"IS THIS HER FAULT OR MINE?": AN EXAMINATION OF THE OVERREGULATION OF SEXUALITY IN *MEASURE FOR MEASURE* AS AN ARGUMENT AGAINST EARLY MODERN ANTI-THEATRICALISM

by

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ABSTRACT

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The early modern anti-theatricalist movement sought to permanently close the playhouses, arguing that theaters breed immorality through their association with prostitution and the female body. This thesis examines how Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* reappropriates these symbols in an argument against the anti-theatricalist movement, as the overregulation of sexuality mimics the overregulation of the theater. The first section examines the overregulation of prostitution in early modern society and in the play. The second section looks at the resistance to excessive regulation of female

bodies that were portrayed as weak and unable to resist sin. The final section evaluates the theatricality of the play and demonstrates that sexuality in the play is connected to the larger argument against anti-theatricalism.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> *I am persuaded that Satan hath not a more speedie way & fitter schoole to worke and teach his desire to bring men and women into his snare of concupiscense and filthie lustes of wicked whoredoms, than those places and plaies and Theaters are.*
>
> – John Northbrooke, *A Treatise Against Idlenesse, Vaine Playes and Enterludes* in 1579 (29b).

John Northbrooke's description of the theater as a school where Satan promotes lust and whoredom exemplifies the beliefs and fears of the early modern anti-theatricalist movement. Northbrooke uses the metaphor of a school to describe the institution that anti-stage moralists believed directly competed with the church for the position of moral educator and guide for society.[1] Those who argued against the theater believed that it possessed the ability to transform the minds of those in the audience, and thus acted as a direct adversary to the church.[2] Northbrooke's criticism focuses specifically on how the theater ensnares the audience with sexual desire. The imagery of

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[1] Paul Whitfield White, "Theater and Religious Culture," in *A New History of Early English Drama*, ed. John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997): 139. White explores the connection of the theater and religion during the early modern period.

[2] Debra Bruch, "The Prejudice Against the Theater" in *The Journal of Religion and Theatre* 3, no.1 (2004): 13. Bruch reexamines the history of the theater, arguing that Christian prejudice had a significant effect on the place of theater in society.

a snare suggests an audience unwillingly trapped by the institution of the theater since the implement of a snare is associated with hunting. As a hunter might do with a helpless animal, the theater lures in its audience by temptation and traps it so that it cannot free itself from concupiscence and lust. This idea is supported by medical and literary texts of the early modern period that portray humans as easily influenced, or trapped, by external forces such as the theater, defining the body as permeable and easily penetrated by its surroundings. Anti-theatricalists use this same logic to characterize the minds of the audience as equally porous. Puritan anti-theatricalists viewed the theater as an immoral enterprise that preyed on society, and they blamed it for a variety of societal problems including, according to Debra Bruch,

> emptying the churches, perpetuating pagan custom, distorting truth, showing forth profane, seditious, and bawdy stories, teaching knavery and lechery, causing God to visit the plague on London, leading youth into idleness and extravagance, affording meeting places for harlots and customers, aiding the Pope, and corrupting maidens and chaste wives.[3]

The sheer number of crimes that the Puritans blamed on the theater speaks to the absolutism of Puritan belief. A general sense of societal decay pervaded early modern texts, as is evident in works such as Thomas Dekker's *The Belman of London* and the

[3] Bruch, 13.

Anglican Church's *Homilies*.[4] Anti-theatricalists specifically pointed blame at the theater for contributing to this decline in morality, refusing to acknowledge the possibility of a reversal in causality. They argued that the theater drew people away from the church, but not that a decline in attendance at the church may have contributed to higher attendance at the theaters. They saw a society in which lies and sedition ran rampant, but refused to believe that these characteristics of society might have contributed to the inclusion of similar incidences in plays. They pinpointed the theater as a place where prostitutes could congregate, instead of attempting to eliminate prostitution from the grounds of theaters. Perhaps the most telling of the anti-theatrical criticisms was that it assisted the Pope, as Puritans associated the theater with Catholicism.

Foundations for the Puritans' resistance to the theater exist in their desire to return to the fundamentals of a pre-Catholic church, which defined the world as a dualistic entity of good and evil, or God and Satan. [5] Edward Dering, a sixteenth century Puritan leader, summarizes the Puritan philosophy, saying, "God spake it; therefore we must do it. God speak it not; therefore we have nothing to do with it."[6] Since the theater has no mention in the Bible, Puritans rejected it and attributed its invention to Satan. [7] In addition, Puritans characterized the rituals of the Catholic

[4] Thomas Dekker, *The Belman of London*, London: 1608, *Early English Books Online*. 23 March 2005. Thomas Dekker's book examines the different types of 'vagabonds' that live in London and the sins and crimes they commit, painting a picture of London as a crime filled city. The homilies published by the Anglican Church also allude to a decline in morality that must be rectified by following the given instructions. "Against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion" provides a strong example of this sentiment.
[5] Bruch, 14.
[6] Edward Dering quoted in Everett Emerson, *English Puritanism from John Hooper to John Milton* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1968): 57. Emerson provides a look at the Puritan movement through the eyes of its leaders.
[7] Bruch, 17.

Church as theatrical, arguing for banning of such elements in the Anglican Church, including individual baptism, confirmation, certain elements of the marriage ceremony, and kneeling during communion.[8] They also rejected, as is evident in the writings of John Milton, the "idolatrous erection of temples beautified exquisitely to out-vie the Papists, the costly and dear-bought scandals, and snares of images, pictures, rich copes, gorgeous altar clothes" of the Church of England.[9] Puritans saw the concentration on imagery as idolatrous and associated it with costuming in the theater. Milton's use of the word snare to describe how this fascination with imagery works evokes Northbrooke's description of the theater, demonstrating the similarity in criticisms against the theater and Catholicism.

Puritans rejected the theatricality that was part of both of these institutions and campaigned for the reformation of the Church and a return to a more pure religion. Walter Travers, a major force in the Puritan movement, writes in 1587,

> I thought it, I say, my duty to desire and beseech this Church earnestly and carefully to think of this so great a benefit [...] to restore again the most holy policy of ruling the Church which our Savior Christ hath left unto us, and to fear lest that the Lord will punish us and will be revenged of us if we continue to despise His discipline.[10]

[8] Emerson, 16-17.
[9] John Milton quoted in Emerson, 288. While Milton's criticism of the Church does not come until later in the seventeenth century, his ideas are consistent with early Puritan complaints.
[10] Walter Travers "Church Discipline and the Gospel" quoted in Emerson, 88.

The desire to return to something earlier is key to the Puritan idea of reformation, as Puritans believed that religion at the time of Christ was more pure than the current permutation of Christianity. Puritans thought that the well-being of society was contingent on their adherence to the procedures of this early religion, and believed that if they failed to reform the church, God would punish them.

The reliance of Puritans on early models of Christianity supported their opposition to the theater, as the conflict between Christianity and the theater has its roots in the early history of the Christian church. Early Christians suffered persecution by the Roman society and government, which used the theater as a tool to suppress the growth of Christianity. The Roman government required Christians to attend theatrical performances that privileged pagan gods and displays of gruesome violence, including actual death.[11] Christians in the audience witnessed displays of pleasure and celebration in response to this violence, which sometimes took the form of sexual intercourse among audience members.[12] The lewdness and fascination with violence must have provoked animosity against the theater, a sentiment that eventually resulted in the banning of the theater once Rome was under Christian control. Puritans desired the same victory over the theater that their early counterparts had achieved.

Although early Christian rhetoric against the theater found its basis in actual theatrical practices that persecuted Christians for their beliefs, by the early modern period Christianity's status as a legal and legislated religion eliminated this issue. Since

[11] Bruch 3-4.
[12] Bruch 4. Catherine Edwards also supports this idea in "The Suffering Body: Philosophy and Pain in Seneca's *Letters*," where she argues, "While a brave fighter would be applauded, the audience would enjoy the wounds inflicted on his body as signs of victory" (252).

governments no longer forced Christians to attend events that directly conflicted with their beliefs but instead now required residents to attend Protestant churches, Puritans had less reason to attack the theater than their previous counterparts did. Despite changes in the relationship between the theater and Christianity, however, Puritan anti-theatrical polemic continued to perpetuate previous biases and argue for extreme measures not to limit but instead eliminate theatrical practice from society. To justify their arguments, anti-theatricalists made broad generalizations regarding the theater, associating it with other entities the early modern society had already stigmatized, including prostitution and the female body. Anti-theatrical criticism pinpointed the theater as one of the predominant forces working against the church in early modern England and connected it with prostitution based on factors such as proximity, similar practices, and mutual consequences. Joseph Lenz summarizes the associations anti-theatricalists drew between the theater and prostitution: "Like a brothel, the theater houses 'some lewd intrigue of Fornication'; like a bawd, it advertises its product with effeminate gesture and costly apparel; like a prostitute, the motive is the same – money."[13] Brothels not only shared the same land and buildings with theaters, but the ownership of brothels and theaters often coincided, such as in the case of Philip Henslow's Rose and Unicorn.[14] This shared physical space fueled anti-theatrical

[13] Joseph Lenz, "Base Trade: Theater as Prostitution," *ELH* 60, no.4 (1993): 833. Lenz argues that prostitution served as one of the main anti-theatrical metaphors for the theater, tracing the connection through proximity, metaphor, and historical perception. He specifically focused on the play *Troilus and Cressida* to further examine the connection between prostitution and the theater.
[14] Lenz 837-38

criticism, as critics forged further connections, accusing the theater of promoting prostitution and housing prostitutes in the audience.[15]

In addition, the actions of players on the stage were likened to those of prostitutes as both entertained their audience with showy demonstrations, in the hope of receiving a monetary reward for their efforts. Players put on costumes, not only using the clothes of those from different social classes, professions, and other situations, but also donning the dresses of women. The sexual favors that a prostitute performs for her customers are not unlike the motions that a player makes as he walks across the stage since in both bodies become commodities to trade. Wallace Shugg's description of early modern prostitution as "indiscriminate intercourse, the absence of real love or affection, and payment in cash" is applicable to early modern players as well, as players interact with an audience with whom they have no personal connection for monetary compensation.[16]

Anti-theatricalists also connected the theater and prostitution through the consequences of indulging in both vices, namely disease, corruption, and a toppling of the structures of authority. Early modern writers located the blame for syphilis largely in the institution of prostitution. [17] Syphilis had a "reputation for being intentionally,

[15] Lenz, 837.
[16] Shugg 291.
[17] For more information, see Milburn. He examines the syphilitic symbolism in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, arguing that "The poem's symbolic relay between the health of the individual body and the health of the national body—a common feature of Elizabethan thought—ties political stability to the regulation of venereal disease and consequently advocates the imposition of an emerging medical power over the life of the English citizen" (617). He goes on to point out that the text specifically targets "the illicit activities of the sexually active public" as the source of disease (617).

surreptitiously spread, particularly by women of loose morals."[18] Those who indulged in pleasure with these women knew they risked painful consequences. Louis F. Qualtiere and William W. E. Slights write, "Moral outrage was sanctioned by a widespread conviction that God himself had made the disease to punish impure sexual contact," although there was some debate as to "[w]hether God executed his punishment of fornicators directly or by guiding 'natural' causes."[19] While syphilis served as both a real and symbolic symbol of the dangers of prostitution, disease in general took on the same function in relation to society. Anti-theatricalists also saw the plague, which closed the theater in 1592-1594 and later in 1608-1609 as a punishment for the immorality of society. The institutions of prostitution and the theater represented the spread of disease both as a problem associated with crowds and sexuality and metaphorically as the decay of society.

William Rankin explores the relationship between the audience and the play in *A Mirrovr of Monsters*, published in 1587. In his discussion, he speaks of how an audience is poisoned through viewing a play, a metaphor compatible with early modern conceptions of disease. He refers to players as "ungodlie" men who,

> like the Viper forget them that feedes their venom with their poison, thereby to increase their stings, and to hurt the world which they are borne to offend, and ungratefullie reward them, that will sped their time for their profit, labour for their lust, and painefull trauaile to

[18] Louis F. Qualtiere and William W.E. Slights, "Contagion and Blame in Early Modern England: The Case of

> please them, whole pleasure as poison spreddeth it selfe
> into the vaines of the beholders.[20]

Rankin describes the audience as feeding the players. Whether with the money that they pay to see the play or with their applause, the audience nourishes the players. According to Rankin, however, the players do not demonstrate appreciation for this nourishment. Instead they are described as vipers who sting those who feed them. The painful sting of the viper, and the painful death that follows from the poison as it "spreddeth it selfe into the vaines" provides a portrayal of agony. Those who entered the playhouse with the expectation of pleasure receive this painful "reward" of an infected body. Rankin's use of the metaphor of poison represents the infection of the soul. While the playhouses closed for the plague, anti-theatricalists characterized the theaters as filled with another type of disease, which infected the mind. Both prostitution and the play shared, in the minds of anti-theatricalists, not only the potential for physical infection, but also for the type of infection that resulted in damnation.

Another shared consequence of the theater and prostitution was the dismissal of structures of authority, specifically in regards to women. These structures held great importance in the early modern period as is evident in the Homily on Obedience,

> Take away Kings Princes, Rulers, Magistrates, Iudges,
> and such estates of GODS order, no man shall ride or goe
> by the high way vnrobbed, no man shall sleepe in his

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the French Pox." *Literature and Medicine* 22, no.1 (2003): 17.
[19] Louis F. Qualtiere and William W.E. Slights, : 8-9.
[20] Rankin, William, *A Mirrovr of Monsters* (London: 1587) *Early English Books Online*: 17b.

> owne house or bedde vnkilled, no man shall keepe his wife, children, and possession in quietness.[21]

Maintaining the structure of authority, in terms of both government and family relations was portrayed as necessary to preserve the safety of the society. The structure of a family with the man ruling over the household corresponded to the larger society's structure of the monarchy over the people. While the Homily names the potential consequences of disobedience as robbery and murder, in the household insubordination might result in excessive sexuality and cuckoldry. According to this way of thinking, involvement with institutions such as prostitution or the theater could lead to these consequences.

Prostitution challenged traditional gender roles by allowing the employment of women, who, since they had their own means of supporting themselves, could not be controlled by male structures of authority. The theater questioned the social structure by placing men on stage dressed in female clothing and allowing women in the audience.

Concerned about the privileging of femininity in the theater, anti-theatricalists similarly drew connections between the female body and the theater, as they described both as morally weak. Descriptions of leaky, permeable bodies traditionally linked to femininity became descriptions of both the audience and the actors involved in a theatrical presentation. Eyes and ears served as open pores through which the audience

[21] "Homily on Obedience: An Exhortation Concerning Good Order, and Obedience to Rulers and Magistrates," *Renaissance Electronic Texts 1.1* (1994), www.anglicanlibrary.org/homilies/bk1hom10.htm: 1-2.

became infected by whatever message of immorality the theater was presenting. In Stephan Gosson's *School of Abuse*, he writes,

> In our assemblies at playes in London, You shall see suche heauing, and shoouing, such ytching and shouldring, to sytte by women; suche care for their garments, that they be not trode on: such eyes to their lappes [...]: such masking in their ears, I knowe not what.[22]

Gosson associates the desire for female bodies with the glances exchanged during the play. While men shoved each other to get close to the women they desired, they also used their eyes to gaze upon her body, specifically in this passage, her lap, penetrating her with their sight. According to Paul Yachin, early modern society saw the eye as "both penetrable and penetrating."[23] To the Puritans, the involvement of eyes contributed to the types of interaction and potential transformation in the audience. One concern was that females who attended plays were, as Patricia Parker describes, "made 'common' in the public theater by the gaze of many men, no longer subject to the exclusive surveillance and control of father or husband." [24] The idea of the "common" woman is that of a prostitute, someone whose sexuality is readily available. The anti-

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[22] Stephan Gosson, *The School of Abuse* (London: 1579). Early English Books Online: 18f.
[23] Paul Yachnin, "Eye to eye opposed" in *The Culture of Playgoing in Shakespeare's England: A Collaborative Debate*, ed. Anthony B. Dawson and Paul Yachnin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): 72. (He refers to *The Taming of the Shrew* "unknit that threat'ning unkind brow,/ And dart not scornful glances from those eyes,/ To would thy lord (5.2.136-38)" to show the power attributed to eyes in the period.)
[24] Parker, Patricia, "Othello and Hamlet: Dilation, Spying, and the 'Secret Place' of Woman," *Representations* 44 (1993): 84. Parker argues that there is a connection between spying to reveal something hidden and the language of opening "the 'privy' place of woman" (60).

theatricalist belief that women were transformed into prostitutes through the medium of a gaze suggests the power that early modern society attributed to the eyes.

In Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, when Olivia says about Viola, "Even so quickly may one catch the plague?/ Methinks I feel this youth's perfections/ With an invisible and subtle stealth/ To creep in at mine eyes" (1.5.295-298)," her description shows how people thought that infection could "creep" in through the eyes because of visual stimulation. Olivia's association of the exchange of looks with the exchange of disease alludes to the danger anti-theatricalists attributed to the theater, associating the theater not only with the potential for contracting physical disease but also with the ability to alter a person's sense of morality. This concept is further complicated through Viola's status as a woman dressed as a man, played by a male actor. In the scene, Olivia believes that Viola is actually Cesario, the disguise Viola has adopted. On stage, the audience saw desire exchanged between two female characters, both played by male actors. The homoeroticism associated with this scene is characteristic of the types of transformations that anti-theatricalists feared. The disguise that Viola dons tricks Olivia into desiring another woman.

Anti-theatricalists believed this type of transformation did not end on the stage with the characters, however. Instead, the potential for infection also affected the actors themselves, in the minds of the anti-theatricalists. They believed that the players' constant changing of identity, alongside the changing of costumes, would "have a destabilizing effect on their sense of self." [25] The altering of a person based on the role

[25] White, 140.

that he played suggests that an inherent weakness in identity that allowed the theater easily to transform individuals into immoral beings. By associating the theater with prostitution and female bodies, anti-theatricalists argued that its weak audience and unstable players became agents of the devil, a view that demonized the theater and identified it as the root of societal problems.

While anti-theatricalists presented their views as undeniable fact, the movement was not immune to criticism. As Howard suggests, the variety and number of anti-theatrical tracts indicate "that the public theater was not viewed in the period as an isolated phenomenon, but as part of an ensemble of cultural and social changes disturbing enough to warrant various forms of intervention and management."[26] Certainly, anti-theatricalists wanted their audience to identify the cause of all these misfortunes as the institution of the theater. Those who opposed the anti-theatricalist movement argued, however, for a reevaluation of the direction of this causality, recognizing moral indiscretions in the theater as the result of larger societal issues. Opponents of the anti-theatricalists movement made their arguments through tracts that directly addressed the issue, as well as in literature and plays. These texts of opposition recognized the absurdity of a movement that used old doctrine to defend new regulations and questioned the extremity of the measures it advocated. In *The Unfortunate Traveller*, Thomas Nashe uses ana-baptists to represent the Puritans, describing them as "Verie deuout Asses they were, for all they were so dunstically set

[26] Jean E. Howard, *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1994): 23. Howard argues that the theater provided a significant avenue for social change in the early modern period.

forth, and such as thought they knew as much of Gods minde as richer men."[27] Like others opposed to the extreme nature of the Puritan anti-theatricalist movement, Nashe rejects the reliance on Scripture and the assumptions Puritans made about the theater. He characterizes the excessive reliance on the Bible as absurd, connecting devoutness with ignorance.

Other criticism of anti-theatricalism questioned the hypocrisy of the movement, pointing out that some anti-theatricalists were members of the theater community or had been at one time. Stephen Gosson attempts to diffuse this criticism as he begins *The School of Abuse* with a note to his reader:

> Gentelmen, and others, you may wel thinke that I fell you my corne, and eate Chaffe; barter my Wine, & drinke Water; sith I take vpon me to deterre you from Playes, when mine owne woorkes are dayly to be seene vpon stages, as sufficient witnesses of mine owne folly, and feuere ludges against my selfe.[28]

Gosson plays the part of the penitent anti-theatrical propagandist, admitting his involvement in plays, but at the same time rejects them, as if he has to admit his involvement in order to absolve himself of guilt. While he acknowledges the problems with his own association with the theater, his criticism of the theater is no less severe as

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[27] Jennifer L. Anderson, Jennifer L., "Anti-Puritanism, Anti-Popery, and Gallows Rhetoric in Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller*" in *Sixteenth Century Journal* 35, no.1 (2004): 45. Anderson views *The Unfortunate Traveller* as an argument against the Puritan movement; Thomas Nashe, *The Vnfortvnate Traveller p. 233 (205-328) The Works of Thomas Nashe* 1958 ed. Ronald B. McKerrow Vol. 2 Basil Blackwell Oxford

he argues that the "wanton speache" of actors "whette desire to inordinate lust," locating the danger of the theater in sexuality.[29]

While anti-theatricalists criticized the theater for its supposed immorality, the theater housed criticism of its own, often directed towards the abuse of power, or authority. Although both the theater and the anti-theatrical texts shared the characteristic of criticism, anti-theatricalists were more worried about resolving everything and leaving little room for debate, while plays presented more ambivalent representations of their subjects. [30] The target of criticism of Shakespeare's plays varied from writings against the pope and Catholicism to more controversial criticism of Puritanism.[31] The play *Measure for Measure*, constructs an argument against the anti-theatricalist movement through its examination of overregulation. Specifically, the play focuses on the overregulation of sexuality, in the areas of prostitution and female bodies. By using these elements of the anti-theatricalists platform to construct its argument, *Measure for Measure* encourages audiences to reevaluate assumptions made by the anti-theatricalists movement and reject the elimination of the theater.

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[28] Stephan Gosson, *The School of Abuse*. Stephen Gosson admits his status of a playwright, and this is confirmed in Francis Meres *Palladis Tamia* 284.
[29] Gosson, B6b.
[30] Jeremy Lopez, *Theatrical Convention and Audience Response in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 26. Lopez argues that we can develop a better understanding of the early modern audience through the examination of the plays from the period.
[31] White 144.

CHAPTER 2

PROSTITUTION AND POWER

The regulation of sexuality in *Measure for Measure* speaks against the overregulation that the Puritans advocated, as Angelo, an overly enthusiastic substitute for the Duke, sentences Claudio to death for impregnating Juliet. His choice of punishment seems excessive in the context of a play in which prostitutes enjoy a great deal of stage presence. An early modern audience would have recognized the severe punishments in the play as representative of recent trends in the regulation of prostitution and of the theater. While the regulation of prostitution was not a newly introduced phenomenon, the increasing severity of punishments that accompanied the regulation represented a transition away from regulation for practical purposes to regulation for moral concerns.

The legal regulation of prostitution in England began in 1162, when an ordinance passed by Parliament required that brothel houses not employ any woman who showed symptoms of venereal disease.[32] The same set of ordinances also required that brothels close on religious holidays, ordered that representatives of law to search

[32] Wallace Shugg, "Prostitution in Shakespeare's London," in *Shakespeare Studies* 10 (1977): 292. Shugg constructs a history of the early modern prostitute to form a foundation to examine the literary prostitutes such as Mrs. Overdone.

the houses on a weekly basis, and forbade the employment of women without their consent.[33] While prostitution was associated with the contraction of venereal disease, the interference with religious practice, and the potential for exploitation, this early attempt to regulate sexual misconduct specifically focused on controlling and not on eliminating prostitution. If the government could carefully regulate prostitution, then the practice was at least legally, if not socially, acceptable. The attempt to control prostitution did not end, however, with the acceptance of these ordinances. The London Enactment of 1393 allowed brothel houses in Southwark and Cock Lane, but forbade prostitutes in other districts of London.[34] The relocation of prostitutes to a specific area allowed for tighter regulation of the practice since regulators could keep a closer eye on the brothels and more easily differentiate those who partook in the practice from those who did not.

The new, stricter regulations did not provide an acceptable solution to all, however, and Parliament introduced serious attempts to close the brothels in 1506. Starting in 1520, leaders of the Reformation began a general campaign against the brothels, which focused on the increase of syphilis and on the priests who were supposed to frequent the brothels.[35] In 1546, Henry VII issued a proclamation aimed at a "final" closing of the brothels, which once again scattered prostitutes around London and made policing of prostitution more difficult.[36] In *Measure for Measure*, Pompey informs Mrs. Overdone that the government has issued a new proclamation that "All

[33] Shugg 292.
[34] Shugg 292-293.
[35] Shugg 293.
[36] Shugg 294

houses in the suburbs of Vienna must be/ pluck'd down" (1.2.95-95), certainly alluding to these types of attempts. These stricter rules against prostitution reversed the effect of earlier laws, however, causing the scattering of prostitutes around London.[37] In play, Pompey also tries to convince Mrs. Overdone, "Though you change your place, you need not/ change your trade" (1.2.107-108). Like the prostitutes in London, those in the play find new locations to continue business. In the 1580s, the Puritans began a campaign for moral reform, which suggested stronger punishments, including the death penalty for prostitution, bringing a new level of severity to the regulation of prostitution.[38]

This severe reaction to sexuality is at the core of *Measure for Measure*, as Angelo tackles the issue of rampant sexuality. Flaws are exposed in his desire to regulate prostitution and sexuality, however, as symbols of prostitution fill the play, not only in the obvious characters of the bawd, Mrs. Overdone, and prostitutes, such as Kate Keepdown, but also through characters who represent the upper class and/or regulators.

In *Measure for Measure*, the interaction and effects of prostitutes and their customers challenge Angelo's overregulation. While late in the play, one of the prisoners is given the name Mr. Rash to denote his involvement with prostitutes, the connection of prostitution to disease in the play is tentative at best (4.3.4). A conversation between a gentlemen and Lucio demonstrates the inconsistency in this connection. The gentleman says of Madam Mitigation, "I have purchas'd as many

[37] Shugg 293.

diseases under her roof as come to—" (1.2.46-47). He continues, "Thou art always figuring diseases in me; but thou art full of error, I am sound" (1.2.53-54). Although he has purchased many diseases, he claims not to have gotten his money's worth. Although disease is assumed the obvious and definite consequence of partaking in a prostitute, the gentleman claims he has not caught the disease, suggesting that a person may take pleasure in a prostitute without receiving the punishment of disease. Lucio responds to him, however, stating, "Nay, not (as one would say) healthy; but so sound as things that are hollow. They bones are hollow; impiety has made a feast of thee" (1.2.5-57). Lucio, like the early modern anti-theatricalists who do not believe an audience member might escape contamination from what he/she sees on the stage, does not believe that the gentleman could have escaped syphilis during his encounter with a prostitute. While initial attempts to regulate prostitution had focused on practical implications such as venereal disease, Lucio, like Puritan anti-theatricalists, is more concerned with moral corruption. Since syphilis was seen as a punishment from God for impure actions, the possibility that disease was not a necessary consequence of prostitution challenged moral arguments for its elimination.

The play further challenges the overregulation of prostitution by locating the blame for sexual misconduct in the hands of authority. Angelo, the Duke, and Isabella are all portrayed in situations associated with prostitution during the play. By connecting authority figures with prostitution, the play demonstrates the problem of

[38] Shugg 303.

government punishing a crime that is not unlike its display of power.[39] Through the examination of prostitution, *Measure for Measure* acknowledges problems with prostitution, such as disease and corruption, but in doing so relocates the blame in characters who represent figures of authority.

Angelo is first connected to prostitution in the opening of the play, as the Duke leaves Angelo in his place to run the country and maintain order while he travels. When Angelo arrives at the court to discover his new assignment, he says, "Always obedient to your Grace's will,/ I come to know your pleasure" (1.1.25). The fervor with which he approaches the Duke's will is similar to the passion that prostitutes and players must display for their customers. Both occupations rely on an exchange of pleasure for profit. Prostitutes please their customers with sexual favors in exchange for money, while players perform on stage for their customers for the same monetary reward. The payment that Angelo expects for fulfilling the Duke's pleasure is the receipt of power, an even more valuable commodity in the early modern period. Angelo's connection to prostitution finds further reinforcement in his treatment of Claudio and Isabella.

Isabella's use of a similar line, "I am come to know your pleasure" (2.4.31) when she approaches Angelo to beg for the pardon of her brother suggests her actions are also like a prostitute. Angelo explains to Isabella that she can free her brother,

[39] Jonathan Dollimore points out that critics have traditionally argued that *Measure for Measure* is an argument about how sexuality must be controlled. He argues, however, that the flawed figures of authority in the play instead call for a reevaluation of authority, as "corruption is displaced from authority to desire and by implication from the rulers to the ruled" (73). Dollimore, "Transgression and Surveillance in *Measure for Measure*," in *Political Shakespeare*, ed. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985): 72-87.

Claudio, if she will "lay down the treasures of [her] body" (2.4.96). Isabella quickly agrees to submit her body for punishment in place of Claudio's. She says, "Th' impression of keen whips I'ld wear as rubies,/ And strip myself to death, as to a bed/ That longing have been sick for, ere I'ld yield/ My body up to shame" (2.4.101-104). Consenting to the penetration of her body by a whip, Isabella shows that she is willing to trade her body for the pardon of her brother. Her body becomes a commodity to trade, and thus she transforms into a prostitute through her words, leaving the audience to wonder whether the words an actor speaks on stage have the power to change his identity. She makes it clear, however, that she is unwilling to serve Angelo sexually and endure the shame of losing her virginity. Although Angelo promises that if she will "give [him] love" in the sexual sense, he will pardon Claudio, Isabella is able to resist Angelo's request.

Angelo becomes the instigator in a plan to force Isabella into a prostitute-like situation, ironically in an attempt to punish Claudio's sexual transgression. His punishment of the crime with the crime, his response of measure with an equal measure, demonstrates the problems with overzealous ruling. The play suggests that Angelo's response is even worse than the original crime, however, through Madame Overdone's response to Claudio. She describes, "Well, well; there's one yonder arrested and carried to prison was worth five thousand of you all" (1.2.60-61), referring to Lucio and the other customers of prostitutes. Mrs. Overdone believes that Claudio and Juliet's actions are not as bad as prostitution, and thus not as bad as Angelo's response. Angelo's actions force an innocent girl into the position of a prostitute and push her brother

further into sin. As Jonathan Dollimore argues, "Whatever subversive identity the sexual offenders in this play possess is a construction put upon them by authority which wants to control them."[40] The overregulation of sexuality in the play creates the identities of Claudio and Juliet and leads to further sexual misconduct on the part of Angelo and Claudio.

When Isabella approaches Claudio with Angelo's ultimatum, Claudio initially is shocked, but realizing it is his only chance at survival, he asks her to submit to Angelo's request. Isabella says to Claudio if she does so it will "leave you naked" (3.1.72), alluding to the incestuous nature of the action. She follows up by saying, "Is't not a kind of incest, to take life/ From thine own sister's shame?" (3.1.138-139). Claudio becomes a bawd for Isabella, selling his own sister's body to save his life, a situation Isabella recognizes when she says, "Mercy to thee would prove itself a bawd" (3.1.149).

It is not the initial sexual deviance that causes the society to fall into a downward spiral of immorality, but instead Angelo's fanatical response to it. Like the Puritans who thought they could eliminate the threat of immorality by eliminating the theater, Angelo believes that by strictly punishing those who break the laws regarding sexual behavior he can resolve societal ills. The audience discovers, however, the inherent problems with such an extreme and unquestioning response, the same type of response the Puritans advocated towards the theater, as Angelo becomes entranced by the idea of attaining the unattainable. As Katherine Eisaman Maus argues, "prohibition

[40] Dollimore 73.

is aphrodisiac."[41] The Puritan resistance to the theater did not eliminate societal problems, but instead encouraged rebellion in the form of excessive sexuality and also through the criticism of Puritanism through theatrical means.

The relocation of prostitution onto unexpected characters of authority in the play, as well as the challenge to the effects of prostitution speaks against the type of overregulation that anti-theatricalists advocated. Arguments against the overregulation of prostitution, alongside those against excessive control of female bodies demonstrate that an abuse of authority and a desire for absolute regulation are more problematic than the institutions themselves.

[41] Katherine Eisaman Maus, *Inwardness and the Theater in the English Renaissance* (Chicago: Chicago University Press): 164. Maus examines the conflicting morality of a society that punishes not the crime of sexuality, but the revealing of it. Applying this to *Measure for Measure*, Juliet and Claudio are punished because of the visual results of their sin, while Angelo hopes to escape punishment hidden in his chambers.

CHAPTER 3

FALSE FEMININITY

The portrayal of female bodies in *Measure for Measure* also supports an argument against excessive control, or regulation, as the play challenges traditional views of women. Society viewed women as weak creatures that could not control their bodily urges, a view predicated on Christian teaching and supported by early modern texts. Early modern theologians used Christian doctrine, based on the Genesis account of original sin, to justify their belief that woman was not only a physically but also a morally weaker being who was unable to resist temptations in the world around her. As Juan Luis Vives writes in discussing the education of women,

> But since we do not wish the young girl to be as learned as she is chaste and virtuous, care must be taken on the part of the parents that she not be defiled by anything immoral or dishonorable, and that nothing of that nature be acquired through the bodily senses or through her upbringing.[42]

[42] Juan Luis Vives, *The Education of a Christian Woman: A Sixteenth-century Manual*, trans. and ed. Charles Fantazzi (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000): 54. Vives, a sixteenth-century Spanish scholar, presents his idea of the best education for Christian women, focusing on the regulation of interactions and what they read.

As Vives conveys, Renaissance writers believed that women were easily corrupted by immoral forces with which they came into contact and suggested that avoiding potential vehicles of infection was the only way to preserve the morality of a woman. Medical texts of the period supported this idea, justifying the definition of female weakness with images of leaky female bodies that could not control what entered or left them. Gail Kern Paster elaborates on this theory in her book *The Body Embarrassed*, where she describes how women were portrayed as unable to control both their appetites and their excrements, ranging from linguistic exclamation to urine and menstruation.[43] The sexual appetite of a woman was considered dangerously insatiable.[44] Further justification for the connection of sexual appetite and hunger in the early modern period is found in *The most delectable and pleasaunt history of Clitiphone and Leucippe*, a classical text by Achillis Tatius which was translated into English and republished by Thomas Creed in London in 1597. In the text, Clitiphon connects meals with sexual encounters on several occasions. In one place, he ponders, "but al my dreams were of Leucippe, me thought I talked with her, I plaid with her, I supped with her, & did attain more pleasures then in the day time: I kissed her, and did attaine more pleasures."[45] The connection of eating and "more pleasures" suggests that the satisfaction of sexual desires is connected with the pleasure that comes from eating.

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[43] Paster, Gail Kern, The Body Embarrassed: Drama and Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

[44] Weil, Rachel, "Sometimes a Scepter is Only a Scepter: Pornography and Politics in Restoration England," *The Invention of Pornography*, Ed. Lynn Hart (New York: Zone Books, 1993): 148. Rachel Weil discusses the expectations held regarding gender roles and sex in the early modern period in her article.

[45] Tatius, Achillis. The most delectable and pleasant history of Clitiphone and Leucippe: Written first in Greeke, by Achillis Tatius, and Alexandrian: and now newly translated into English by VV. B. Whereunto is also annexed the argument of euery booke, in the beginning of the same, for the better understanding of the historie. London: Printed by Thomas Creed, for William Mattes, 1597. EEBO STC/ 1370:01. P.7

Because women were considered incapable of resisting their sexual urges or other temptations, society placed restrictions on the actions of women and held their fathers or husbands responsible for controlling them. The church enforced these regulations, as the Homily on the State of Matrimony quotes Ephesians 5.22-23: "Let women bee subiect to their husbands as to the Lorde; for the husband is the head of the woman, as Christ is the head of the Church."[46] The homily further explains,

> For the woman is a weake creature, not indued with like strength and constancie of minde, therefore they by the sooner disquieted, and they be the more prone to all weake affections & dispositions of mind, more then men bee, & lighter they bee, and more vaine in their fantasies and opinions.[47]

The church portrayed women as more sinful beings who could not distinguish right from wrong and who easily fell prey to their temptations, advocating strict control over their actions.

In *Measure for Measure*, the early modern portrayal of women is challenged as the play first acknowledges these descriptions, and then goes on to show how these negative portrayals of women are often inaccurate or equally applicable to men. By speaking against the claim that women were less morally capable, the play challenges the restrictions placed on women.

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[46] "Homily on the State of Matrimony," *Renaissance Electronic Texts 1.1* (1994), www.anglicanlibrary.org/homiles/bk2hom18.htm: 5.
[47] "Homily on the State of Matrimony", 3.

The unquenchable desire of women is represented in *Measure for Measure* through physical hunger and the consumption of food. Pompey's connects sexual and physical hunger in his description of how Elbow's wife "came in great with child; and longing. (saving your honors' reverence) for stew'd pruins" (2.1.89-90). Even after evidence is presented that Mrs. Elbow's sexual desire has been addressed, her cravings for "stew'd pruins" reveal her insatiability. Another encounter with female appetite in *Measure for Measure* comes in Pompey's description of Mrs. Overdone: "she hath eaten up all her beef, and/ she is herself in the tub" (3.2.56-57). Mrs. Overdone, a previous prostitute who had to retire and become a bawd because of her age, is given this disturbing description where men and beef are likened, and she is described as a consumer of both.

Despite the inclusion of these descriptions which are consistent with traditional beliefs about women, the play does not maintain this viewpoint throughout. Instead, the play also uses figures of the female body in less likely places, not normally associated with feminine characteristics, suggesting to the audience that the play is concerned with challenging traditional assumptions about femininity, and therefore the way that it is regulated. Pregnancy serves as a metaphor for actions of male characters, specifically those in the governing body. At the beginning of the play, the Duke says to Escalus, "The nature of our people,/ Our city's institutions, and the terms/ For common justice, y' are as pregnant in/ As art and practice hath enriched any/ That we remember" (1.1.9-13). The term "pregnant" describes Escalus, taking on the meaning of full, or ready, representing his knowledge about society, laws, and justice. The choice of the word

"pregnant" in a play centered on the punishment of a couple for a pregnancy out of wedlock is certainly significant, however. Using the word pregnant to describe Escalus both equates him with a woman and elevates the position of the female identity. Examining Escalus in terms of femininity, the audience is reminded that the female characters on stage are all played by male actors. True to the meaning of his name, the character of Escalus functions like a set of scales, a balancing force between masculinity and femininity, which resists the absolute separation of the two social constructs.

The relationships and location of blame in the pairs of Claudio and Juliet and of Isabella and Angelo also challenge traditional assumptions. Isabella and Juliet are physically juxtaposed on the stage as Angelo says, "Well; let her be admitted. See you the fornicatress be remov'd" as Isabella arrives and Juliet is dismissed (2.2.23-24). He desires that the virgin enter the room and also that he can enter her. In doing so, he would damage her body, voiding her chastity. Mario Digangi argues, "The copiousness of the whore and the barrenness of the virgin are presented as ideological counters in *Measure for Measure*, against which the exclusive closure of the chaste wife [...] should be posited as the ideal measure," but I would argue instead that while these bodies have fundamental differences, they ultimately share in the same argument against overregulation as they both challenge images of the female body and thus force a reevaluation of Puritan rhetoric based on these ideas.[48] Isabella's challenge exists in her ability to resist temptation despite early modern assumptions that the female body is too

permeable for self-control. Juliet's resistance to traditional ideas of the female body comes in her lack of blame for the sexual indiscretion of which she is part. The play also challenges assumptions about the female body through the actions of their male counterparts.

In *Measure for Measure*, Juliet bears the evidence of her sexual encounter with Claudio through her pregnant body. The Duke describes her sin as "heavier" than Claudio's despite their mutual participation in the crime, speaking to the way women were perceived in the early modern period as culpable for all sexual deviance. But while both the Duke and early modern society blame women for actions of sexual excess, the play places more emphasis on the culpability of Claudio. Pompey, the clown, describes the reason for Claudio's imprisonment as "Groping for trouts in a peculiar river" (1.2.90). Pompey's description equates the female body with a private river, where fishing is restricted. Both actions are unlawful, and thus Pompey equates them, to show how the government does not demonstrate discernment when punishing individual crimes. In addition, his description locates little blame in the female body since a river is not responsible for who fishes in it. Mrs. Overdone asks Pompey, "What? Is there a maid with child by him?" (1.2.91) to which he responds, "No; but there's a woman with maid by him." (1.2.92). This passage plays on the word "maid" as a young fish, further extending Pompey's metaphor and suggesting once again a lack of

[48] Mario Digangi "Pleasure and Danger: Measuring Female Sexuality in *Measure for Measure*," *ELH* 60, no.3 (1993): 600-601. Digangi argues that the focus on defining female sexuality in *Measure for Measure* is symptomatic of the male anxiety regarding the female body.

participation on the part of the woman.[49] The use of this metaphor, along with Lucio's description of Claudio's action as "filling a bottle with a tun-dish" (3.2.172), suggests an inactive female body. The blame for the action in the play is placed on Claudio, and not on Juliet, although Juliet physically bears the signs of their actions on her pregnant body. As Claudio describes, their crime "With character too gross is writ on Juliet" (1.2.155).

Claudio's insemination of Juliet becomes a metaphor for writing both in the visible pregnancy, the creation of a new child, and in the control over his new fate. When Lucio urges a more descriptive response to his question about Claudio's imprisonment, Claudio claims, "What but to speak of would offend again" (1.2.136). Like the action itself, speech is portrayed as insemination. By speaking the crime, he will commit it again. He will re-impregnate, this time, Lucio with the knowledge of his crime. The knowledge of such a crime is, it seems, as dangerous as the pregnancy itself. The metaphor of language for pregnancy is further elaborated as Claudio describes, "The stealth of our most mutual entertainment/ With character too gross is writ on Juliet" (1.2.154-155). Insemination becomes an act of writing, both of the man onto the woman and also of the man, in this case, of his own destiny.

As Claudio is taken to prison, he is first shown around the city as part of his punishment, then sentenced to death and housed in the prison until his execution can be performed. He asks the Provost, "Fellow, why dost thou show me thus to th' world?/ Bear me to prison, where I am committed" (1.2.116-117). Claudio begs to be taken out

[49] "Maid." The Oxford English Dictionary provides the definition of "Any of several fishes," quoting J. Jones

of the spotlight. He initially accepts his imprisonment, but cannot endure the judgment of his neighbors as he is carted around the city. To him it is the gaze which brings pain in the form of shame. In *The Diary of Henry Machyn*, there are several examples of this type of practice, where criminals are displayed, often with a sign announcing their crime.[50] The display of Claudio in such a way reinforces his guilt by making it visible to the public.

Juliet, on the other hand, becomes a side-note in the play. Describing her state of pregnancy, the Provost says, "What shall be done, sir, with the groaning Juliet?" (2.2.15). She is described in an animalistic fashion, as if she is nothing more than a beast, further enforcing her lack of responsibility for the action that has taken place. The play challenges the culpability of the female body and in doing so challenges the criticism of the theater that relied on the metaphor of a weak and immoral female identity.

The character of Isabella also challenges expectations of female identity through her interaction with Angelo. As previously argued, Isabella is forced into a prostitute-like situation through the encounter. Although her character is morphed into this traditional symbol for the dangerous leaky woman, the juxtaposition of this identity with her identity as a novice in the nunnery encourages the audience to question whether she fits into the categories identified by early modern society. Angelo sees her in terms of a virgin conquest as he describes, "Never could the strumpet,/ With all her

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1579 *Arte Preseruing Bodie & Soule„* "Of fishes,..Whiting, Smelt, Maids, Loch, Sammon" and a 1598 *Epulario* "Take out the guts of maids or Thornebackes by the gils with a forke or string."

double vigor, art and nature/ Once stir my temper; but this virtuous maid/ Subdues me quite" (2.2.183-185). She is seen as an object of temptation, but not as unwilling to resist temptation, as she says, "I had rather/ my brother die by the law than my son should be/ unlawfully born" (3.1.189-191). She shares with early modern society a focus on virginity as the one virtue a woman can possess. Isabella says she will lay down her life before her virginity (3.1.103-104), but to Claudio "Death is a fearful thing" (3.1.115), and he is willing to forfeit his sister's most valued possession—her virginity—for his life, showing that the female body is a commodity for trade.

While women were traditionally portrayed as morally weak beings who possessed a voracious sexual appetite, in *Measure for Measure*, it is Angelo and not Isabella, who demonstrates moral weakness and insatiable desire. While the blame traditionally attributed to women is transferred from Juliet to Claudio, a similar transfer occurs as Isabella's femininity becomes Angelo's. Instead of Isabella displaying a sexual appetite, Angelo is the one who cannot achieve satisfaction. Angelo says of the words that Isabella speaks, "She speaks, and 'tis/ Such sense that my sense breeds with it" (2.2.142-143). Using the metaphor of breeding, he alludes to the sexual nature of their conversation. The idea that words can be used to breed plays on the anti-theatricalist concerns that people who heard the words on the early modern stage became injected with these ideas. Ironically, however, it is not the weak female who is affected by the words, but instead the male ruler who is trying to regulate the sexuality

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[50] *The Diary of Henry Machyn*. Ed. Nichols, John Gough. Camden Society: 1848. Reprinted by Johnson Reprint, 1968. *The Diary of Henry Machyn* examines the day-to-day happenings in London between 1550 and 1563 through the eyes of an average London citizen.

of others. Angelo speaks of future evils as "new conceiv'd,/ And so in progress to be hatch'd and born," (2.2.96-97). He connects evils with processes of the female body and locates sin in femininity, while describing the plot he has established to obtain Isabella's body. Not only is the possibility of pregnancy evoked, but the actual sin is also coded as female in his description. When Isabella rejects him, Angelo vengefully says, "Then, Isabel, live chaste, and brother, die" (2.4.184). He takes pleasure in the idea of Claudio's execution and even claims if she will not surrender her body, he will have Claudio's "death drawn out" (2.4.165). If Angelo cannot satisfy himself with Isabella, he has to find another means to placate his uncontrollable sexual appetite. Since death served as a euphemism for orgasm during the early modern period, Angelo's threat can be seen as an allusion to sexual excitement.

Angelo's guilt is reinforced as he reflects on the sexual encounter he believes he had with Isabella, "This deed unshapes me quite, makes me unpregnant/ And dull to all proceedings. A deflow'red maid!/ And by an eminent body that enforc'd/ The law against it!" (4.4.20-23). His actions are described once again through the language of the female body. Instead of describing the woman as becoming pregnant, Angelo is described as becoming "unpregnant." This description not only places sexual blame on Angelo by focusing on his participation, but also further extends his guilt by using "unpregnant" metaphorically as a loss of identity.

In the play, both female characters and male characters challenge traditional assumptions about femininity. Since attempts to regulate women relied on traditional images of weak women who could not resist the temptations of sexuality, the play's

presentation of alternate readings of femininity challenges excessive regulation. Through images of theatricality in the play, *Measure for Measure* expands this criticism of the overregulation of sexuality to a resistance against anti-theatricalism.

CHAPTER 4

PERFORMING AUTHORITY

While the play focuses much of its attention on the overregulation of sexuality, the emphasis on theatricality in the play suggests that this criticism is part of a larger argument against the anti-theatrical movement, as actors on stage play government officials who, through the aid of costume and performance, temporarily change their identities.[51] The idea of substitution, a theatrical device, becomes crucial to the play as it is used for a variety of purposes, including deceit, desire, and justice. While at times substitution is problematic, the play reveals that the concept is not inherently flawed. While anti-theatricalists blamed the theater for immorality, the examination of substitution in the play once again reinforces the argument against the movement, showing that the theater is a tool that can be used for both good and evil. The main transformations occur in the characters of Angelo and the Duke.

Before Angelo arrives in the court to discover his assignment, the Duke ponders, "What figure of us think you he will bear?" (1.1.14). The transfer of power to Angelo is more than a transfer of responsibility; it is a transfer of identity. The transformation of

[51] Steven Mullany touches on the idea of *Measure for Measure* as a critique of the theater in "Apprehending Subjects, or the Reformation in the Suburbs" in *The Place of the Stage*, suggesting that the ambivalence within the play serves as a reflection of theatrical practice (113).

identity as Angelo becomes the Duke is the same exchange that takes place as an actor becomes for the audience the character that he plays. Once the Duke announces Angelo's assignment, he describes Angelo as "dress'd" with their love (1.1.19). The love and support that the court has for Angelo covers him like a costume, granting him his new identity.

Early modern society placed a great deal of value in the importance of costume, or dress. Sumptuary laws regulated the type of materials and clothing each social class could wear. Early modern writers believed a connection existed between one's outward appearance and inner worth, a belief based on Italian Renaissance courtesy literature, including Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier*.[52] Costumes were considered by anti-theatricalists as dangerous vessels that allowed people to experience of another identity as they took on an outward appearance that was outside their social status or even gender. A 1587 declaration issued by the Queen regarding sumptuary laws describes the "excesse of Apparell" as an "infection," demonstrating that the fear of costumes occupied the minds of people across social classes.[53] Part of this fear was directed at the association of costuming and the female body. As Kuchta explains, overdressing was considered "a kind of 'womanish vanity'." [54] Della Casa, an Italian Renaissance writer on whom English writers drew, suggests that the link between femininity and overdressing may be symptomatic of homoeroticism; as he says, "Your garments should

[52] David Kuchta, "The semiotics of masculinity in Renaissance England," *Sexuality and Gender in Early Modern Europe: Institutions, Texts, Images*, ed. James Grantham Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 235. Kuchta analyzes the connection between ideas of masculinity and attitudes about attraction in the early modern period, concluding that political display was not inherently gendered.
[53] "A declaration of the Queenes Maiesties will and cammaundement, to have certaine Lawes and orders put in execution against the excesse of Apparell" (1587) *Early English Books Online*.

not be extremely fancy or extremely ornate, so that no one can say that you are wearing Ganymede's hose."[55] As Joyce Green MacDonald argues, "The myth of Ganymede has been analyzed as narrating a specific and socially functional homoeroticism, one initiating young boys into an ancient Greek social order which did not segregate sexuality from the prevailing homosocial male bonds."[56] By the early modern period ganymede had become the common term for a catamite, or "a boy kept for unnatural purposes."[57] Early modern writers feared that actors who dressed in feminine clothing would be transformed into effeminate men, perhaps even performing homoerotic actions. Even if a person came from the right social class to wear expensive garments, caution still was given to not become affected by the clothing. As Kutcha describes, "Affectation and impersonation were condemned because they drew attention to the theatricality, the self-fashioning, the created image."[58] Although Kutcha speaks regarding the courtier, these same ideas can be applied to early modern theater, as English courtesy writers adopted many of the beliefs and arguments of their Italian Renaissance models.[59] Early modern writers were even more concerned about the practice of men dressing in women's clothing, as they portrayed women on the stage. These writers drew from John Calvin who evoked the passage from Deuteronomy passage, "A woman shal not weare the apparel of a man: neither shall a man put on the

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[54] Kuchta 238.
[55] Della Casa quoted in Kuchta 239.
[56] MacDonald, Joyce Green. "Marlowe's Ganymede." *Enacting Gender on the English Renaissance Stage*. Ed. Viviana Comensoli and Anne Russell (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999): 104.
[57] Ganymede, Catamite OED
[58] Kuchta 237.
[59] Kuchta 235. According to Kuchta, Henry Peacham, Thomas Elyot, Francis Bacon, Francis Osborne, William Higford, and the author of *The English Courtier* all are English writers influenced by Italian courtesy writers.

garments of a woman' (*Sermons*, 773-74)" and argued that this practice should be eradicated.[60] In *Measure for Measure*, however, it is not the men who put on women's garments, like Juliet and Isabella, that represent society's worst ailments, but instead those who donned the costumes of other males, such as Angelo.

Exploration in the play *Measure for Measure* reveals that while costumes and other characteristics of the theater might enable immoral behavior, the underlying identity is most often the cause of it. Critiquing Angelo, Isabella says, "O, it is excellent/ To have a giant's strength; but it is tyrannous/ To use it like a giant" (2.2.107-109). She accuses Angelo of affectation, of being too involved in his sense of power within his costume, so that he forgets that he is not the Duke, but instead a person standing in his position. She further enforces this idea when she says accuses Angelo of merely posing in his position, "Dress'd in a little brief authority" (2.2.118). The costume Angelo has may give him more confidence to discipline others, but it does not change who he is. As Isabella says, the costume is brief, or temporary; therefore, the authority that it has does not go past his presence on the stage. When the Duke transfers power to Angelo, he says, "In our remove be thou at full ourself" (1.1.44). The Duke makes sure to specify that the period of Angelo's authority is contingent on the Duke's absence. As soon as the Duke returns to his position and reveals himself, Angelo's power dissolves.

Lucio describes Angelo as "a man whose blood/ Is very snow-broth; one who never feels/ The wanton stings and motions of the sense" (1.4.58-59). While his

[60] Jonas A. Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981): 140.

description seems to focus on the inner features of Angelo and not on the costume he has donned, in actuality Angelo's lack of "wanton stings" is only pretense. As Angelo pretends that he is immune to passion, Lucio's words become not a description of Angelo's actual being, but instead a costume that Angelo uses to convince society that he is a worthy leader. This costume is not able to transform Angelo, however, as the audience discovers when Angelo makes his sexual advance on Isabella. By pinpointing the cause of Angelo's cruelty as his blood, Lucio encourages the audience to question initial observations regarding culpability. At first, Angelo's snow-broth blood seems to be the underlying cause of his cruelty, but as the play reveals that Lucio's description of him is only a mask which hides his sexual desire, the audience is forced to reevaluate the cause of his action, finally to discover that there is another cause of his actions, which is not the false image of blood that Lucio constructs with words but instead an inner identity that he has managed to disguise thus far under his costume. While Lucio describes Angelo's blood as cold and gives that as the reason that he can resist temptation, the play actually shows that the coldness of Angelo's blood functions more consistently with ideas of female blood in the early modern period. Medical texts defined female bodies as weaker based on their blood. Although male blood often served as a metaphor for "mercy, sacrifice, or passion" on the early modern stage, female blood was considered equivalent with other bodily excrements such as urine.[61] Early modern society characterized female bodies as colder and moister, more full of

[61] Paster, Gail Kern. 65

blood, contributing to their need for menstruation, a leaking of the body.[62] In *Measure for Measure*, however, it is Angelo who cannot control his body and sexual desire.

While Angelo suffers pangs of sexual desire that he cannot resist, he is critical of these feelings in others. His excessive criticism comes across in his enforcement of each sin strictly according to the law, even if the laws seem arbitrary or severe, viewing actions in terms of right or wrong with no middle ground. Angelo serves as the play's representation of the Puritan critic; as Paul Whitfield White argues, "the overly 'precise' Angelo" is symptomatic of Shakespeare's "unease with the more extreme tendencies of puritanism."[63] Angelo becomes the model of the hypocritical Puritan anti-theatricalist, who criticizes the theater despite his involvement as an actor. He says, "We must not make a scarecrow 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" (2.1.1-40). Angelo's criticism of the law alludes to the permissive state of the country under the Duke's rule. The Duke admits, "Sith 'twas my fault to give the people scope" and that his permissiveness has lead to the corruption of the society (1.3.35). Angelo points out the problems with a government that creates and maintains laws to scare people, without ever enforcing them. Although Angelo's criticism of the law seems valid, one must question whether his approach is better. Angelo is not an empty costume like the scarecrow but instead a hypocritical leader, who passes judgment on others in society even when he is guilty of the same transgressions. He becomes full of affectation in his costume and is unable to reach a middle ground. While the play condemns the anti-

[62] Paster 79.

theatrical movement for the extreme and unquestioning measures it advocates, the play does not accept the opposite solution of complete permissiveness, but instead tries to locate a balance between regulation and permissiveness. At the opening of the first act, the Duke transfers his power to Angelo because the society is sinking into corruption due to a lack of discipline. The Duke's fears of immorality are affirmed by the focus on prostitution in the play as a central characteristic of society. The portrayal of society in *Measure for Measure* calls for a reevaluation of the regulation of sexuality and the theater.

When Isabella goes to Angelo to convince him to pardon Claudio, she says, "I do beseech you let it be his fault,/ And not my brother," to which Angelo responds, "Condemn the fault and not the actor of it?/ Why every fault's condemn'd ere it be done./ Mine were the very cipher of a function,/ To find the faults whose fine stands in record,/ And let go by the actor" (2.2.35-36, 2.2.38-41). Angelo argues that it is impossible to criticize an action without condemning the person that has performed it. Angelo's use of the word actor evokes Puritan anti-theatricalism, as he blames the actors for their action. If the audience steps back to look at the play as a whole, they might see that actors playing the prostitutes, criminals, and governors should not be condemned for the actions they perform on stage. The play suggests that while actors should be granted leniency on stage, when disguises are taken off stage—such as in the case of Angelo, the play's representation of Puritanism—then actions do have real effects. It is not the theater that needs to be critiqued, but instead the society which

[63] White 144.

abuses the powers of theatrics. Angelo believes that his costume of authority is undiscoverable and thus exploits its power. When Isabella says she will reveal Angelo's plan, he says, "Who will believe thee, Isabel?/ My unsoil'd name, th' austereness of my life,/ My vouch against you, and my place i' th' state" (2.4.154-156). He believes that his authority makes him invincible, not accountable for the actions he performs. Yet, as the Duke reveals when Lucio pulls of his hood at the end of the play, costumes are merely temporary, and there is always a person hiding beneath them (5.1.355).

As with Angelo, the Duke takes on the identity of several theatrical positions throughout *Measure for Measure*. The Duke's relinquishing of power at the beginning of the play is the Duke's first disguise. He is the ruler of the people, but by transferring this power to Angelo, he temporarily hides his identity as the Duke. Ironically, the Duke makes the choice to do so stating, "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;/ Nor do I think the man of safe discretion/ That does affect it" (1.1.67-72). The Duke covers his identity, claiming that he does not want applause, but in doing so becomes an actor, a profession whose ability to survive is based on an audience's applause and appreciation. At the end of the play, when the Duke returns to repair the damage done by Angelo, it seems that he regains a desire for applause as he attempts to tie up loose ends and present a finale for the audience.

The Duke takes on a second disguise, or identity, as he puts on the cloak of a friar. The Duke says, "And to behold his sway,/ I will, as 'twere a brother of your

order,/ Visit both prince and people; therefore I prithee/ Supply me with the habit, and instruct me/ How I may formally in person bear/ Like a true friar" (1.3.43-47). He desires not only to physically appear to be a friar, but also to act like one. In Act II, scene III, the Duke approaches the Provost in his disguise as a friar, saying, "Bound by my charity and my blest order,/ I come to visit the afflicted spirits/ Here in the prison. Do me the common right/ To let me see them" (2.3.3-6). The Duke acts as if he is a friar and uses his disguise to gain access to the prison. Ironically, he would have had the same privilege as the Duke. Further, however, he offers to "minister" to the prisoners, which initially can be seen as an abuse through his disguise. A Catholic audience might have found a problem with an un-ordained person taking a confession, viewing the consequence as eternal damnation of the confessor's soul. Protestants, however, may have seen the use of costume as normal for the Catholic Church, viewing any act of confession or performance of forgiveness as just that, acting and performing. According to Protestant doctrine, only God could grant forgiveness. The presentation of the Duke as a friar is more telling in the context of other pieces of the time that portrayed the devil dressed in similar costumes, as Faust insists the devil wear a friar's hood in *Doctor Faustus* and Archimago disguises himself as a monk in *The Faerie Queen*.[64] This same type of criticism of the Catholic Church is found in the discussion of prayer in Act I, Scene II, as the first gentleman asks if the prayer was said in metre and Lucio responds, "In any proportion, or in any language" (1.2.21-22). The discussion of grace turns to the performance of it; the audience is encouraged to

[64] Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. Thomas P. Roche, Jr. and C. Patrick O'Donnell, Jr. (London: Penguin Books, 1978):

question whether such institutions are merely performed or if they have true meaning beyond their performance. Elbow confirms the play's criticism of Catholicism, and even religion in general. He says of Claudio and Juliet, "If it please your honor, I know not well what/ they are; but precise villains they are, that I am sure of,/ and void of all profanation in the world that good Christians out to have" (2.1.53-56). Elbow's misspoken words serve as a criticism of Christianity and the pretense of Catholicism. It is not acting, once again that is inherently evil, but instead the misuse of it.

When Isabella goes to speak to Claudio about Angelo's proposal, the Duke, who is still in the costume of Friar Lodowick, further disguises himself, hiding as he listens to their conversation. He requests, "Bring [me] to hear [them] speak, where I/ may be conceal'd" (3.1.53-54). Putting on this second layer of costume, the Duke becomes the audience, thus another part of the theater production. The Duke says, "My business in this state/ Made me a looker-on here in Vienna" (5.1.316-318). The Duke's action of hiding himself exemplifies the ideas of Patricia Parker, who identifies a relationship between the female body as she examines early modern definitions of the word dilate. She describes, "To *dilate* in early modern usage [...] meant both to 'make large' and to speak 'at large,' expanding or discursively spreading out something originally smaller and more constricted."[65] As part of Patricia Parker's argument, she looks at "the language of uncovering, dilating, and opening the 'privy' place of woman" and how such an action is related to a fascination with spying during the early modern period.[66]

Book I, Canto III., Marlowe, Christopher, *Dr. Faustus*, ed. John D. Jump (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).

[65] Parker 63.
[66] Parker 60.

As the Duke becomes a spy, he is effeminized through the costume of the costume and through his action.[67] In addition to encouraging a reevaluation of femininity, the Duke's transformation into the audience also suggests a larger criticism of anti-theatricalism. It is not the theater infecting the audience in this situation, but instead an immoral audience that affects the theater.

Near the end of the play, the Duke takes on yet another role, as a playwright, or director, as he begins arranging the characters' lives. He designs a plot to serve justice to the characters who have drifted into immorality during his absence. Mariana, Angelo's previous fiancé, will take Isabella's place in Angelo's bed unbeknownst to Angelo himself. As he reveals his plan, the Duke says, "If you think well to carry this/ as you may, the doubleness of the benefit defends the/ deceit from reproof" (3.1.256-258). The Duke uses the theatrical technique of substitution in order to produce the desired results. The Duke describes, "With Angelo to-night shall lie/ His old betrothed (but despised);/ So disguise shall by th' disguised/ Pay with falsehood false exacting,/ And perform an old contracting" (3.2.278-282). The Duke repeats this technique several times in his master plan. He selects to execute Barnadine in place of Claudio, and when Barnadine is too drunk to pray for forgiveness the dead body of Ragozine is substituted instead (4.2.170-171, 4.3.70-76). He threatens to kill Angelo for his abuse of Claudio, exclaiming, "'An Angelo for Claudio, death for death!'" (5.1.409). The

[67] The connection to Catholicism is further enforced, as well, as Thomas Bell describes how Catholics were seen as working to undermine the government and the Church of England under disguises and hiding in "secret caves, dennes, and holes." Quoted in Julian Yates, "Parasitic Geographies: Manifesting Catholic Identity in Early Modern England," in Marotti (ed.), *Catholicism and Anti-Catholicism,* 65. Yates argues that the recusancy of early modern Catholics can be read as a competition for space in England.

idea of substitution is inherent to the theater, as actors become substitutes for the characters they represent.

The Duke also performs his duties of a director in the arranging the marriages of different characters. He forces Lucio to marry Kate Keepdown, a prostitute he impregnated. As previously alluded to, he also pairs Angelo and Mariana (5.1.377). Finally, he tries to create his own match with Isabella, saying, "Give me your hand, and say you will be mine" (5.1.492). The play ends without a final answer from Isabella, however. Her lack of response possibly results from early modern fears that a marriage performed on stage had lasting consequences, although it also informs the audience that a playwright does not have as much control as the anti-theatricalists believe. The audience is encouraged to question what place a woman like Isabella has in the early modern society. As a character in Vienna, she has the option to return to her position in the nunnery, but as a representative of a London woman, she has less freedom. Women who did not marry in early modern London were often associated with prostitution, as it was the only occupation open to women. The conundrum of female identity is presented in *Measure for Measure* through the following interchange between the Duke and Mariana,

Duke: What, are you married?

Mariana: No, my lord.

Duke: Are you a maid?

Mariana: No, my lord.

Duke: A widow then?

Mariana: Neither, my lord.

Duke: why, you are nothing then: neither maid, widow, nor wife? (5.1.171-178). The Duke cannot fathom the possibility of a woman falling outside the categories that society has established for women. Lucio gives his own insight regarding the issue, as he says, "My lord, she may be a punk; for many of them are neither maid, widow, nor wife" 5.1.279-280). The play's previous emphasis on reevaluating the roles of women challenges the Duke and Lucio's definition of Mariana and encourages the audience to ponder the lack of possibilities for a woman in the early modern society.

The play reveals that the lack of options open to women is a result of the overregulation sexuality. It is not the women who choose to become prostitutes, but instead men, like Angelo and the Duke, who force women into these roles through their actions or mindsets. As Angelo formulates a plan to deflower Isabella, he questions his fall from virtue: "Is this her fault, or mine?/ The tempter, or the tempted, who sins most, ha?" (2.2.162-163). *Measure for Measure* encourages the audience to ask the same question of the theater through its analysis of prostitution and female bodies. While early modern anti-theatricalists place blame on the tempting theater as the reason for societal decay, the play suggests that culpability resides outside the theater in the society as a whole. Through the portrayal of overregulation, in regards to both sexuality and the theater, *Measure for Measure* argues that the excessive regulation advocated by anti-theatricalists is not only unnecessary, but harmful, as it is based on inaccurate assumptions about the theater, prostitution, and female bodies.

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