is always toward ourselves, not heaven,  
 Showing as we would nor spare heaven as we love it  
 But as we stand in fear. (2.3.33-38)

In this moment, the Duke is suggesting that Juliet’s sense of shame and the potential sorrow she might feel from that shame is self-serving, and that unless the sorrow she feels is directed towards heaven, then her sorrow is in vain. The irony of this advice is that the Duke himself does not follow it.

Moreover, in reference to James's conception that the monarch is meant to "*procure peace of the people*," it seems that the Duke believes he can achieve that through "*minister[ing] Justice and Judgement to the people*." However, the Duke's tactics in attempting to issue peace are self-serving and problematic. The reason as to why there is a true lack of peace within Vienna seems to solely be a product of the Duke's decision to employ Angelo as ruler. Because the play begins with the transfer of power between the Duke and Angelo, our only conception of we have of Vienna beforehand is through the characters' reactions to the new enforcement of the laws in the city. What is obvious is that the citizens within the play, even those who hold positions of power aside from Angelo, are not at peace with the administration that has taken over. Even still, the Duke overweighs the concept of "*establish[ing] good Lawes to his people, and procure[ing] obedience to the same*" despite the public upheaval. The Duke operates under the assumption that he knows what is best for his people, but his attempt to tighten the laws in Vienna are in the interest of maintaining, or reobtaining, an image of purity for his office and state rather than procuring peace.

However, the Duke is not the only figure with Jamesian qualities in the play. Through the character of Angelo, Ellison argues, the play accomplishes the inclusion of a Puritan magistrate whose rule is veiled by a perceived Catholicism "who attempts to enforce ancient laws for the execution of a Catholic (Claudio)" (45). Here, Ellison bridges a possible reading of Angelo as being a partial representation of James as a "Puritan magistrate," which is worth considering as well. To completely disregard other characters in positions of power other than the Duke in the play as being indicative of the uncertainties towards James would also ignore the ways in which corruption is portrayed through those characters as well. Meaning, an analysis on how power is conveyed and ultimately used corruptly by the Duke as an illustration of James would omit how

other characters contribute to this sense of corruption. The potential execution of Claudio is ultimately a result of a combined corruption between the Duke, Angelo, and Escalus. What occurs throughout the play is a destabilization of the absolute authority of the monarchy represented through Catholic hierarchical structures where an imposter (Angelo) occupies the throne reserved for the extension of God and cannot cope with the responsibilities thrust upon him.

This illegitimacy in the transition of power between the Duke and Angelo resonates in several ways with the transition between Elizabeth and James. Firstly, the idea of a ruler acting in place of the rightful ruler recalls a particularly pressing issue during Elizabeth's reign. The idea that she was an illegitimate ruler because she was the illegitimate daughter of Henry VIII is what led some to see Mary Queen of Scots' assassination plot against her as justifiable. The concept of Angelo standing in place of the Duke can also be read as a representation or mockery of the relationship between the Pope and his respective Catholic rulers. Meaning that while Catholic monarchs might act as a visualization of authority within their respective kingdoms, the execution of that power ultimately is derived from the Pope's authority rather than the monarch's. In *Measure for Measure*, Angelo is provided only with an imaginative state of power from the Duke in his absence.

The Duke grants Angelo the power to govern the people of Vienna during his falsely proposed visit to Poland: "Hold, therefore, Angelo. / In our remove be thou at full ourself" (1.1.42-3). However, the power offered to Angelo here is veiled by the fact that Angelo is not officially the ruler of Vienna by divine right, and the divine authority which the Duke represents is closely watching and ready to manipulate Angelo's execution of his power to his own liking. The Duke reveals the purpose of his assigning Angelo his position to Friar Peter in his cell at the

beginning of 1.3, and in so doing, the Duke admits to being actively deceptive towards both Angelo as well as the Viennese people:

I have delivered to Lord Angelo—  
 A man of stricture and firm abstinence—  
 My absolute power and place here in Vienna,  
 And he supposes me travell'd to Poland;  
 For so I have strew'd it in the common ear,  
 And so it is receiv'd. Now, pious sir,  
 You will demand of me, why I do this. (1.3.11-17)

The Duke's description of Angelo as "A man of stricture and firm abstinence" highlights why the Duke's decides to choose Angelo as temporary ruler as opposed to Escalus who is second in command behind the Duke because the Duke is interested in ensuring that while he is "away," somebody will implement the strict laws in Vienna that the Duke says "for this fourteen years we have let slip" (1.3.21). Although here the Duke spreads the blame of the loose grip on the laws of Vienna upon both himself and the Friar, the Duke does accept responsibility for not enforcing the laws:

Sith 'twas my fault to give the people scope,  
 'Twould be my tyranny to strike and gall them  
 For what I bid them do. For we bid this be done,  
 When evil deeds have their permissive pass  
 And not the punishment. Therefore indeed, my father,  
 I have on Angelo imposed the office,  
 Who may in th'ambush of my name strike home. (1.4.35-41)



Here, the Duke illustrates how Angelo's purpose as ruler is merely to perform the execution of the law in a way that initiates a redirection of the city's adherence to its strict rules based on religious principles. Unaware that he is being manipulated by the Duke, Angelo initially performs his role just as the Duke expects that he would. What's most striking about the fact that the Duke hands over his office to Angelo is the reality that he exposes his own insufficiencies as ruler by implication. Of course, the Duke is very much self-absorbed by how he is viewed by the public as well. When the Duke admits that it would be *his* tyranny to enforce the laws by implementing punishments for the things he has "bid them do," the Duke shows that the only thing worse than being staged to the public's eyes with "their loud applause and Aves vehement" (1.1.71) would be being staged as tyrannous.

Just as the Duke attempts to mitigate his own responsibility for the direction of Vienna through hiding behind the disguise of a friar, Angelo takes shelter behind the law. In his conversation with Isabella, Angelo states that "It is the law, not I, condemn your brother" (2.2.81), which works as a means to deflect responsibility for his grotesque leadership. When offered the opportunity to grant mercy towards Claudio, Angelo denies it wholeheartedly, citing the fact that his display of pity is through justice:

Isabella	Yet show some pity.
Angelo	I show it most of all when I show justice, For then I pity those I do not know, Which a dismissed offense would after gall, And do him right that, answering one foul wrong, Lives not to act another. (2.2.124-9)

Angelo's reasoning here is that by eliminating the sinner, Claudio, he also eliminates the possibility of that sinner committing another act of sin against another person if he is let off the hook. If we were to apply James's purpose of a monarch to Angelo in this case, "*To advance the good, and punish the euill*, as he likewise saith: *To establish good Lawes to his people, and procure obedience to the same*," Angelo acts in a way that assumes that in order to "advance the good," he must "punish the evil" in a way that removes the sinner from the commonwealth entirely. By removing the sinner outright, obedience to the law will follow through the absolute expulsion of all those who commit sin. In this case, Angelo sees the execution of Claudio as a way to strike enough fear into the citizens of Vienna so that the sin will not continue. In response, Isabella protests how this ideology is founded upon the abuse of power rather than it is to "*procure peace of the people*," continuing to bridge the connection to James's principles:

So you must be the first that gives this sentence,

And he that suffers. O, it is excellent

To have a giant's strength, but it is tyrannous

To use it like a giant. (2.2.106-09)

This outright disconnect being displayed by Angelo towards administering justice in this scene is also notably exactly what the Duke intended in his decision to install Angelo as ruler in his stead. Therefore, while it is easy to direct all of our blame towards Angelo in his outrageous enforcement of the law, it is important to remember that the Duke very much sanctions this form of tyranny. Angelo is used thusly as a scapegoat by the Duke in his plot to escape being perceived as tyrannous.

Isabella is also not the only character who cautions Angelo in his handling of the law. When considering the monarch's purpose to "*minister Iustice and Iudgement to the people*," the

Provost warns Angelo that they “have seen / when, after execution, judgment hath / repented o’er his doom” (2.2.14-6), to which Angelo responds, “Go to. Let that be mine. / Do you your office, or give up your place / And you shall well be spared” (2.2.17-9). Here, Angelo displays the type of “absolute authority” that James attributes to the “divine right of kings” where the ruler is not subjected to earthly regulations. This imagined sense of power that Angelo believes he has is what allows a perversion of “justice and judgment” upon the people in Vienna because there is nobody who can speak against his decisions. Angelo’s understanding of his authority therefore results in his outright admittance of his tyranny as he asks Isabella for her body where he knows his power over her cannot be faulted: “I’ll prove a tyrant to him. As for you, / Say what you can, my false o’erweighs your true” (2.4.181-84). Whether or not we view Angelo’s acquisition of authority in Vienna as being legitimate at all, the purpose of Angelo’s corrupt sense of power in the play allows us, and especially audiences of Shakespeare’s time, to consider how absolute authority might lead to the abuse and manipulation of that authority when it is unchecked by others.

In connection with the idea of “checking authority,” Escalus ostensibly would be the only character in the play who could possibly overthrow Angelo’s judgement; however, the Duke suspiciously grants him no authority to do so. Although we understand Escalus to be second in command to the Duke in the onset of the play, the Duke overlooks him while deciding on Angelo as his substitute. The Duke’s reasoning for choosing Angelo is made clear: Angelo represents the values and morals that the Duke would like to see reinstated into Viennese culture, with which Escalus agrees. But why, specifically, would the Duke not entrust Escalus with the same duty, especially when he lists quite clearly how qualified Escalus is for the job:

Since I am put to know that your own science

Exceeds, in that, the lists of all advice  
 My strength can give you: then no more remains,  
 But that to your sufficiency as your Worth is able,  
 And let them work. The nature of our people,  
 Our city's institutions, and the terms  
 For common justice, you're as pregnant in  
 As art and practise hath enriched any  
 That we remember. (1.1.5-13)

The answer to this question lies in how Escalus demonstrates a concern for the governance in Vienna, and exemplifies a more moderate, and perhaps more just, understanding of the law than Angelo. When discussing Claudio's harsh fate with Angelo at the beginning of the second act, Escalus argues "Let us be keen, and rather cut a little / Than fall and bruise to death" (2.1.5-6) in response to Angelo's line "We must not make a scarecrow out of the law, / Setting it up to fear the birds of prey / And let it keep one shape till custom make it their perch and not their terror" (2.1.1-5). While Escalus proposes a lighter and more reasonable sentence for Claudio, Angelo expresses that he finds stability in the strict enforcement of the law. Because he is not given any real power to make decisions for the city during the Duke's absence, Escalus cannot take further action in this negotiation to prevent Angelo's harsh rule. Moreover, this exchange also further depicts Angelo's insight towards his own personal philosophy towards punishment where, in order to ensure that they do not "make a scarecrow out of the law" where the public would proposedly habituate to the punishments they administer, they should instead implement the law in a way that strikes constant "terror" amongst the public so that the law is never broken in the first place.

Escalus's moderate philosophy towards punishing the citizens in Vienna is juxtaposed with Angelo's in a way that foregrounds Escalus as the rational figurehead within the play who seems to be the only character out of the three who can view the concepts of good and evil through a complex lens. Escalus represents reason within the play, but he also becomes very much complicit in what unfolds and begins to alter his stance on punishing others as he begins to realize he has no authority over Angelo. Towards the latter end of this scene previously mentioned where Escalus resists Angelo's authority, Escalus stands in agreement with Angelo's decision to execute Claudio while also feeling torn by the prospect of his impending death:

Justice	Lord Angelo is severe.
Escalus	It is but needful.
	Mercy is not itself that oft looks so;
	Pardon is still the nurse of second woe.
	But yet, poor Claudio! There is no remedy.
	Come, sir. (2.1.254-60)

Perhaps there is truth to Escalus's perspective that "There is no remedy" when viewing the situation from his position as a powerless authority figure, but because he spreads the idea that Claudio's death is "but needful," Escalus involves himself in the corrupted law enforcement of Angelo.

The only remedy to the unjust rule founded by Angelo in the play comes through the Duke's plot to "procure peace" among his people. In this last connection to James's *True Law*, the Duke exemplifies the concept of "deciding all controversies that can rise among [his people]." In order to rectify Angelo's intended rape of Isabella and find a solution for her to

maintain her virginity, the Duke conveniently recalls a woman named Mariana and her complicated relationship to Angelo:

She should this Angelo have married; was affianced to her by oath, and the nuptial appointed: between which time of the contract and limit of the solemnity, her brother Frederick was wrecked at sea, having in that perished vessel the dowry of his sister. But mark how heavily this befell to the poor gentlewoman: there she lost a noble and renowned brother, in his love toward her ever most kind and natural; with him, the portion and sinew of her fortune, her marriage-dowry; with both, her combinate husband, this well-seeming Angelo. (3.1.226-36)

How the Duke has happened upon this knowledge, we do not know, but we can most appropriately attribute his acquisition of this particular knowledge to how slander runs rampant through Vienna just as much as prostitution does within this play. The passage also can be read in comparison with the perception of the monarchy as being an extension of God where the Duke's knowledge is indicative of his symbolic omnipotence as ruler. However, because this omnipotence is seemingly rooted in his involvement in the economy of slander, the Duke's likeness to God, or his image as a ruler being an extension of God is likewise contaminated.

In the final act, the Duke's attempt to "decide all controversies" only takes place after his identity is revealed to the public, as Bethany Besteman signifies: "it is notable that the timing is not of his choice and is physically out of his control. It is this unwilling unmasking which allows justice to proceed" (Besteman 8). The type of justice that does proceed, however, is unmistakably troubling. In "*take[ing] vengeance upon them that doe euill,*" the Duke's vengeance comes in the form of enforcing non-consensual marriages upon Lucio and Angelo while additionally threatening Angelo's execution. Just as Angelo attempts to place the

responsibility of Claudio's proposed execution into the hands of Isabella, so does the Duke with Angelo's. It is only Isabella who can "procure peace of the people" in this final act through her forgiveness of her abuser, which she emphatically offers. As Ruben Espinosa explicates, Isabella's "unfailing mercy is set against the Duke's 'merciful' design" (87). The Duke's vain attempts to appear as merciful in this scene are thus exposed through Isabella's forgiveness. Unfortunately, the fact that the Duke's acts of vengeance upon Angelo and Lucio are no different than his public proposal to Isabella demonstrates that the state of Vienna at the play's end will be just as imbalanced as it was at the beginning.

When read alongside James's *True Law of Free and Religious Monarchies*, Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* depicts a Vienna that emblematicizes a theoretical England subjected to James's recent ascension to the throne. Ultimately, James's idealized conception of the monarchy's rule over its people is based upon the assumption that there is an idealized ruler, and what unfolds throughout *Measure for Measure* is an exemplification of how that assumption can lead to repercussions. While the Duke, Angelo, and Escalus serve separate purposes in conveying this message, they each represent the ways in which corruption can fester when authority is exploited.

## Chapter Two: Marriage and Prostitution in

### *Measure for Measure*

In my previous chapter, I analyzed the distribution of power within *Measure for Measure* through the lens of James's *True Law of Free and Religious Monarchies*, suggesting that the representation of the authority mirrors the type of absolute authority James affords himself as monarch. While my focus up to now has been toward critiquing the type of power upheld by male characters in the play as they manipulate the principles of justice and judgment as a means of maintaining their positions of authority, this chapter intends to consider women's agency and autonomy in an environment that is largely controlled by men. As in my previous chapter, I focus on the relevant cultural issues that form the context of this play's first performance(s). Whereas my previous chapter connects James I's political ideologies to authority figures in the play, this chapter explores operations of power, and of religious authority specifically, through both hegemonic and dissident constructions of gender and sexuality, especially along contours of class and creed, in *Measure for Measure*. To the extent that gender and sexuality, class and creed, signify within and across notions of public and private, the present chapter hopes to map a kind of geography of women's spaces within *Measure for Measure*'s Vienna, to consider how women respond to, negotiate, and at times even evade the far reach of religious authority and with it the patriarchal social order.

In extending my discussion on the topical elements presented within the play where I previously used the transition of power between Elizabeth and James to inform my reading for chapter one, in this chapter I will utilize the topical issue of prostitution in early modern London to illuminate the backdrop of this play. Just as I read the presentation of authority in *Measure for*



*Measure* through the lens of James's *True Law*, in this chapter I will inform my reading of the juxtaposition between prostitution and marriage through the lens of Emma Goldman's "The Traffic in Women." In my analysis, I will also demonstrate how women's voices are literally silenced in the play and even in the pertinent scholarship on the play as well. I contend that background spaces such as convents and brothels provide some opportunity for women to reclaim some of that authority, as space is taken up so heavily by male figures in *Measure for Measure* while they seek to gain and maintain control. Furthermore, I demonstrate how marriage in the play works as a foundational element in upholding the structures of the patriarchy, where the lifestyles within a brothel or convent resist this normative behavior, offering single women a way out of the culturally idealized trajectory for women. In doing so, I will analyze and compare the juxtapositions between Isabella, whose vow of celibacy starkly contrasts with Mistress Overdone's position as a bawd, and the marriages between Juliet and Claudio, and Angelo and Marriana to illustrate how the main realization of violence upon women in *Measure for Measure* becomes the forced marriages at the end of the play. First, I will discuss how Goldman's text can be applied to *Measure for Measure* through this juxtaposition between Isabella and Mistress Overdone.

Goldman begins her piece with an example that clearly speaks to the central issue in *Measure for Measure* which gives us the basis of our plot: "It is significant that whenever the public mind is to be diverted from a great social wrong, a crusade is inaugurated against indecency, gambling, saloons, etc. And what is the result of such crusades? Gambling is increasing, saloons are doing a lively business through back entrances, prostitution is at its height, and the system of pimps and cadets is but aggravated" (212). From the beginning of the play, we are swept into the Duke's own crusade against the rampant prostitution which he has

allowed to go unpunished. In this same line of thought, it is noteworthy to discuss how we see (or do not see) the aggravation of prostitution throughout the play after the Duke takes measures to crack down on the driving image of sin in Vienna. We are aware of the prevalence of prostitution in Vienna through the conversations of characters, but we never enter the space of Mistress Overdone's brothels within the text itself. Brothels are hidden from our view, and because they are hidden we cannot visualize the flow of customers who might use Overdone's services before, during, or after the play's end. We can speculate on this matter based on the conversations within 1.2, but ultimately we cannot accurately imagine the state of prostitution in Vienna as the story unfolds. However, if we read Overdone's brothels concealed by taphouses as being "consistent with the disguise motif he uses in the play" (Widmayer 186), we might further our understanding of where the implications of prostitution might be disguised throughout the text.

Goldman also points out the hypocrisy of the demonization of prostitution from the church because of the role that the church played in the origins of prostitution. Throughout a large expanse in history, prostitution was generally tolerated by the church as "an act of public service" (Goldman 219), at least so long as brothels would give back a certain amount of revenue to the church. This fact that brothels could produce revenue for the church offers a possible explanation as to why the strict laws in Vienna were so loosely enforced before the play's onset, and also would have been historically relevant especially in London where officials "[in Southwark] not only tolerated commercial sex, they profited from it" (Mowry 10). Presumably, there must have been a reason for the prolonged toleration of prostitution in the city that would have incentivized the Duke to turn a blind eye towards the institution which he perceives as immoral. One can only speculate, but it seems appropriate to assume that the Church in

Shakespeare's Vienna would benefit from the practice of and involvement in prostitution in the same way that the Church historically has. We can then read the Duke's sudden urgency to reinstate holy order in Vienna as being prompted by the fact that Mistress Overdone's houses had become so expansive that the Church wouldn't have been able to tax prostitution accordingly.

This matter is made visible through 1.2 where Pompey informs Mistress Overdone that her houses in the suburbs are to be "plucked down" (1.2.86), but her houses within the city limits "shall stand for seed" (1.2.88). Because her houses in the suburbs can go more easily undetected outside of the city limits, prostitution on the outskirts of Vienna would be viewed as more of a threat because it would be more difficult to relegate and profit from. Moreover, it should also be noted that Pompey explains the fact that the houses in the city are to be kept in place because of "a wise burgher [who] put in for them" (1.2.89). Nowhere in the text is this "wise burgher" revealed, but it does indicate the fact that there is an independent business person who intends to profit off of prostitution in the same way that the Church has. We might assume that this unknown person is unaffiliated with the enforcement of the law in Vienna because of the fact that Mistress Overdone is ultimately arrested for her status as a bawd, but it is significant that their identity is hidden, especially when considering how disguise plays a distinguished role in contributing to the plot of the play. As an audience, we are largely omniscient to the disguise of the Duke, the substitution of Mariana for Isabella, and the swapping of Ragozine's head to save Claudio's among other hidden aspects of the play before they are revealed to the characters onstage, but in this case we are left in secrecy as to who in the upper class is maintaining the institution of prostitution behind the facade of taphouses. If we account for the purpose of other disguises in the play where they act as a way for a character to appear as someone they are not

for their own personal benefit (which at times is very much necessary), we might then be inclined to believe that this “wise burgher” is more involved in the action of the law than we might initially presume.

Because we do not see much representation of women at in the play aside from Isabella, where we also only momentarily see Mistress Overdone, Mariana, and Juliet, much of our understanding of the class structure in Vienna is illustrated through the men in the play. Act 3, Scene 2 offers an appropriate depiction of the separation between classes as Pompey begs Lucio to bail him out of being imprisoned. In the scene, Pompey refers to Lucio as a friend of his, but Lucio responds by mocking him rather than coming to his aid:

How now, noble Pompey? What, at the wheels of Caesar? Art thou led in triumph? What, is there none of Pygmalion's images, newly made woman, to be had now, for putting the hand in the pocket and extracting it clutched? What reply, ha? What sayst thou to this tune, matter, and method? Is 't not drowned i' th' last rain, ha? What sayst thou, trot? Is the world as it was, man? Which is the way? Is it sad and few words? Or how? The trick of it? (3.2.41-50)

Lucio's act of bombarding Pompey with condescending rhetorical questions is meant to distance him from Pompey and his business, but he also simultaneously aligns himself with prosecuting Pompey as well. While Pompey might be exaggerating his relationship with Lucio as his “friend,” Lucio also exaggerates his distance from Pompey socially as well by antagonizing him for being a bawd while also pretending to be unaware of Pompey's business practices in the first place:

Well, then, imprison him. If imprisonment be the due of a bawd, why, 'tis his right. Bawd is he, doubtless, and of antiquity too. Bawd born.—Farewell, good Pompey. Commend me to the prison, Pompey. You will turn good husband now, Pompey; you will keep the house. (3.2.63-68)

This exchange highlights the fact that those in the working class are the ones who receive the punishment for their sins while regular upper-class citizens such as Lucio are privileged to escape punishment and furthermore go unsuspected by authority figures until there is sufficient evidence against them (such as Lucio's slander against the Duke right in front of his face). Pompey imagines Lucio will help bail him out because he is a frequent customer of his services, but Lucio declines so that he can distance himself from guilt. What maintains this social order is the idea that Pompey will now be wedded to the prison.

Isabella and Mistress Overdone's characters are a threat to this system of social order in *Measure for Measure* because of how they exist outside of the marriage economy. We see this reality come to life through Isabella's and Mistress Overdone's characters who, in the play text, never actually meet. While Isabella's and Mistress Overdone's occupations are conflicting, they're also images of opposing patriarchal rule. Isabella is the figurehead of female purity in the play, resembling best the virtue of chastity, and her counterpart Mistress Overdone is an antithetical figure to her in that regard. In our first encounter with Isabella, she is in the midst of a conversation with Francisca and asks, "And have you nuns no farther privileges?" (1.4.1), to which Francisca responds: "Are not these large enough?" (1.4.2). Isabella's following line, "Yes truly; / I speak not as desiring more, / But rather wishing a more strict restraint / Upon the sisterhood, the votarists of Saint Clare" (1.4.3-6), reveals some important aspects of her character. Firstly, Isabella's wishing for more restraint upon the sisterhood aptly mirrors the

Duke's ultimate goal in the play of enforcing the law in a stricter manner in Vienna. Moreover, we are not informed as to what "privileges" Isabella and Francisca are referring to exactly, but the fact that Isabella views more restraint as being a privilege she gains from being a nun also likens her to Angelo in his hyper-pious demeanor. Our first meeting with Mistress Overdone, however, is largely about her concern with the continuation of her brothels under the recent strict enforcement of the law.

For good reason, Isabella's character has been of central concern to critics of *Measure for Measure* because of the fact that she can be read in most cases as the protagonist of the story and overwhelmingly owns most of the lines from female characters, but this focus on Isabella ultimately subverts the other women in the play. While Isabella represents a kind of purity that is outmatched by even her fellow members of her convent, because of her vows of celibacy, she still functions as an outcast to her society, not so unlike the play's prostitutes. According to Katherine Gillen, the display of female chastity in the theater in general is "the stage's response to anti-theatrical attacks and to its reflexive theorization of the ethics of theatrical exchange." Gillen arrives at this argument through viewing the image of chaste women through how they are seen and exchanged as a "commodity" despite the fact that they are "inscribed with representational stability to match her sexual purity" (Gillen 158). Therefore, the proposed marriage between the Duke and Isabella "reflects the uneasy process by which playwrights invoked female chastity to legitimize the theater, associating theatricality not with prostitution but with the normative exchange of marriage and the mimetic authenticity of the chaste woman" (Gillen 158).

However, both women pose a similar threat in undermining the patriarchal authority in place in Vienna. James Bromley argues that "the figure of the nun is a threat because of her

simultaneous involvement in a supranational religious organization and a single-sex community" (Bromley 109). In alignment with this understanding of the nun as a threat, this perception of Isabella would particularly resonate with audiences in Protestant England because she is not simply a beacon of Catholicism, but instead she "represents a large group of women whose 'profession'—and means of economic support—entails commitment to perpetual virginity" where her "consecrated virginity can remind audience members that English society once allowed women an option to their subservient position in marriage" (Jankowski 227). Jankowski further speculates that Isabella "becomes a site of reader/viewer dissatisfaction because of her refusal to engage in any way with the sexual economy, whether by trading a few illicit hours with Angelo for her brother's life or accepting the licit proposals of the Duke" (227). Her disengagement from the sexual economy also starkly contrasts the prevalence of prostitution, but this does not prevent her from being the most sexualized woman in the play. In 2.2, Angelo cannot help but to impose his sexual imagination over the argument Isabella makes for her brother's life:

Isabella	Because authority, though it err like others, Hath yet a kind of medicine in itself That skins the vice o' th' top. Go to your bosom, Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know That's like my brother's fault. If it confess A natural guiltiness such as is his, Let it not sound a thought upon your tongue Against my brother's life.
Angelo	[aside] She speaks, and 'tis such sense

That my sense breeds with it. (2.2.164-73)

Here, Angelo literally brings to life the request from Isabella that he should consider where in his heart that he has sinned like Claudio. Angelo pleases himself with the words from Isabella in a way that enforces her metaphorical existence within the sexual economy as Angelo imagines a reproduction of their senses.

When we apply this knowledge of Isabella's personality to the conversation between herself and Angelo concerning her brother Claudio's fate, we are given further insight into her character. In 2.4, Angelo offers a form of penance for Claudio's sin where Isabella is at first willing to sin as a form of payment for Claudio's offense. However, Isabella agrees to sinning before Angelo makes it clear to her what he is implying. When Angelo does reveal his terms—that she would give up her body to him in exchange for Claudio's life—Isabella firmly denies the offer: “Better it were a brother died at once, / Than a sister, by redeeming him, should die for ever” (2.4.105-08). We know that Isabella would not be opposed to sinning in exchange for her brother's life, and she acknowledges how she could include one more sin to pray for on top of her others. This willingness shows that Isabella is aware that it is human to sin, and that she does not exalt herself as being too pure for sin. Her willingness to sin in exchange for Claudio's life is also indicative of the fact that giving up her body is more of an attack on her personhood rather than it is a disconnect for her sense of morality.

Isabella is then no less of a sexual outcast in this society than the prostitutes in this place, but there is also a particular lack of humanity afforded to sex workers in the play. While Isabella's speech and rhetoric is highlighted in the play as well as fetishized over by Angelo, figures like Mistress Overdone are hardly given the opportunity to speak and are instead spoken for, as Dollimore also insists: “the prostitutes, the most exploited group in the society which the



play represents, are absent from it. Virtually everything that happens presupposes them yet they have no voice, no presence. And those who speak for them do so as exploitatively as those who want to eliminate them” (Dollimore 85-6). The difference between characters such as Isabella and Mistress Overdone is the ease with which characters can get away with slandering women who are commonly shamed in society for their sexual impurity versus the possibility of being criticized for disparaging someone whose public image is based on their purity.

Other than Isabella, women in *Measure for Measure* are afforded very few lines, and the scenes that feature women in the play are quite brief. Even though Mistress Overdone plays a minor role in the play, she can be read as a juxtapositional figure to Isabella’s sense of purity. Additionally, certain versions of the text only provide the name “Bawd” to indicate Mistress Overdone’s lines, unfairly illustrating an apparent insignificance to her character that is further reiterated by the way in which she is treated by most of the characters within the play. Any mention of her name (which in itself is seemingly meant to be derogatory) is constantly paired with disease imagery linked to sex, and like other female characters in the play, Mistress Overdone’s personal information regarding her contraction of sexual disease is shared by male characters onstage while she is not there.

Unmistakably made clear by Lucio and his companions in 1.2, the spread of venereal disease within Overdone’s brothels is a considerable issue. Prostitutes in *Measure for Measure* are used by male characters in the play for their own sexual convenience, but also for their social convenience as well, since the spread of sexual disease within the sex industry seems to be a punchline for these characters. We see this reference to sexual disease in connection with brothels in a few different areas in the play. In 1.2, we see three gentlemen and Lucio talking unashamedly about how they are regulars at Mistress Overdone’s houses:

Lucio            Behold, behold, where Madam Mitigation comes! I  
                       have purchased as many diseases under her roof as  
                       come to—

Second Gent    To what, I pray?

Lucio            Judge.

Second Gent    To three thousand dolors a year.

First Gent      Ay, and more.

Lucio            A French crown more.

First Gent      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. (1.2.41-52)

In addition to this scene producing a similar kind of needless fluff that coordinates with general “locker room talk” that fills the space of conversations in misogynistic male spaces, this scene serves to illustrate how the brothels are a subtext within the play even if we’re not taken into that space at all. Moreover, the word play on “dolor” here, which refers to both currency as well as suffering for Lucio, is important to consider because 1) it situates these men within the upper class for being able to afford this type of entertainment and 2) it illustrates the extent to which these men go to utilize Mistress Overdone’s houses as they’re willing to suffer through sexual disease that they seem to assume they will contract.

Moreover, it is important to also consider how the perception of venereal disease takes different forms as it is applied to either men or women. In this passage, Lucio and the gentleman

speak about their venereal diseases as though they wear them as a badge of honor. Yet, when aimed towards Mistress Overdone or her workers, the connotation of the disease becomes more of an attack on their personhoods:

Pompey        Troth, sir, she hath eaten up all her beef, and she is herself in the tub.

Lucio         Why, 'tis good. It is the right of it. It must be so. Ever your fresh whore and your powdered bawd, an unshunned consequence; it must be so. (3.2.53-8)

Lucio's cruel condemnation towards Mistress Overdone in this passage also echoes Goldman's argument in "Traffic in Women" that men largely escape ridicule for their illicit sexual activities, while "no law is too monstrous to be set in motion against the helpless victim. She is not only preyed upon by those who use her, but she is also absolutely at the mercy of every policeman and miserable detective on the beat, the officials at the station house, the authorities in every prison" (Goldman 225).

Sexuality has historically been associated with sin, and brothel culture similarly has been linked with the spread of disease, which has loud undertones within the play. Even though Mistress Overdone's occupation allows her to have autonomy and power within a society that does not seem to offer that to women, she still is not able to experience a real sense of stability within it. Because her houses in the suburbs are "plucked down" as a result of the increased religious rule implemented by Angelo, Mistress Overdone is forced to continue her business in the inner city. In addition to her limitations for the expansion of her business, Mistress Overdone is forced to combat the spread of disease within her brothels as well. Her line "Thus, what with the war, what with the sweat, / what with the gallows, and what with poverty, / I am custom-

shrunk” (1.2.73-5) illustrates that sexual disease as well as the plague are her main issues she contends with just before hearing the news from Pompey that all houses in the suburbs are to be plucked down. While Lucio and the gentlemen earlier in this scene mock Mistress Overdone for her business of which they are frequent customers, they also demonstrate how nonchalant they are to the issues that jeopardize the future of her brothels by joking about contracting disease under her roof.

Yet if the foundational element to patriarchal rule is marriage between a man and a woman, why is it Angelo’s first response to execute Claudio instead of marrying him to Juliet from the beginning? Even Isabella, upon hearing the news that Claudio has impregnated Juliet, almost nonchalantly responds, “O, let him marry her” (1.4.53). The prospect of Claudio’s impending execution also signifies Juliet’s position in society as a single woman with child, which ultimately becomes an inconvenience to the state because “their illegitimate children would likely need the support of the community” (Willen 561). Audience members of the time would have recognized the potential issue of bastardy which sixteenth and seventeenth authorities “obsessed” over because of the particularly high rate of illegitimate pregnancies between 1590 and 1615 (Widmayer 184). The solution to this issue seems simple enough: Claudio and Juliet’s marriage would easily avoid the prospect of a single woman needing the increased financial aid from the city, but there is another concern at play as Widmayer explains: “such a solution was not acceptable to many propertied persons who, fearing poor breeding more poor in their communities, did all in their power to keep such undesirables from marrying, thus contributing to the high rate of illegitimacy” (Widmayer 184). Angelo’s decision to execute Claudio therefore implies that he views Claudio’s execution as a sacrifice that would aid in prohibiting illegitimacy. altogether because of the public fear of the law.

Claudio highlights the issue concerning marriage in Act 1, scene 2 in his conversation with Lucio:

She is fast my wife,  
 Save that we do the denunciation lack  
 Of outward order. This we came not to  
 Only for propagation of a dower  
 Remaining in the coffer of her friends,  
 From whom we thought it meet to hide our love  
 Till time had made them for us. But it chances  
 The stealth of our most mutual entertainment  
 With character too gross is writ on Juliet. (1.2.144-52)

This scene offers a justification for early modern audiences to sympathize with Claudio and Juliet whose sin is premarital sex, but it also seems to ensure audience members that foul play was not involved. When comparing this scene with the one scene where Juliet makes an appearance in this play, there is a striking difference between the couple's reaction to their unfair sentence. While Claudio intends to resist his punishment through calling on his sister, Isabella, to defend him, Juliet speaks to the Duke in a way that illustrates her resentment towards her sin that she now carries. Moreover, a significant qualification occurs as the Duke asks about the mutuality of the "offenceful act" (2.3.26) that was committed. Although their sin is the same, the Duke insists, "then was your sin of heavier kind than his" (2.3.31), which Juliet professes it so. Calling back to my previous mentioning in my first chapter of the conversation between Juliet and the Duke in 2.3 where I speculated over the possible readings of Juliet's sincerity towards her "supposed sin which she repents, it seems reasonable to assume Juliet does feel a strong

remorse for her premarital sex when reading the scene in light of how the idealization of chastity is forced upon women through their upbringing.

Goldman would proclaim this to be a “double standard of morality” where “society considers the sex experiences of a man as attributes of his general development, while similar experiences in the life of a woman are looked upon as a terrible calamity, a loss of honor and of all that is good and noble in a human being” (222). Furthermore, Goldman attributes this type of upbringing to the causation and continuation of prostitution where it “involves the keeping of the young in absolute ignorance on sex matters, which alleged innocence, together with an overwrought and stifled sex nature, helps to bring about a state of affairs that our Puritans are so anxious to avoid or prevent” (Goldman 222). This stance offers an explanation as to why prostitution persists in such a setting where patriarchal laws restricting sexuality produce a culture which favors abstinence over sexual education.

The only married couple in the play that we know of before the last act is Elbow and his wife, whom we learn of in 2.1 as we’re given a performance of a bawdy court. We see male characters bringing up women’s sexual habits elsewhere throughout the text, and especially so in 2.1 in the trial between Elbow and Froth who is defended by Pompey. During the trial, it seems that Elbow has arrested Master Froth for committing some kind of injustice against his wife, but because of Elbow’s misuse of words, it is difficult to ascertain exactly what he is accusing Froth of. As the facts develop in the trial, there seems to be only one thing for certain; the man representing Froth, Pompey, is villainous:

He, sir? A tapster, sir, parcel bawd; one that serves a bad woman, whose house, sir, was, as they say, plucked down in the suburbs, and now she professes a hothouse, which I think is a very ill house too. (2.1.68-72)

Elbow's act of raising suspicion against Pompey and his "ill house" under which he serves Mistress Overdone prompts Escalus to inquire about how Elbow has come to this conclusion. Elbow reveals that his wife had been seen at one of Mistress Overdone's houses, and Pompey specifies that she was in search of "stewed prunes." The insinuation here is that Mistress Elbow was more than likely searching for stewed prunes in order to help cure the assumed venereal disease she had contracted. This detail calls us to question where Mistress Elbow would have contracted venereal disease in the first place. Our first thought might be that Froth was the perpetrator in infecting Mistress Elbow, but through Elbow's continual protestations on his wife's behalf to preserve her honor, we might consider a different perspective. In regards to Goldman's piece, where she proclaims that "fully fifty per cent. of married men are patrons of brothels" (225), we might find it just as likely that Elbow himself had been visiting Mistress Overdone's houses and subsequently passed on venereal disease to his wife. No matter what, we are never given the perspective of Mistress Elbow and cannot derive the truth of the matter because of it. This problem is played out on a larger scale through the formulation of the bed-trick and the involvement of Mariana.

The bed-trick becomes the most complex issue to discuss in the play when we account for Angelo's lack of consent in having sex with Mariana. Firstly, it should be noted that it is the Duke who formulates the bed-trick as a convoluted solution to Angelo's intention of raping Isabella. When explaining the plan to substitute Mariana for Isabella, the Duke justifies the bed-trick in a similar way that Angelo attempts to convince Isabella that she should exchange her body for her brother's life: "the doubleness of the benefit defends the deceit from reproof" (3.2.284-5). Perhaps there is some truth to this statement, but if we buy into this type of understanding of justice, then we might unintentionally distract ourselves from thinking more

deeply about the psychological turmoil the bed trick would impose on the characters involved. While we might feel a sense of relief that Isabella escapes sexual assault, it is still extremely problematic that the solution to avoiding that assault is through the assault of Angelo where he does not consent to sex with Mariana. It also should not be forgotten that the bed trick simply does not need to take place at all in order for the Duke to resolve the issue he has created in appointing someone as corrupt as Angelo to rule Vienna. The Duke could easily interject and instill order within the city, but he is too focused on how he will be perceived by the public to admit this mistake. He creates the bed-trick as a solution, but just as Angelo places the responsibility of Claudio's life in the hands of Isabella, so too does the Duke place the responsibility of the bed-trick upon Isabella.

At the beginning of Act 4 when we first meet Mariana, her initial dialogue with the Duke seems a bit awkward. As the Duke enters, Mariana stops the boy from singing as she sees the Duke and says, "Here comes a man of comfort, whose advice / Hath often still'd my brawling discontent" (4.1.8-9). Because we know that the Duke is in disguise, the fact that Mariana seems familiar with the Duke draws a few questions that are left unresolved throughout the rest of the play. There are a couple of possible readings of this moment: either Mariana recognizes that the Duke is himself because of the fact that he has frequently visited her (which would explain how the Duke knows so much about the relationship between Mariana and Angelo), or Mariana simply mistakes the Duke for somebody else (which seems less believable if it is somebody who has frequently visited her). If we were to read her reaction to seeing the Duke as indicative that the Duke himself had been visiting her, then her consent to switching places with Isabella is also called into question because she would then be motivated by the Duke's influence. Whether or not Mariana recognizes the Duke as himself, the Duke places the responsibility of detailing the



bed-trick plot upon Isabella who then takes Mariana off stage to tell her. Because this interaction takes place off-stage, we're not given any actual access into Mariana's reaction to this plot. Furthermore, because we never hear from Mariana's perspective, I would resist the reading offered by Kaara Peterson that the bed-trick is meant to "represent the palliation of the willing virgin's unruly desires by the marriage cure as more important and less problematic, however, than the status of the liaison or marriage brokered to authorize the bed-trick *ex post facto*" (30). It isn't just that Mariana might not have sexual desire for Angelo, it is the fact that we do not know that she does while all of the characters assume she does as well that makes this bed-trick especially problematic.

If any moment is symbolic of female spaces and voices being placed in the background of the play while male spaces and voices come to the forefront, it would be this brief moment when Isabella takes Mariana away to relay the bed-trick plan to her. Rather than writing this conversation between Isabella and Mariana (which would have been the first and only scene in the original text that would have more than one woman on stage at the same time without a male presence), Shakespeare inserts the Duke's brief, self-absorbed soliloquy:

O place and greatness, millions of false eyes  
 Are stuck upon thee; volumes of report  
 Run with these false, and, most contrarious, quest  
 Upon thy doings; thousand escapes of wit  
 Make thee the father of their idle dream  
 And rack thee in their fancies. (4.1.63-8)

While Mariana and Isabella discuss the disturbing topic of swapping places to have sex with Angelo, the Duke takes the time to complain to the audience about how troublesome it is to cope

with the difficulties of being in a position of power. Moreover, the Duke does not even mention the general topic of the bed-trick at all. Instead, the Duke's focus is on how he is perceived by his people where he believes his image as ruler is manipulated. Because the Duke includes this remark during the pivotal moment of the bed-trick being discussed, it seems that the Duke treats the creation of the bed-trick as an inconvenience that he must undergo in order to preserve his image.

Furthermore, when Isabella and Mariana reappear on stage, we still are left uncertain about Mariana's response to her imposed task of switching places with Isabella. Because Isabella speaks for Mariana in saying, "She'll take the enterprise upon her, father, / If you advise it" (4.1.70-1), we might read Isabella as a participant in the same silencing behavior that we have seen where men in the play speak on behalf of women. We also might read Isabella as taking advantage of Mariana through her line, "Little have you to say / When you depart from him, but, soft and low, / 'Remember now my brother'" (4.1.74-6), but this reading invalidates the fear Isabella might have concerning Claudio's life. In any case, the stakes are made so high that Mariana might not feel like she has a choice in the matter at all, even if it is made to seem like she does.

The bed-trick is a complicated plot point because it forces us away from a tidy ending where everything resolves itself in happily-ever-after fashion. Because our focus is so heavily set on Isabella's saving Claudio's life where the bed-trick also "allow[s] for the virgin who exists apart from the sexual economy to remain outside it, if temporarily and not perpetually" (Peterson 380), we forget that Mariana is just as much prostituted to Angelo as he is to her. Although the bed-trick offers us an image of a reversed social order, it cannot be mistaken that the Duke facilitates this plot in order to ultimately uphold the patriarchy. If we view marriage in line with

Goldman's reasoning that it is equivalent to prostitution when it is agreed upon through economic reasons, the forced marriages seem all the more problematic, especially so when considering how the one genuine intended marriage between Claudio and Juliet is inhibited by economic reasons. Because their relationship fundamentally mirrors Claudio's and Juliet's, the forced marriage between Angelo and Mariana becomes a perversion of their intended marriage where both are prostituted to each other by the Duke who "attaches conditions that insist upon his continued power over his subjects' persons" (Meyler 39). In the case of Isabella, she stands silent on stage as the Duke attempts to enforce his will of engagement with her—a potential future which destroys the identity she has firmly held on to throughout the play.

### Chapter Three: Performing *Measure for Measure* in the Post-Trumpian Present

In my previous chapters, I have discussed the violence against women and the structures of power at play which are embedded in harmful religious ideologies within the text of *Measure for Measure* through a historical lens. Through chapter one, I have outlined how the play responds to the transition of power between Elizabeth I and James I and draws from the public anxieties regarding this event in a way that speculates over the potential corruption the new monarch brings along with him. In highlighting this potential corruption, I lean on James's political philosophy which promotes the divine right of kings through his treatise *True Law of Free and Religious Monarchies*. In my second chapter, I have demonstrated how women attempt to navigate the patriarchal rule in Vienna which attempts to mitigate their freedoms and silence their voices in order to maintain social control.

Viewing this play within its cultural context, as I have emphasized before, allows us to engage with and understand the provocative messages proposed by Shakespeare during such an uncertain time while also using the text to expand our understanding of the early modern cultural context itself. Embedded in historical readings is also the reality that our investigation of that history allows us to better understand the origins of our own issues that have been pervasive in our own society. However, focusing solely on the historical context where our aim is to “‘restore Shakespeare's artistry to the earliest conditions of its realisation . . .’ and to ‘restore his works to the specific imaginative and material circumstances in which they were written and engaged’” (Hawkes 1) assumes that we can view the text without bias from the present time. In order to illustrate how *Measure for Measure* speaks towards issues regarding gender and power dynamics

as it is related to religion, I will utilize Gregory Doran's 2019 depiction of *Measure for Measure* performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company to discuss how the play can be presented in a way that is still relevant today. The first half of this chapter will be an analysis on the RSC's recent production of *Measure for Measure* directed by Gregory Doran where I focus on how the central issues I have discussed throughout my previous chapters can be performed. In the second half of this chapter, I will build on how future productions of this play can benefit from a presentist outlook on the text.

As horrifying as the events that take place in *Measure for Measure* are, it is easy to distance ourselves from the play when viewing it strictly in its historical context. By looking at how the play still resonates today for modern audiences, we might find that the distance between our current social climate compared to the early modern period is not as great as it seems. In this chapter, I argue that modern day reproductions of *Measure for Measure*, especially those that exist in the post-Trumpian era, have the potential for allowing us to further negotiate the patriarchal rule which roots itself in the attempt to control women in order to maintain social order. Rather than simply bridging the gap between our societies, then and now, *Measure for Measure* can be utilized as a way to critique, satirize, and ponder the influences of patriarchal rule which still heavy-handedly exist today.

Modernized interpretations of the play have provided a vast array of subjects to analyze as our culture changes and puts forth percolating societal issues to discuss through the use of the text. When asked about the challenges regarding directing *Measure for Measure* in the twenty-first century, Doran responds:

[The play] certainly probes about in some pretty murky ponds. But I think that makes the play very contemporary. The Jacobean period was a time of

uncertainty. The world seemed to have lost its moorings. Moral absolutes were being questioned. I think we recognise that today. We are suspicious of neat happy endings. Life is not like that, and Shakespeare here seems to feel the same.

(Doran)

Here, Doran notes that at the play's core is a sense of disorder which comes as a result of the political and religious uncertainties and would resonate with modern day audiences as well, seemingly due to the fact that we're presently living in the age of information and are rapidly undergoing our own cultural shifts. It's always astonishing how Shakespeare seems like a magnet attracting all the iron filings of whatever is going on in the world at the time. *Measure for Measure* has particular resonance today.

Just look at the plot. A young woman appeals to a man in authority to save her brother's life. He agrees on condition that she sleeps with him. When she threatens to expose him, he asks who would believe her. She turns to the audience and asks "To whom should I complain?" #METOO! (Doran)

In light of the fact that Doran reads the play in relation to the #MeToo movement, I will therefore discuss how he visualizes this particular social issue in his production.

What might not be clear from the text is the feeling of being slighted from the perspective of Escalus towards the Duke's choice of promoting Angelo to power over Escalus. In Doran's 2019 RSC production of the play, we're not only provided with the visible face of disappointment from Escalus, we're also given a woman playing Escalus's part, which would not have been the intention of Shakespeare's original text. The significance of the Duke's decision to choose Angelo over Escalus is, in this particular production, clearly more problematic than the text originally offers and adds a layer of depth to the tension between Angelo and Escalus. The

Duke's decision evolves from his plan to reinstate the strict, religiously informed laws, where he views Angelo as being the most worthy candidate for the position because of his status as "a man of stricture" (1.3.13). However, Doran's choice of Claire Price to play the role of Escalus seems to unquestionably raise issues concerning gender as it pertains to how contemporary audiences would perceive this oversight of a woman who is rightfully next in line as ruler of Vienna. Doran's production capitalizes on the fact that none of the characters in this scene verbally acknowledge the fact that Escalus deserves the role of leader in Vienna during the Duke's apparent time away through the expressions of each of the characters.

Although the Duke addresses Escalus as second in command, he does not go into detail about why he decides not to place her in power even after ironically listing all of her qualifications as someone to rule perhaps more effectively than himself:

The nature of our people,  
 Our city's institutions, and the terms  
 For common justice, you're as pregnant in  
 As art and practise hath enriched any  
 That we remember. (1.3.9-13)

This leads us to question why Escalus is not chosen, and the matter of Escalus's gender in this particular production would arguably resonate with contemporary audiences as to what causes this oversight. Even if the matter of gender is not verbally expressed in the text, it is still something that can be felt in the performance. When analyzing Escalus's facial expressions in this moment, it is clear that she is hurt by the Duke's decision while being forced to swallow her pride in the moment as she agrees with the Duke's appointment of Angelo without questioning

it: “If any in Vienna be of worth / To undergo such ample grace and honour, / It is Lord Angelo” (1.1.22-4).

The sexism being portrayed in this scene very much rests in the background and subconscious of the audience just as brothels and convents do throughout the rest of the play. Additionally, the discomfort towards the fact that the Duke overlooks Escalus is also present in Angelo’s hesitation to accept the Duke’s request for him to take control over Vienna. Angelo’s initial lines displaying how he might not be worth the position might seem to simply be a matter of formality, but the nervous tone in his voice illustrates the reality that he is overstepping Escalus, which he has no ability to argue against either. The filmed version of Doran’s RSC production makes this uncomfortable dynamic between Escalus and Angelo visible by panning to Escalus’s face, which fights to maintain an image of pleasantries while seeming obviously upset as the Duke requests Angelo to take the position. When the Duke forces Angelo to accept the position, he forces him to kneel and Angelo glances nervously at Escalus, indicating furthermore that he realizes the significance of the Duke’s decision to overlook Escalus.

After the Duke exits the stage, Escalus briefly mentions the matter to Angelo about her role as second in command where she illustrates her concern, “To look into the bottom of my place: / A power I have, but of what strength and nature / I am not yet instructed (1.1.84-6). Angelo’s seemingly apologetic nature in this scene paired with his answer, “‘Tis so with me. Let us withdraw together, / And we may soon our satisfaction have / Touching that point” (1.1.87-9), lends an optimistic interpretation of Angelo’s character which never comes to fruition throughout the play. In their first scene together where we are able to view the dynamic of power between them, we’re provided with a starkly different tone between Angelo and Escalus. While offering alternative reasoning to Angelo’s extreme efforts to enforce the law, Escalus is portrayed as



someone whose voice is not heard or considered worthy of being a part of the decision-making process in Vienna. Angelo responds to her suggestions in an exhausted, condescending tone while occupying himself with his surroundings rather than engaging in conversation. Moreover, when Escalus speaks to Angelo, she seems to feel the need to speak in a benevolent tone with an upward inflection, resembling how women in the workplace today might feel the need to alter the way in which they speak to their male colleagues to get their point across. Escalus phrases her argument in a way that attempts to avoid the chance that she is speaking out of order to Angelo, even though she occupies a higher position than him when the Duke is the one in power. When Angelo closes the discussion, Escalus delivers the lines “Be it as your wisdom will” (2.1.33) with a frustration that would not immediately be obvious in the text. I argue that Escalus’s gender in this scene is crucial to our understanding of the intended message being portrayed by Doran and translates seamlessly into the power dynamics regarding gender in the workplace that we are familiar with today.

Another figure who was originally intended as a male character but is played by a female actress is the Provost. She is slightly more confrontational in her tone than Escalus when she makes clear her opinion on Angelo’s decision to execute Claudio, but Angelo still responds to her in the same disinterested manner. While the Provost’s character could be considered an androgynous role more appropriately than that of Escalus, it seems that Doran’s choice of this actress to play the Provost as a woman is intentional. The effect of having both Escalus and the Provost portrayed by female actresses is to illustrate how women struggle in the workplace when it comes to inserting their opinions because men typically disregard their input. It does not seem like a coincidence, then, that both of the people in positions of power who work for Angelo are characters portrayed by women. Although these gender dynamics are not intended by the text,

Doran makes use of Angelo's perception of his power as being unquestionably just and righteous.

Through the argument between Isabella and Angelo in 2.2, Doran shows how women who challenge men also have to overcome being sexualized in non-sexual circumstances. When Isabella first approaches him, Angelo resorts to occupying himself with paperwork, occasionally glancing up at her as she speaks to him. Isabella's urgency very much contrasts with Angelo's indifference, which speaks to his view of the law as being something emotionless and objective in its adherence to how it is written. The length of their argument before Isabella begins to leave is quite similar to how quickly Escalus and the Provost experience being shut down while trying to have a discussion with Angelo. After being coaxed by Lucio to continue on with trying to earn Claudio's freedom, Isabella marches back onto the stage which forces Angelo's attention. As Isabella continues to press on in this argument between herself and Angelo, Angelo slowly loses his interest in the things around him and begins to resort to anger and frustration to illustrate his flawed points of view. It seems in this moment that Angelo feels a sense of discomfort towards the fact that he is being challenged in a way that upsets the gendered hierarchy, but Angelo also reveals after their conversation that he is attracted to Isabella's speech: "What, do I love her, / that I desire to hear her speak again / and feast upon her eyes?" (2.2.179-81). If we do not take into account his actions later in the play, it seems here that Angelo's attraction towards Isabella is innocent to a certain extent.

In an attempt to interrogate the reasons as to why Angelo's attraction towards Isabella escalates to the reality of rape, Doran plants an interesting piece to Angelo's character at the beginning of 2.4. Here, we see an interesting interpretation of his character from Doran to actively illustrate Angelo with a deep internalized and suppressed form of sexuality which is

depicted briefly in his soliloquy at the beginning of 2.4. Of course, the passage speaks to Angelo's strict religious practice, but Doran goes further in this depiction. In this passage, Angelo displays his internal conflict towards the fact that he cannot properly devote any time to prayer because his mind is distracted by his attraction towards Isabella: "Heaven hath my empty words, / whilst my invention, hearing not my tongue, / anchors on Isabella" (2.4.2-4). Towards the end of this speech, and conveniently in Angelo's lines, "Blood art thou blood (2.4.15), Angelo lifts his pant leg to reveal a cilice, a spiked metal chain wrapping around his thigh, which is most notably worn by members of Opus Dei, an institution derived from the Catholic Church founded during the time period in which this production is meant to take place, as a part of their belief in mortification. Of course, while there is nothing inherently wrong with the practice of mortification in the form of self-inflicted pain, which is intended as a "symbolic reference to Christ's passion" (opusdei.org), the practice does hold strong negative connotations as well.

There are a few layers of hidden meaning behind this reference if we read Doran's portrayal of Angelo as "a figure filled with Freudian repression who secretly scourges himself," as play reviewer, Michael Billington does. When interrelating Angelo's lifestyle of "stricture and firm abstinence" with the idea that masochism can be attributed to severe sexual repression, and if sadism is indeed a disavowal of masochism as Jacques Lacan defines it, Angelo's outburst towards Isabella is at least somewhat better explained. In avoiding a sympathetic reading of Angelo here, I am not implying that Angelo's actions are justified through his sexual deviancy, but instead I am more importantly indicating the issue of sexual suppression itself as being a preemptive factor for the prevalence of sexual abuse, especially when noting its pervasiveness in the church throughout history and accordingly in our current systems.

With regards to this reading of Angelo, one might ask why Isabella does not also exhibit a similar delineation from her faith when she also lives a life of celibacy and a stricture that leads her to wish for a life of further constraint for herself and the votarists of St. Claire. Isabella is juxtaposed by Billington to Angelo's flawed character as "a woman of determined reason and implacable faith who, at one point, forces Angelo to join her in prayer," so why does she remain so perceptively steadfast in comparison to her male counterpart if they lead seemingly similar lives before she argues for the life of her brother? The answer to this, as I have demonstrated in chapter two, is because there are tremendously fewer potential social repercussions for a man of Angelo's stature to commit fornication than there would be for Isabella.

After conveying to Isabella his terms for freeing Claudio, Angelo gets on his hands and knees to beg for Isabella's reciprocal love, which he professes to her. He resorts to begging her in the face of her rejection of him, and the scene seems comical as the audience engages in quiet laughter. However, the tone quickly changes when Isabella threatens to expose him for his outrageous behavior in exchange for her brother's pardon. Angelo's line in this moment "Who will believe thee?" is perhaps one of the most relevant references to the contemporary perception of sexual assault where women might feel a sense of helplessness when exposing their assaulters because of the fear that no one will listen to them (see fig. 1). Doran intends this moment in the play to be highlighted because of his focus on his performance as being a commentary on the #metoo movement which empowered sexual assault survivors to collectively speak out against their assaulters and tell their stories. The play does not necessarily need to be viewed in this light to gauge how troubling this scene is, and the discomfort towards Angelo's unwanted touch from Isabella's perspective makes it clear that this scene is a portrayal of real sexual assault that takes place in the play upon Isabella, even though she does not ultimately sleep with Angelo later on

through the disguise of the bed trick. When Angelo grabs Isabella, she stands frozen with her hands guarding her face and groin and holds that position even until after Angelo leaves the stage.



*Figure 1 Isabella and Angelo, Measure for Measure: Royal Shakespeare Company, directed by Gregory Doran, Opus Arte, 2019.*

Doran stages the attraction from the Duke to Isabella in Act 4 (fig. 2). The scene where the Duke holds and seemingly attempts to comfort Isabella feels very much like a sexual assault as well. The image of Isabella being held by the Duke mirrors Angelo's assault on Isabella in that he comes from behind her and places his arms around her body. The pain presented in Isabella's face is a product of the fact that she had just learned of her brother's death. In this moment the Duke takes advantage of her suffering to touch her, and while his speech displays his concern for her, his face contrasts this feigned comforting of her as he rolls his eyes back and sticks his tongue out, displaying a creepy sexualization of this moment where he is supposedly comforting her.



*Figure 2 Isabella and the Duke, Measure for Measure: Royal Shakespeare Company, directed by Gregory Doran, Opus Arte, 2019.*

There is a significant shift in tone that results at the end of the play's intermission that dramatically contrasts with what had been previously portrayed on the stage. The scene opens with a woman singing the boys part at the beginning of Act 4, and in the background is a bright pasture or garden where Mariana sits in a chair. This image is Doran's depiction of the Duke's earlier line, "there at a moated grange resides the dejected Mariana" (3.1.253), but it is also set up to closely mirror the Duke's earlier conversation with Juliet, as Mariana sits in the same chair and position on stage as her. Especially when comparing the earlier environment of a prison which Juliet inhabited, this scene is our first visible portrayal of a female space. Of course, we infer earlier in 1.3 that the scene is placed in a convent, which would be considered a prominent female space, but there is nothing done by the production to imagine that space is feminine or even at the very least, a representation of a convent. Additionally, the scene and the convent very much fades into the larger masculine space of the rest of the play because of the fact that there is nothing done to stage it differently.

Here in Act 4, however, we open with a starkly different stage from before which feels very feminine, and is additionally maintained without male intrusion at least for the duration of the song. Notably as the scene progresses, after the Duke coordinates the bed trick plan with Mariana and Isabella, there is a moment in the text which affords the Duke another monologue after the two women leave. Instead, Doran keeps Mariana and Isabella on stage in the background as the setting moves from day to night, and rather than giving the Duke further space to take control over the space in this scene with his voice, the Duke simply stands in silence, watching the two women from a distance. This choice of exempting the Duke's lines, and rather employing silence from his character provides us with our first instance in the play where the female voice along with a sense of space is conveyed as overpowering the pervasive masculinity in the play. Moreover, because the Duke's monologue from the text is deeply self-centered with an attention to how difficult it is to deal with the public perception of himself (which has nothing to do with the scene and seems very much out of place), the choice to illuminate this overtake of space is quite revealing.

In analyzing the final scene of the play in Act 5, it is important to consider how Isabella is presented. She marches in with a dishevelment that would naturally align with the image of someone who had just learned of her brother's wrongful death. Her voice is broken and distraught, but this is contrasted to the indifferent Duke who is no longer in disguise and shows no emotional comfort towards Isabella. Angelo hides his face from Isabella and shakes his head towards the accusations from Isabella were nobody on stage, aside from perhaps Escalus who looks on with concern, yet never speaks in her defense displaying that she believes her. Isabella here is depicted just as the characters view her to be: mad. The scene creates a visible reality for Angelo's earlier lines "who will believe thee, Isabel?" from 2.4. When Isabella realizes that she

is not believed and tries to leave, only to be stopped by a guard, the Duke's act of arresting her resembles the consequences of speaking out as a woman against their assaulters. Read in the reference to these lines, the Duke's casual aside to Angelo "Do you not smile at this, Lord Angelo? / O heaven, the vanity of wretched fools" (5.1.168-69) feels all the more sickening, offering a depiction of a similarly relevant issue in that men often side with other men in response to their accusers.

Ultimately, it seems as though the audience is receptive to this message that casts doubt upon the tidiness of the ending that the Duke attempts to convey in his authorial construction of the ending. While the cast, or the remaining extras who are presented as upper-class citizens clap in eerie unison for the Duke's proposal, the audience remains silent with Isabella. It seems as though the clapping from the cast members forces the audience to think introspectively about how they might be complicit in their viewership of the play as it ends with Isabella's brief looking away.

A word that I have not used during my first two chapters is *hypocrisy*. I've avoided using this word to describe the wrongdoings of the Duke, Angelo, and other characters in the play because of how obvious it is to identify them as such. Hypocrisy is the disguise that the Duke wears. We see his addiction to control played out through *Measure for Measure* even after casting doubts on Angelo's ability to rule Vienna in the prospect of him becoming overwhelmed by the power he has in place of the Duke as ruler. But hypocrisy does not have to come in the literal form of disguise. One can put on the face of righteousness and justice as Angelo does in the public sphere, but behind closed doors take on an unapologetic identity as a sexual predator. Or, hypocrisy can be manifested through the condemnation of people who participate in the practices of prostitution while simultaneously being a frequent user of those services as Lucio



does. It goes without saying that these men are hypocritical for their words and actions, but perhaps just as certain is the fact that this is a learned behavior from the church that has remained consistent throughout time.

Recent productions of *Measure for Measure* such as The Antaeus Theatre Company's performance directed by Armin Shimerman and Elizabeth Swain have attended to this issue of religious hypocrisy where the play "depicts how rigid religious beliefs can blind us to human suffering, and it offers a clear warning of what can go wrong when a ruler with impulse-control issues obtains autocratic power" (Jacobs). In an interview with the *Los Angeles Times*, Carolyn Ratteray, the actress who plays Isabella said, "Years ago, people would say, 'Isabella is so cold not to sleep with Angelo so she could free her brother,'... That reaction was the norm. Today, as a society, we're at least a little more attuned to survivors' rights. Reading this play anew, I realized Isabella suffers a tremendous trauma" (Jacobs). Ratteray's quote is a good example of how our perceptions of the play can transform over time as our cultural situation changes.

Religious hypocrisy is just as prevalent today as it has always been, and it doesn't take a Shakespearean scholar to draw the similarities that exist between current social struggles and those that are made clear in *Measure for Measure*. Most recently, Texas has passed a bill preventing women from access to abortions, limiting their autonomy over their own bodies. Not only this, but the state has also issued bounties for anybody who has any evidence of someone getting an abortion illegally. Currently there is also a larger penalty in place for women who illegally abort their pregnancy than there is for rape in the state of Texas. This means even if a woman were to be raped by a man and simultaneously impregnated by him, if she were to have an abortion after her assault and somehow convinced the court that her assault was real and not falsified, the man who raped her would receive less time in prison than she would. When asked

about this ruling, Governor Gregg Abbott assured the press that what was more important was “getting the rapists off the streets,” mirroring Trump’s fear tactics over preventing Central and South American refugees from entering the country because of the apparent likelihood that they are “killers, drug dealers, and rapists.” The reality is, as *Measure for Measure* teaches us, that rape is not as often perpetrated by someone “on the streets” as it is by someone who is already close to the victim and usually one in a position of power over them. One would not need to look further than perpetrators such as Harvey Weinstein, Bill Cosby, or even Jeffery Epstein who literally made the sex-trafficking of under-aged women a commodity for the super-rich including, we assume, Donald Trump who currently lacks conviction. Perhaps an inclusion of Andrew Cuomo’s infamous self-defense quote, “I’m not perverted, I’m just Italian” will find its way into future productions of the play.

In any case, this irresponsible conception of the law is one of the main reasons as to why rape culture still exists today. It also acts as a revitalized way for patriarchal rule to maintain the strength that it still currently has. Whereas it was the social norm in the early modern period for women to be excluded from the workforce where they would receive wages impossible to live off of if they were to work, women today are at least given more space in the workforce than they have throughout modern history. From a glance, this might seem like women are given the capabilities to live autonomously, and to a large extent this is true when comparing strictly to the early modern period, but the reality of the wage gap and the lack of female representation in decision-making levels of authority is still a reality women face today. While marriage is not as much of a necessity for women to be financially stable as it was back then, it is still true that they do not currently hold positions of power at the same rate that men do.

Although we live in a country that prides itself on the first amendment and the freedoms those entail, and although the United States was founded upon the separation between church and state, it is arguable that there is a clear lack of separation. Take the “Pledge of Allegiance,” for example— “...One nation, under God, indivisible...” or our money that states, “In God we trust.” These instances are some of the most obvious that highlight the connection between Christianity and the perceived dependency of American success on Christian beliefs and practices. Politicians often blatantly flaunt their Christian values as part of their campaign strategy, and advertise it in a way as something they could bring to the table if elected, in order to win over votes. This is especially the case of Donald Trump, attracting unrelenting and faithful supporters who could never fathom the anti-Christian values by which they rule. One of the many examples we could look to in order to visualize this kind of corruption is during the 2020 BLM protests. In response to the protests, Trump stood in front of St. John’s Church in Washington DC, holding up a Bible. In the footage, Trump is silent, simply holding up the Bible all for the sake of a photo op. Moments before this, Trump ordered the unloading of tear gas on a group of protestors nearby in order to clear the area, for this photo op. Bishop Mariann Budde of St. John’s Episcopal Church said, “He didn’t come to church to pray...to offer condolences to those who are grieving...to commit to healing our nation... [Trump held up the Bible] as if it were a prop or an extension of his military and authoritarian position” (qtd in Shabad). Just as the Duke hides behind his disguise as a friar, so too does Trump hide behind the bible as a way to grow support from his followers.

Another connection that can be made between Trump and the way the Duke disguises himself is through the way in which Trump unashamedly attempts to avoid blame in every wrongdoing he commits in order to preserve his image for his supporters. In *Measure for*

*Measure*, the Duke's decision to employ Angelo as his replacement is solely for the purpose of avoiding the responsibility of enforcing the strict laws himself and being perceived as a "tyrant." While the analogy is not necessarily perfect, the resemblance of this kind of behavior is well matched by Trumps underplaying of the coronavirus at the early stages of the pandemic to make it seem as though the country was in better shape than it actually was. The stakes of Trump's attempt to preserve his image, especially in sight of the 2020 election, have been indisputably greater than the Duke's.

Another distinct example from the present time which specifically echoes the type of injustice against Isabella in the play is the Brett Kavanaugh scandal which made headlines in 2018 as Christine Blasey Ford accused him of sexual assault after his recent nomination to the Supreme Court by Donald Trump. In his defense statement, Kavanaugh proclaims the accusations against him as being attributed to some outlandish political stunt: "This whole two-week effort has been a calculated and orchestrated political hit, fueled with apparent pent-up anger about President Trump and the 2016 election, fear that has been unfairly stoked about my judicial record, revenge on behalf of the Clintons and millions of dollars in money from outside left-wing opposition groups" (qtd in "Brett Kavanaugh's Opening Statement").

The connection between Kavanaugh and Angelo is unfortunately quite clear. Just as the Duke chooses Angelo to rule in his place because of his supposed "stricture and firm abstinence," so too did Trump appoint Kavanaugh as Supreme Court justice for his conservative "Christian" ideologies. It is further telling that Kavanaugh's similar status to Angelo is what he used in his defense when being accused of sexual assault by Christine Blasey Ford:

As to sex, this is not a topic I ever imagined would come up at a judicial confirmation hearing. But I want to give you a full picture of who I was. I never

had sexual intercourse or anything close to it during high school or for many years after that. In some crowds, I was probably a little outwardly shy about my inexperience. Tried to hide that. At the same time I was also inwardly proud of it. For me and the girls who I was friends with, that lack of major or rampant sexual activity in high school was a matter of faith and respect and caution. (qtd in “Brett Kavanaugh’s Opening Statement”)

In line with Angelo’s challenge to Isabella after she threatens to expose him for his intended sexual assault upon her, “who will believe thee Isabel?”, the trial between Blasey Ford and Kavanaugh illustrates the reason why women are hesitant to speak up publicly against their assaulters.

In response to the case between Blasey Ford and Kavanaugh, Brookline High School set their 2018 production of *Measure for Measure* in “the age of ‘tomorrow’” (Brown).

Unsurprisingly, this play would be a difficult production to perform in the high school setting with such risqué overtones, but the production approached these unashamedly: “Throughout the play, the stage hosted twerking, blow-up dolls as prostitutes and protest chants such as ‘Claudio is not a ho!’ and ‘We should not be hanged just because we banged!’... [which] put a fresh spin on the aged tale and language” (Brown). This last, crucial part of the quote where this journalist eloquently conveys the idea that this performance allowed high schoolers to connect with the play on a deeper level by infusing their own modern flare to the production is what will allow Shakespeare to still be relevant in the future as we use his plays to attend to our current and future societal issues.

While there are seemingly endless examples of how *Measure for Measure* can seamlessly be applied to current issues, it is also just as important to investigate how these issues can be

illustrated through performances. In making the case for presentism and how it fits within the current direction of scholarship on all of Shakespeare's work, not just for *Measure for Measure*, Hawkes writes: "placing emphasis on the present can't help but connect fruitfully with the current realignment of critical responses that stresses the performance of a play as much as its 'reference': that looks at what the play does, here and now in the theatre, as well as – or even against – what it says in terms of the world to which its written text refers" (5). The emphasis on what a play can do "here and now" is most significant from this quote because ultimately we have to consider how our reproductions of Shakespeare can be used to insight action.

An omission of an attention to the "here and now" in performing *Measure for Measure* is perhaps why we might feel underwhelmed by a performance that attempts to convey, in the words of Oli Burley, an "uncluttered, traditional practices production that thrives on Shakespeare's linguistic brilliance," especially as portrayed through the Globe's 2004 production of the play, which, to Lyn Gardner, felt as if "it made the average children's nursery look like a den of inequity. [...] left the theatre with the feeling that I had been patronized for three full hours" (qtd in Gibbons and Stock 1609). It should also be mentioned that in the same summer this production took place, *Measure for Measure* was also performed at the National Theatre in London, which took on a completely opposite approach where they "relied heavily on taped sound effects, electronic visual projections and stark images of illicit sex and police violence...[where at the end of Act 5] David Troughton's suddenly commanding duke—"What's yet behind that's meet you all should know" –revealed a double bed ready for a wedding night" (Gibbons and Stock 1609). This production unsurprisingly drew much stronger reactions from audience members, such as Nicholas de Jongh, who "cannot remember when [they were] last so shocked, startled or disturbed by Shakespeare" (qtd in Gibbons and Stock 1609).

Hawkes also suggests that there is a balance between reading a play historically versus approaching it purely from the lens of the present: “given that history results from a never-ending dialogue between past and present, how can we decide whose historical circumstances will have priority in that process, Shakespeare’s, or our own?” (Hawkes 3) Of course, there is danger in reading Shakespeare through only the lens of the present as well. In doing this, we might afford Shakespeare too much credit for being some kind of beacon of resistance towards antisemitism in writing a marginally sympathetic portrayal of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* where we might weigh his “If you prick us, do we not bleed?” speech with heavier weight than the injustices imposed on Shylock throughout the play labelled as a comedy. Or perhaps we might read Othello’s character as being intended strictly as a victim of racism and of Iago’s cunning deceit in *Othello* while forgetting to account for the fact that audiences of the time wouldn’t have necessarily been opposed to the racial slurs and other forms of racism enacted against Othello in the play.

We often talk about how Shakespeare’s plays continue to be popular today because of their perceived sense of timelessness: “the omnipresence of Shakespeare in our multicultural present bespeaks instead something more remarkable: our ability to reshape and rethink Shakespeare across time and space” (DiPietro and Grady 1). They exist so heavily in the canon of literature because they can still be used to negotiate our current societal issues, but the reality is that the sense of timelessness that a play like *Measure for Measure* offers us is highly dependent on our lack of response to injustices that are still prevalent today. When we react to injustice through a falsified injection of mercy as we see played out through the marriages in *Measure for Measure*, we perpetuate the same structures of oppression that are continuously in place. Scholars often speculate over the future of Vienna after the play’s end and whether or not

the city will revert to its original state before the play's onset, but instead I argue that the end of *Measure for Measure* is not about Vienna at all.



## Conclusion

In the summer of 2018, I had the distinct privilege of experiencing an RSC production of John Webster's play *The Duchess of Malfi*. I had never seen or read this play beforehand, so I had no idea what to expect. An image I will never forget occurred in the fourth act of this play during the Duchess's (played by Joan Iyiola) execution. After the intermission, Ferdinand (played by Alexander Cobb), one of the play's main antagonists and brother to the Duchess, rushed on stage and stabbed the carcass of a life-sized bull which had been ominously hanging by its hind legs on the far right corner of the stage for the duration of the performance. Throughout the remainder of this play, the bull leaked copious amounts of blood upon the stage—so much so that the production offered protective blankets for the audience members who were in close proximity to the potential spillage. Slowly the blood pooled across the stage in its entirety and characters performed through it unacknowledging its presence. In the execution scene, two men stood on either side of the Duchess tightening a rope around her neck in an attempt to strangle her. As the Duchess resisted and attempted to escape their grasp, the characters flailed around the stage splashing the blood upon their clothing and into the crowd. The room was morbidly quiet aside from the noises of the Duchess gasping for air and the grunts of the men attempting to restrain her. As I surveyed the rest of the audience, I saw people leaving their seats to shelter from the gruesome imagery being performed on stage. In her final breath, the Duchess delivered her line "I am Duchess of Malfi still" (4.2.138) as she stood on her knees with her dress stained and dripped with blood.

The visceral effect this scene left me and my fellow audience members with is not something that could easily be experienced through non-live performances. As my experience

suggests, playgoing still has its potential to inspire, upset, and exhilarate audience members in a way that screenplay cannot completely match. Although *Measure for Measure* does not exactly contain such spectacular forms of violence within the text as scene in *The Duchess of Malfi* (which I speculate is a potential reason why it has never gained as much attention as other tragedies from the time period have had up until recently), the play still offers many potential moments for audiences to experience extreme discomfort from the rhetoric used to manipulate women. A simple example of how even the delivery of lines can elicit unsettling responses from the crowd is Angelo's "Who will believe thee?" line which bears no mental strain upon the audience in regard to their following of the occasionally dense Shakespearean language. In Doran's production, as I have already mentioned in chapter three, Angelo builds up to this line somewhat comically as he begs Isabella to have sex with him, and after extracting some laughter from the crowd, he abruptly changes the tone as he threatens her. This silencing effect is accompanied by his act of groping Isabella for far too long of a duration, which can be seen in figure one in chapter three as well. When combining this kind of experience with the production of plays like *Measure for Measure* that provide room for commentary on relevant social issues, the theater can still be utilized as a space to insight action against the kinds of people in power that those plays critique.

In this thesis I have offered an illustration of how the time of *Measure for Measure's* original production and the time of our present can inform and interact with one another by analyzing the similar societal issues at play to form that connection. This study can therefore serve as an example for future presentist and historical readings of other plays during the early modern period where we might continue to close the gap between the two theoretical lenses. While the overall duration of my project has been based in critical analysis of issues regarding

religion, misogyny, and class structures, there is also great potential for future scholars to perform a similar analysis upon works which offer anti-racist readings such as Shakespeare's *Othello*, *The Tempest*, and *The Merchant of Venice*, or perhaps Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Blackness*, which would have been performed less than a year after *Measure for Measure* in James I's court. In terms of productions that could benefit from further exploration that have similar social issues at play compared to *Measure for Measure* are Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and also, as previously mentioned, John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* as well. Interestingly, these plays occur in close proximity to each other where *Hamlet* was written between 1599-1601 before the ascension of James to the throne (yet was not performed until 1609), *Measure for Measure* in 1604, and *The Duchess of Malfi* in 1614.

In the case of *Hamlet*, scholars might attend to the few women in the play such as Gertrude and Ophelia through the same, general scope of analyzing how they navigate such a profusely toxic, masculine space and consider how they seek to withhold their agency and autonomy in doing so. Reading Gertrude's marriage to Claudius through the lens of Goldman's "The Traffic in Women" would undoubtedly lend to discussions concerning the ambiguity of Hamlet's father's death. Scholars might then connect this reading to *The Duchess of Malfi* where both the Duchess and Gertrude are both widows at the beginning of the play but follow different paths in seeking remarriage, where both women are subjected to critiques from other characters. Pairing these figures with an analysis of and potential juxtaposition between either Ophelia in *Hamlet* or Cariola in *The Duchess of Malfi* could also offer interesting and opportune comparisons where both characters die prematurely but for separate reasons and also represented different levels of class.

A distinct similarity between *The Duchess of Malfi* and *Measure for Measure* is that they both take place in notably Catholic spaces, whereas *Hamlet* is situated in Lutheran Denmark. Other scholars might use these expressions of religion from each text to inform their understanding of how the play enacts violence against women depending on the religious space they inhabit, bearing in mind that Shakespeare habitually obscures the representation of either Catholicism or Protestantism in his works. In any case, these women previously listed, in addition to characters from *Measure for Measure* such as Isabella, Mistress Overdone, and Mariana (among others) are subjected to very similar patriarchal structures of rule that make it incredibly difficult to traverse the landscape of their respective plays while attempting to escape various types of persecution.

In terms of outlining future performances of *Measure for Measure* specifically, these productions might continue in the direction of making the connection between authority figures in the play and current political figures even more obvious than they are in order to resonate with crowds who might not necessarily feel like they understand Shakespeare but feel politically motivated. Perhaps this is risky business, but in the interest of spreading the awareness of the play, news headlines that involve both the play's name and something related to our current abusers of power would circulate much more efficiently than they would otherwise. Ultimately, whether it is intentional or not, any production of *Measure for Measure* in the foreseeable future will engage with commentary on the #MeToo movement.

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## Vita

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