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By that meanes becommeth he the dear brothere, sister, and mother of Christ, . . . a citizen of heaven with the Apostles and Prophetes, yea, the chylde of adoptcyon and heyre togyther with Christ in the heavenly inherytaunce. . . . No soch children left Socrates behynd hym, neyther yet Demosthenes, nor Plato, nor Cicero, with all their plesant wysdome and eloquence.

John Bale
Christian ethics has been a major concern in the criticism of Measure for Measure, yet Christian monachal institutions have rarely been considered an essential element in the play.2 Despite the fact that the friar disguise was rare in Elizabethan drama and was generally attacked as silly, few critics have speculated about why Shakespeare should have changed the merchant disguise used by the incognito kings who may have been his sources for Vincentio's device.5 Likewise, some have seen Isabella's novitiate as signifying only a desire for chastity, even though the chaste women who are her counterparts in the sources are not nuns.4 Shakespeare's use of the orders in the play has even been considered antimonachal satire.5

Shakespeare's attitude toward the orders cannot have been independent of his own religious beliefs, but his religion is a vexed question. His father John may have been a recusant Catholic, and some have argued that, for at least a portion of his life, Shakespeare himself was Catholic.6 (The birth of his son Hamnet fewer than nine months after his public marriage to Anne Hathaway, for example, has been used to argue for an earlier, clandestine marriage, presumably performed by a Catholic priest.)7 Moreover, there were two sixteenth-century nuns named Shakespeare in the Benedictine convent at Wroxall, just north of Stratford: Joan Shakespeare, who was sub-prioress at the time of the Dissolution and who lived until 1576 (the year William Shakespeare was twelve); and Isabella Shakespeare, who was prioress in the early years of the century.8 (The latter may be among the sources for the name of Measure for Measure's Isabella, although there are other possibilities.)

If Shakespeare was raised a Catholic, he would have been especially sensitive to the confrontation between Catholicism and Protestantism. In our play, quasi-Brother Vincentio's proposal to quasi-Sister Isabella echoes that confrontation: the Reformation had ended clerical celibacy, and Luther himself married a nun. I cannot presume to argue definitively one way or another the question of Shakespeare's religion,
but the evidence does suggest that he may have been intellectually closer to the Catholic than to the Protestant position on the celibate orders.

Thus we should not be surprised that in Measure for Measure an examination of sexuality implies a searching and sympathetic depiction of the monachal orders. Indeed, the role of the orders in Measure for Measure is crucial to what the play suggests about the organization of human sexuality. It exposes, not the Catholic Church, as in a Protestant satire, but the psychological, historical, and theological grounds of monachal relationships by reinterpreting the religious orders in light of the awesome tension between nature and law, incest and chastity.

The Sexual Dimension of the Religious Orders

We see, then, that savages have an unusually great horror of incest or are sensitive on the subject to an unusual degree, and that they combine this with a peculiarity which remains obscure to us—of replacing real blood-relationship by totem kinship. This latter contrast must not, however, be too much exaggerated, and we must remember that the totem prohibitions include that against real incest as a special case.  

Freud, Totem and Taboo

Totemic tribes that enjoin exogamy (marriage outside the tribe) and allow for the existence of other totemic tribes can thereby avoid incest. However, a tribe that believes its totem to be universal and all other human beings to be part of itself (or, teleologically speaking, potential converts to its universalist doctrine) makes exogamy impossible and all intercourse incestuous. Christianity calls for the universal brotherhood of man and, in its proselytizing character, claims to treat as brothers even those who believe themselves to be non-Christians. The Christian monachal orders are microcosms of a potentially Universal Siblinghood in which kinship has a special significance. Freud remarks that terms like “Sisters in Christ” have analogues in societies where kinship terms “do not necessarily indicate any consanguinity, as ours would do: they represent social rather than physical relationships.” But the monachal use of such terms assumes more than the replacement of “physical” relationships by social ones: it assumes the conflation of social or theological with biological relationships.

As, according to Freud, social taboo parallels individual obsessional neurosis, so the anti-fornication, or anti-incest, taboo that underlies the laws of Shakespeare’s Vienna parallels the neurosis that can underlie both the fear of incest and the desire to engage in a sacred in-
cest. The very term “taboo” means both “sacred, consecrated” and “dangerous, forbidden.”12 “Isabella,” like “Elizabeth,” means “consecrated to God” (from Hebrew elishabet);13 as a Sister, one who violates the taboo on incest by marrying the Son of her Father, Isabella is both sacred and taboo. (According to Freud, a nun’s virginity is in itself a kind of taboo act.)14 “Anyone who has transgressed one of these prohibitions . . . acquires the characteristic of being prohibited,” writes Freud;15 Lucio acknowledges a taboo on Isabella as “a thing enskied” (1.4.34).

Familial Sisterhood and Universal Sisterhood. However sexually inexperienced Isabella may be, a Clarist novice such as Isabella would probably not be totally innocent of contact with, or speculation about, sex.16 It is pointless to follow Lucio’s lead in greeting her ambiguously as “virgin, if you be” (1.4.16), for she undoubtedly lacks the practical sexual experience of such other nuns as Aemilia, the abbess at Ephesus in The Comedy of Errors, or Thaisa, the mother who joins Diana’s vestal virgins in Pericles. (Both women have had earthly husbands.) Yet Isabella must have the knowledge of secular love that everyone acquires by wondering about sexual conduct and kinship relations within an earthly family. In the course of the play, Isabella responds to that universally available knowledge; since she conducts her life somewhere between the earthly family that a novice plans to leave and the heavenly family that a novice plans to join, her response distinguishes her among women.

The play amply documents Isabella’s theoretical knowledge of the facts of life. She raises the question of Claudio’s legitimacy (3.1.140) and all too promptly understands the nature of Claudio’s offense, associating it with Juliet (1.4.45).17 But her distinctive sensitivity to the general Viennese malaise about legitimacy and incest is better reflected in the fact that she immediately links his act with kinship terms by referring to “my cousin Juliet” (1.4.45). Even Isabella’s apparently reassuring response to Lucio’s immediate question, “Is she your cousin?”—she says, “Adoptedly, as schoolmaids change their names / By vain though apt affection” (1.4.46–48)—is discomforting because the exchange reminds us that no one, especially in licentious Vienna, can know absolutely who his consanguineous parents are. Beyond the epistemological question of legitimacy, the interchange of names between Isabella and Juliet suggests an incestuous conflation of Claudio’s sister and his lover; had Juliet been adopted by law rather than in name or by affection, intercourse with Claudio might also have been incest, since the canon laws frequently barred relatives by legal adoption from sexual commerce.18
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Isabella’s reference to adoption is loaded in another way, as well. It echoes the terms used to describe God’s relationship to Christian believers: “We ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:23, cf. Rom. 8:15). The fact that Isabella is on the verge of publicly declaring her allegiance to a heavenly family as a Sister reminds us of her status—and the status of all the play’s characters—as children by adoption of God.

By fornicating and bastardizing, secular Vienna has reached an extreme of exogamy, where the threat of unrecognized blood relationship has become so pervasive that if one wishes to be chaste one must marry out or marry not at all. Thus Barnardine the native Bohemian and foreigner to Vienna is for Isabella (or any other Viennese woman) the only certainly eligible bachelor in the city—and he is condemned to die.

The theme of ubiquitous incest similarly informs Hamlet. Claudius, like Cain, has killed his brother and, like Henry VIII, has married his sister-in-law—incestuously, Hamlet insists (HAM 3.3.90). Yet for Hamlet (as, we speculate, for Isabella) the problem is more pervasive—any person who marries becomes “a breeder of sinners” (HAM 3.1.122). That is why he counsels his beloved Ophelia (in the sources she is his collactaneous sister) to enter a nunnery: “I say we will have no more marriage. Those that are married already—all but one—shall live. The rest shall keep as they are. To a nunnery, go.” (HAM 3.1.147-49.)

If Isabella had Hamlet’s remarkable self-knowledge, she might well recoil like him from the taint of any implication whatsoever in human sexuality: “I am myself indifferent honest, but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me” (HAM 3.1.122-24).

Much Ado’s Beatrice touches on the distinctive source of Isabella’s reaction when she says, with a clever pun on Isabella’s chosen profession: “I’ll none. Adam’s sons are my brethren, and truly I hold it a sin to match in my kindred.” (ADO 2.1.63-64.) The pun on “none” and “nun” also appears in Angelo’s injunction to the novice Isabella, “Be that you are, / That is, a woman; if you be more, you’re none” (2.4.133-34), and in the dialogue between Hamlet and the “gravemaker” who is digging a grave for Ophelia:

Hamlet. What man dost thou dig it for? (HAM 5.1.121)
Clown. For no man, sir.
Hamlet. What woman then?
Clown. For none neither.
Hamlet. Who is to be buried in ‘t?
Clown. One that was a woman, sir; but, rest her soul, she’s dead.
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In *Hamlet*, as in *Antigone*, not death to the world and spiritual marriage to Jesus (i.e., entering a nunnery, which in some orders entailed a service for the dead before rebirth and marriage to Jesus), but becoming nothing in death homogenizes the members of the domestic household.* In *Measure for Measure*, by contrast, from the virtual inevitability of incest and lack of restraint that she sees almost everywhere in the secular world, Isabella seeks refuge in an institution where, more subject to a Mother Superior than to the memory of a conceivably adulterous mother and more subject to Brothers than to a lecherous brother, she hopes to transcend sexual desire and specific familial blood ties. She seeks to become a “chylde of adopcyon” (Rom. 8: 23, trans. John Bale) to God.

To take vows in a Sisterhood is radically to change one’s relationship to everyone in the world, including the members of one’s blood family. “If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life,” said Jesus, “he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14: 26; Rev. Stand.). Pope Innocent IV’s description of how Saint Clare divorced her earthly family before joining the heavenly one is thus typical of Christian monachal tradition:

Meditating on this verse of the Prophet, “O daughter, hear, see, and listen, forget your people and the house of your father, because the King has desired your beauty,” the Blessed Clare of saintly memory . . . turned her back to fleeting, and transitory things. Divesting herself of herself, her parents, and of all things, and making herself a daughter of the celestial Kingdom, she elected and named as her spouse the poor Jesus Christ.21

Before entering a Christian Sisterhood and becoming a child of adoption to God, a woman is allowed to distinguish brothers from others

*In *Hamlet*, ambiguous family relationships become inseparable from ambiguous political relationships. This conflation is summed up in the figure of Gertrude, who stands to the political ruler in the same mixture of relations as a nun stands to God, being not only ambiguously sister and wife of Claudius but also mother of the potential king Hamlet. In one of Shakespeare's sources (Belleforest, *Histoires tragiques*, 5th series, 3d story, chap. 1), she is also the daughter of a king, from whom she receives the kingdom as a kind of dowry. Thus she is “imperial jointress to . . . the state” both as a woman who has a “‘joint’ tenancy in an estate” (cf. Coke, *On Littleton*, L.1; C.5; 36.D) in such a way that he who would be king of the state must marry its queen, or kill her—thus being in the same position as Jocasta—and as a woman who conjoins the various successive parts of the royal family and hence of the state. Tellingly, on entering Gertrude’s chamber, Hamlet compares himself to Nero: “Let not ever / The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom” (HAM 3.2.378–79). Nero’s incest with his mother, Julia Agrippina Minor, conflated in his person two of her relations as mother, sister, wife, and daughter of emperors; he enacts both the incest Hamlet may fear he desires and the matricide Hamlet may fear he will commit. See my forthcoming essay “Hoodman Blind.”
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and to treat them differently; indeed, for family purposes of marriage a laywoman is obliged to distinguish between a blood brother and other men, just as for state purposes of war she is obliged to distinguish between fellow citizens and aliens. As a novice in the Sisterhood of the Clares Isabella at the beginning of the play has presumably begun to learn how to transcend the distinction between brothers and others in both familial and political realms. (A member of an order must put into practice the Christian prescription that Christians should be "no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints" [Eph. 2: 19], hence above earthly international wars.) She should have begun to think and act as though all men were equally her brothers.*

Sharing Hamlet's recognition of the pervasive taint of familial sexual sin, Isabella is in the position of Antigone, caught between horror at sexual transgression and pious duty to a family constituted (actually for Antigone, potentially for Isabella) by such transgression.22 But her attempt to flee from the urban brothel-in-potentia to the Sisterhood, from mother and father to Mother Superior and Pope, merely relocates the problem of incest from the consanguineous family to the Christian Family, for the Christian rejection of blood family makes all sexual intercourse sibling incest. This is quintessentially true for a monk or a nun, and it is official Church doctrine that "concubinage or marriage with a person consecrated to God" is not merely fornication but incest.23 The rejection of parenthood entails that all humans—parents, siblings, spouses—become wholly "children of your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5: 45).4 To Tiresias' formal and political

*The commandment to divorce one's earthly family is to be interpreted literally. (One purpose of "dying to the world," as do Catholic celibates, is to signal that divorce.) According to Saint Anthony, remembering one's relatives is a temptation of the devil (Athanasius [?], Vita Antonii, PL, 73:36, and Sulpicius, Dialogues, 1:22). The fifth-century abbot Saint John Cassian reports that the abba Apollos refused to go to his father's funeral, pleading that he himself had been "dead to this world for twenty years"; the same Apollos refused to help his brother save an ox in a swamp (Cassian, Conferences, 24:9). Herbert Workman cites a similar story of religious flight from consanguineous kin recorded in the Patrologia: "Pior, an Egyptian monk, for fifty years refused to see any member of his family, even when they came to visit him. When, on her appeal, his bishop at length bade him visit his sister, he obeyed, but took care, writes his admiring biographer, to keep his eyes closed all the time" (Monastic Ideal, pp. 59-60, drawing on Verba Seniorum, PL, 73:759, and Palladius, Historia Lausiaca, 39, PG, 34:991-1262).

4One parallel in Shakespeare to the Catholic ceremony in which a woman takes leave of her earthly family ("dies to the world") and enters the heavenly family ("is reborn") by becoming the wife, sister, daughter, and mother of God is the scene in which Coriolanus, banished by the Romans and "svanted to others" (i.e., to the Volscians; Cor 5.2.84), attempts to cast off his "father" Menenius Agrippa and claims that he no longer knows "wife, mother, child" (Cor 5.2.71 and 5.2.83; cf. 5.3.10). Compare
question "Who is your father?," then, all Christians should answer "Father."

Brother and Sister Saints

That Shakespeare has the sister in Measure for Measure enter a Sisterhood involves the theme of homogeneous liberty (equality and fraternity) that is crucial to monachism and its essential opposition to the political order. That Shakespeare then has his sister-in-training leave the Sisterhood on behalf of a brother suggests that she still loves, or can love, her brother unequally—either more than others or differently from others—and at the same time it foreshadows the possibility of a reinstatement of political, or parentarchal, heterogeneity. What might mediate between the positions of homogeneity in liberty and heterogeneity in parentarchy is, from a general sociological viewpoint, the practice of sibling incest of the sexual kind. But no one is allowed to practice such incest in an unmediated way. In theory, therefore, the love of blood relatives might combine with the fear of earthly incest and make for an individual's decision to join a monastic order or even to found one.

Historically, earthly sibling love and heavenly Sibling love have often been joined in the same persons. In Christian hagiography, a saintly person's intense earthly sibling love is often followed by an extraordinary Sibling love of all human beings, just as if each and every human being had become a brother or sister. The Acts of the Saints includes more than 150 men and women who were brother and sister as well as Brother and Sister. Sibling celibates appear from the very beginning of Christian monachism: Saint Anthony, traditionally the first Christian monk, placed his sister in a nunnery when he left the world for the ascetic life. More strikingly, brother-sister liaisons played an important role in the historical beginnings of the Christian orders, for the sister of each of the three great cenobitical founders, Saint Pachomius, Saint Basil, and Saint Benedict, helped to preside over a community of nuns that followed an adaptation of her brother's rules for monks.

Earthly sibling and Christian Sibling love figured in the lives of many great saints. Saint Benedict—founder of the order in which Volumnia's remark that Coriolanus is no longer akin to his Roman mother, wife, and child, and other repetitions of the same motif (5.3.178–80, 5.3.101–3). Coriolanus claims that he has no family at all and allies his rejection of ordinary kinship with the atheist or arrogantly isotheist hypothesis that "a man [is] author of himself / And [knows] no other kin" (5.3.36–37).
bella Shakespeare was prioress and in which Clare once served, and
author of the strict Regula monachorum—visited his sister, Saint Scho-
lastica, once a year. On the last of these visits, according to Saint Greg-
ory the Great’s biography, Scholastica entreated Benedict to stay the
night. When he adamantly refused, she fell to prayer until a sudden
storm arose, so that she had her way. The consummation of that night,
spent all in spiritual conversation, could be seen as the incorporation
and transcendence of any earthly attraction, physical or otherwise,
that might have existed between the brother and sister. Three days
later, Scholastica died; in the course of time, Benedict joined her in a
single grave.28

Legends about Gregory the Great’s own life involve incest and the
wonderful atonement for incest. As Hartmann von Aue tells the story,
Gregory was the child of a brother-sister union and unknowingly
married his own mother. When he became Pope (the first monk ever
to do so) he forgave his mother’s incest and his own, restored Benedic-
tine discipline, and enforced the rule of celibacy for the clergy.29 This
Christian solution—repentance and atonement—to the Oedipal situa-
tion suggests that the Catholic orders made possible an atonement for
the desire for incest or unchastity, even when the actual act was not in
question. The Holy Family atones for the earthly one by making all
even.

Some brother and sister saints voiced explicit concern for their sib-
lings’ sexuality, at times in terms that border on identification and pos-
sessiveness. In his Rule, or Book on the Institute of Virgins and on the Con-
tempt of the World, for Sister Florentine, Saint Leander identifies his
sister’s virginity with the goal of the entire Church: “It is above the
skies that we must seek the true wealth, the gift of holy virginity . . .
What all the saints hope one day to be, what the entire Church expects
to become after the resurrection, thou art already . . . Christ is al-
ready thy spouse, thy father, thine inheritance, thy ransom, thy Lord,
thy God.”30 Yet exhorting his saintly sister as Sister to marry the Son of
her Father, Leander expresses a more specific self-interest in safe-
keeping her virginity: “Ah, well-beloved sister, understand the ardent
desire which inspires the heart of thy brother to see thee with Christ.
. . . Thou art the better part of myself: Woe to me if another take thy
crown.”31 In the monastic life into which he sends her, Florentina’s
earthly crown will be Leander’s as much as any man’s.

In an epitaph composed for the tombstone of his sister Saint Irene,
Saint Damasus expressed a similar proprietary interest: “A witness of
our love (our mother), / Upon leaving the world, / Had given thee, my
blood sister, to me as a pure pledge.”32 Such concern with a sibling’s
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chastity was not confined to men. When Saint Lioba, a Sister, sought to serve her cousin Saint Boniface, she wrote him, “God grant, unworthy as I am, that I might have the honor of having you for my brother.” She closed the letter with the following suggestive verse:

May the Almighty Judge, who made the earth
And glorious in His kingdom reigns,
Preserve your chaste fire warm as at its birth,
Till time for you shall lose its rights and pains.  

The sixteenth-century Saint Teresa of Avila, who had nine beloved brothers, ran away from home with one brother, Rodrigo, at the age of seven, and with another, Antonio, at the age of twenty, to a Carmelite convent. Originally Teresa had wanted Antonio to become a Brother and herself a Sister, but in her Life she seems to forget Antonio as brother from the moment she enters the Sisterhood. In her Meditations on the Song of Songs (1566), Teresa seeks to replace the fraternal love she once had for Antonio by “spiritual marriage” and rebirth into a family where earthly kinship distinctions do not exist. Just such a transcendence of consanguinity was Teresa’s essential goal for the Discalced Carmelite Order that she helped to found. Teresa writes, “For the love of the Lord refrain from making individual friendships, however holy, for even among brothers and sisters such things are apt to be poisonous.” Reminding her Sisters to “think of the brotherhood which you share with this great God” as “children of this God,” she exhorts them, and all Christians, “to make our actions conform to our words—in short, to be like children of such a Father and the brethren of such a Brother.” Saint John of the Cross, an ideological mainstay of Teresa’s order, wrote in his Precautions, “You should have an equal love for or an equal forgetfulness of all persons, whether relatives or not, and withdraw your heart from relatives as much as from others.” In precisely this way Teresa erased and raised herself above differences between family and nonfamily. The saintly Teresa, who verges in her Life on confessing to spiritual incest—a biographer, pressing too hard, might conclude that she made love with a certain Dominican Brother—came to accept the ordinary taboo on sexual intercourse with a brother only when she accepted the extraordinary taboo on sexual intercourse with any human being.

As everloving Brothers and Sisters, such loving brothers and sisters came close to marriage without violating the law against physical incest. A few Catholic orders allowed closer physical communication between siblings or Siblings in “double cloisters”—monasteries and nunneries standing side by side. Among the Faremoutiers, who first developed
double cloisters in the seventh century, Saint Cagnoald ruled the monks in one wing and his sister, Saint Burgundofara, ruled the nuns in the other. The Order of Fontevrault and the Brigittines adopted the same organization. (For the mortification of the flesh, at times monks and nuns at Fontevrault would sleep in the same bed.) The only order founded in England, the Order of Saint Gilbert of Sempringham, was a double cloister of cohabiting Brothers and Sisters.

Saintly Sibling Love in Possible Sources of 'Measure for Measure'

*Measure for Measure* primarily reflects insight into a psychological dimension of monachism rather than direct influence from the biographies of the sibling or incestuous saints I have described (although a good case could be made for influence by Hartman's story of Gregory). Yet other saintly men and women whose names or biographies critics have cited as Shakespeare's sources have similarly ambiguous relations with blood kin.

**Saint Bernard.** The name Barnardine in *Measure for Measure* may derive from an incidental name—Bernardine—in Erasmus's *Funus*, which partly concerns the behavior of friars at a dying man's bedside. (Compare the Duke's *ars moriendi* speech, 3.1.5–41.) Erasmus's "Bernardine" may in turn refer to the Order of Saint Bernard—the Bernardines. "Barnardine" may just as well recall Bernardine of Siena, Bernardine Ochino, or Bernard of Vienne, however, and such echoes probably say little about the play. Yet the spiritual affinity between brothers and sisters in *Measure for Measure* does recall the love of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux for his sister Humberlina, as well as his remarkable sermons on sibling love—both typical of the Christian monachal tradition.

After Bernard left home with his brother Andrew to enter the austere monastery of Citeaux, the story goes, Humberlina came, richly dressed, to visit them. Andrew greeted her, "Why so much solicitude to embellish a body destined for worms and rottenness, while the soul, that now animates it, is burning in everlasting flames?" Humberlina answered, "If my brother Bernard, who is the servant of God, despises my body, let him at least have pity on my soul. Let him come, let him command; and whatsoever he thinks proper to enjoin I am prepared to carry out." Some time thereafter she entered a convent.

In Bernard's famous sermons *On the Song of Songs*, sisterly virginity and the theme "my sister as my wife" (*soror mea sponsa*) are sexualized, in a manner familiar from other sibling saints.
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The Blessed Isabella. The name of Shakespeare's Isabella, a novice in the Clares, has been connected with the Blessed Isabella of France, also associated with the Clares.50 One critic has even conjectured that Shakespeare may have seen a manuscript of the, "Isabella Rule" belonging to the Clares' abbey in London.51 But critics who have associated the Blessed Isabella with Shakespeare's heroine have mistakenly believed she was associated with a sect of the Clares that was unusually strict in sexual discipline. Therefore, they have postulated that the special "restraint" on the Order of Clares that Shakespeare's Isabella seeks to join (1.4.4) must be sexual, paralleling Claudio's forced "restraint" (1.2.120) after his liberty with Juliet.

The sect of Clares with which the Blessed Isabella was associated and for which she formulated the "Isabella Rule" was not especially strict in its regulations for dealings with men, however. She founded a relaxed sect, called the Urbanist Clares from the name of Pope Urban II, who, along with Pope Alexander IV, ratified the relaxed rule; it was Saint Collette who reintroduced sexual strictness in the Colletine Clares.52 Moreover, there is little if any textual evidence for the contention that the Clares as depicted in Measure for Measure are particularly strict in sexual matters. According to the rules that Sister Francisca enunciates, the scene in the nunnery (1.4) could open as follows: "The Prioress, asleep, the nuns entertaining smart visiting ladies and priests, some secular music."53

Instead, the unique regulation of the Clares was the "privilege of poverty" that Clare herself convinced Pope Innocent IV to grant her Sisters in 1253. This privilege gave a Sister the unique right to own absolutely nothing, not even communally as part of a collective.54 (Isabella may refer to the dispensation in her first line of the play, "And have you nuns no farther privileges?" [1.4.1].) In the language of the Church, a privilege is not a restraint per se, but a license or permission—the term refers to a special ordinance issued by the pope.55 The regulations of the Clares require that a postulant sell all her goods and distribute the proceeds to the poor. In the words of a modern account of the order, this radical gesture, which renounces the very basis of secular political organization, "with a single blow undoes all earthly ties and liberates the heart for a unique love."56 (We will return to Clare's privilege later in this chapter.)

The Blessed Isabella was renowned for a love less unique, her affection for her brother, Saint Louis IX, the virgin King of France. Louis describes the strong feelings between himself and his sister, telling how he used to roll up in bedclothes the young Isabella. She was
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betrothed several times, but all her betrothals were canceled; some cancel-
cellations required payment of a forfeit, or “ransom,” by her brother. (In ex-
change, she ransomed her brother from Muslim captivity, with
the aid of the Order of Ransom.) At one point the Blessed Isabella
refused a proposal of marriage from Emperor Frederick II and in-
formed the Pope himself of her “vow of virginity.”

For Isabella there was a definite tension between two tendencies:
that of rejecting consanguineous bonds and loving all human beings
equally with the unique love of a Sister, and that of accepting con-
sanguineous bonds and loving some men, such as a brother or a hus-
band, differently from others. The Blessed Isabella did not become a
nun, although a story that she did circulated in the sixteenth cen-
tury. Instead, she lived as a laywoman in a house adjacent to the con-
vent she founded; that is, she steered a middle course, virtually co-
habiting with her saintly, virginal brother. (Ironically, some historians
have erroneously called the siblings husband and wife.)

St. Clare and St. Francis. In Measure for Measure the order whose
garb Vincentio assumes is probably that of Saint Francis, the brother
order to Isabella’s of Saint Clare (1.4.5). (The name of Isabella’s tutor,
Francisca, is also reminiscent of St. Francis.) Clare and Francis were
not blood relations, but a deep, lifelong affection existed between
them. At the age of eighteen, Clare heard a sermon by St. Francis and
determined to devote herself to his mode of life. After testing her
resolution, he himself received her vows at the altar and invested her
with the Franciscan habit when, arrayed as a bride, she married Christ
in spirit. He established her in a convent with a version of the Francis-
can “Form of Life.” After his death, for the rest of her life she fought
to maintain the order’s closeness to his spirit, despite pressure from
Church authorities to mitigate its austerity.

Sigmund Freud, in his discussion of how some people “find hap-
piness . . . among the path of love . . . by directing their love, not to
single objects, but to all men alike,” calls Saint Francis of Assisi the
man who “went furthest in exploiting love for the benefit of an inner
feeling of happiness.” Franciscan “readiness for universal love of man-
kind,” says Freud, is, “according to one ethical view, . . . the highest
standpoint which men can achieve.” Yet Francis’s love for every being
universally seems inextricably linked with love for his Sister in par-
ticular, as his remarkable poem “Brother Sun and Sister Moon,” sug-
gests. Genealogists, bending the truth, even go so far as to present
the two as close blood kin, even as brother and sister. Franciscan
theologians, moreover, often portray maleness and femaleness joined

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together, not in what we normally assume to be their closest union (marriage), but in roles that would normally be impediments to that union (namely, mother and son, or brother and sister). What Francis and Clare could never permit in physical relations becomes a blessing in spiritual relations. In *The Soul's Journey into God*, Bonaventure likewise put the balance of all the soul's relationships into its one, supposedly whole, relationship with God as Christ—a spiritually incestuous relationship, since the soul becomes the daughter, spouse, and sister of God.67

I do not wish to argue that the biographies of these sibling saints were sources for Shakespeare, but to point out a connection between the “ardent passion” of Isabella for Claudio that Walter Pater remarks and her vocation as a nun.68 In the play, Isabella and Claudio trade almost overtly sexual statements. Isabella, for example, tells Claudio that he may live, but only by a method that “Would bark your honour from that trunk you bear, / And leave you naked” (3.1.71–72). Claudio responds: “If I must die, / I will encounter darkness as a bride / and hug it in mine arms” (3.1.82–84), foreshadowing what Angelo intends to do with Isabella in the darkness. These undercurrents of sibling love surface in Isabella’s accusation that Claudio wants to commit “a kind of incest” (3.1.138); thereafter the brother and sister never again speak to each other, as though, even after the last act of pardon and atonement, they both fear a reemergence of the abhorred theme.

Such passion echoes the affection of brother and sister saints and the sibling love prominent in the rhetoric of the orders. The erotic libertine feelings of an earthly kind that a religious celibate must, in the words of a contemporary Augustinian Sister of Meaux, “damn well sacrifice”* may often historically have been directed, not only toward the opposite sex in general, but toward siblings of the opposite sex in particular. Be that as it may, the Catholic orders seem associated with ambiguous sorts of love—that is, incest—which they translate from earthly sexuality to a heavenly unification of all loves and all kinship in a single relation with Christ and a single, universalizing relation with all humans. How close these relations are to the indiscriminate libertine sexuality that threatens Viennese social organization in *Measure for Measure* appears in the fact that the members of one Christian order, the Brethren of the Free Spirit, were physical as well as spiritual libertines.

*“You can't sublimate it. You can't suppress it. You simply have to damn well sacrifice it.” Quoted in Bernstein, Nuns, p. 109.
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A Libertine Order: The Brethren of the Free Spirit

Ubi spiritus, ubi libertas.
Motto of the Libertine Brethren

Similar motivations and appeals to grace are involved when a religious celibate overcomes sexual desire and loves everyone equally as Universal Siblings and when a religious libertine overcomes the restrictions of law and conscience after the Fall and loves everyone equally, including siblings. Both celibates and libertines hypothesize a Universal Siblinghood in which sleeping with a brother is no worse than sleeping with any other man. One seeks liberty from physical desire; the other, liberty from rules that restrict physical intercourse. But for both, in the words of Saint Paul (2 Cor. 3:17), “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”

The second Clementine decree, promulgated at the Council of Vienne in 1311 by church officials aiming to suppress the Brethren, describes in almost these very words the third “error” of the heretical Brethren of the Free Spirit, a lay order founded in the twelfth century that exhibited both the ascetic and the libertine aspects of Universal Siblinghood. According to the Council, the Brethren’s error was this doctrine: “Those who have achieved this state of perfection and absolute freedom are no longer subject to obedience and law or obligated to follow ecclesiastical regulations, for where divine spirit rules, there is liberty.” The Brethren attempted to return to prelapsarian innocence by a harsh novitiate of absolute restraint followed by grace and absolute liberty.

Abiezer Coppe, a member of the Ranter sect, promulgated in England in 1650 a doctrine influenced by the Brethren. For the Ranters, as for the Brethren of the Free Spirit, “God dwelt inside them, as an inner light whose authority was above all laws. . . . Sin was thus made to disappear. The consequence was, for some Ranters, sexual license.” Coppe described the state beyond good and evil that was the Brethren’s goal: “Be plagued back again into thy mother’s womb, the womb of eternity: That thou maist become a little child, and let the mother Eternity, Almightyness, who is universal love, and whose service is perfect freedome, dresse thee, and undresse thee, swaddle, unswaddle, bind, loose, lay thee down, take thee up.” To such a child, dress and undress, incest and chastity, are alike—he knows no evil.

When the spirit of God is in one, one is God, or God’s image in unfallen nature. One can truly say, “I belong to the liberty of nature, and all that my nature desires I satisfy. I am a natural man.” In the state
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of primal innocence or perfect grace, there is a perfect adequation or atonement between desires and acts, and the Pauline dictum "All things are lawful unto me" (1 Cor. 6:12) applies. According to one adept, "the Spirit of Freedom or the Free Spirit" is attained when one is "wholly transformed into God." Such a person's guiding principle must be "Do what you want" — the single rule of Rabelais's anti-abbey of Thélème. That injunction informs the principal extant theological work by a member of the Brethren of the Free Spirit. Marguerite Porete, in her Mirror of Simple Souls, writes, "Friends, love and do what you want." Not to enact what one desires to enact would be in itself a sign of disunion with God.

The sect of the Free Spirit, founded at a time when Neoplatonism's influence was growing, emphasized the soul's at-oneness with God. The Brethren's liberty was misinterpreted as mere libertinage, of course, but they attempted to synthesize Platonic Eros and Christian agape into an "Adamic eroticism" — "a sensuality above sensuality." What this meant in practice is suggested by a hostile report: "Tri-themius speaks of a girl, named Gisla, who, when asked if she was a virgin, replied that above the world she was, but in this world not." For at least one Brother of the Free Spirit, John Hartmann of Achmansteten, spiritual liberty meant "the complete cessation of remorse and the attainment of a state of sinlessness." This entailed total transcendence of the post-Edenic taboo against incest:

The free man could do as he wished, including fornicate with his sister or his mother, and anywhere he wished, including at the altar. He added that it was more natural with his sister than any other woman because of their consanguinity. His justification lay in being perfectly free and bound by no law or ecclesiastical statutes and precepts; such a man was a Free Spirit in contradistinction to the gross men who were subject to existing authority of the church. His sister, far from losing her chastity, increased it as a result of their intercourse.

The same liberty to have intercourse with mother or sister appears in the testimony of Conrad Kannler. As Leff retells it, Kannler said that "he could fornicate without sinning, and where a virgin was involved she remained chaste; he was similarly at liberty to have sexual intercourse with mother and sister, although he did not believe God would permit it for the imperfect." The followers of the sixteenth-century Belgian David Joris, a prominent member of a sect influenced by the Brethren of the Free Spirit, were said to have "incestuous orgies."

It would be an error to dismiss the Brethren of the Free Spirit and similar groups as merely peripheral movements. Practicing incest in
the name of Christian liberty may actually have been part of the oldest Christian doctrine. At least one biblical scholar suggests that the Corinthians’ incestuous sexual intercourse, which Paul criticizes in 1 Cor. 5 ("such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father’s wife," 1 Cor. 5:1), "was not a deed done secretly out of weakness but an ideological act done openly with the approval of at least an influential sector of the community."83 Such a sect would have taken Paul’s words about freedom from the law—"All things are lawful for me" (1 Cor. 10:23)—to indicate freedom from such rules as Lev. 18:8, “The nakedness of thy father’s wife shalt thou not uncover.”84

In the medieval era, the heresy of the free spirit, which spread among such lay orders as the Beguines and Beghards, came to inform the Women and Men of Intelligence and the Adamites. One of the Women of Intelligence, Bloemardinne of Brussels, "wrote much of the spirit of liberty and impious sexual love, which she called Seraphic."85 The Adamites of Bohemia were an anarchist sect that foreshadowed Protestantism. (Consider the influence of both the Brethren and the Adamites on the Bohemian reformer Hus, a precursor to Luther who was influenced by the English Wycliffe.)86 The Brethren may have understood an identification that helped drive or articulate the religious reformation: that of the polar opposition between and the sameness of incest on earth ("sin") and incest in heaven ("grace"). Did not Augustine warn, "Do not think that heresies could have arisen from a few narrow little souls. Only great men have brought forth heresies"?87

What characterizes a fraternal order such as the Franciscans or the Clares is its liberty from flesh or its razing the desires of the flesh and raising them to heaven. What characterizes a libertine order such as the Brethren of the Free Spirit is its graceful liberty of flesh. ("Now Libertines are named after the liberty of the flesh, which their doctrine seems to allow.")88 But "grace is grace, despite of all controversy," says Lucio (1.2.24–25), recalling Rom. 11:6, “And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace.” Although it might at first seem that between the two kinds of sexual freedom there is all the difference in the world, religious libertinism and religious celibacy are significantly linked in some Renaissance literature.89 Moreover, the issues of liberty and libertinism—whether the connection between them be identity or opposition—resonate with the larger antinomian and Manichaean debates of the sixteenth century.90 It was even claimed that the Protestant reformers’ doctrine of faith implied
Both an essential connection of spiritual with earthly incest and a license for enacted earthly libertinism.

In England, the Family of Love, one of the best-known radical religious sects in the Elizabethan period, claimed that all members of the sect were "one Being" with their leader, who is "Godded man: and so bee all named Gods and Children of the most highest." They assumed that all "are equal in degree among themselves; all Kings, and a kingdom of kings" and announced a communist society where a new brother's "goodes shalbe in common amongst the rest of his brethren." "The Family of Love," a comic play probably written by Thomas Middleton and performed by the Children of the Revels sometime between 1602 and 1607, contains a trial scene in which the Family's sexual freedom is institutionalized in law.

The Mirror of the Incestuous Soul

The link between libertinism and celibacy, or incest and chastity, can be an upsetting one, and for that reason, perhaps, it often appears in the form of esoteric riddles. Incest has long been associated with the unspeakable solution to a perfect riddle, of course; the locus classicus is the story of Oedipus, who knows that the answer to the Sphinx's riddle is "man in general" (men generally crawl first, then walk, and finally hobble) but does not know that the answer to the oracle's riddle is "Oedipus in particular" (the man who killed his father and married his mother). Compare two similarly riddling late-medieval inscriptions from churches in Alincourt and Ecouis:

Here lies the son, here lies the mother,
Here lies the daughter with the father;
Here lies the sister, here lies the brother,
Here lies the wife with the husband;
And there are only three bodies here.

Here lies the child, here lies the father,
Here lies the sister, here lies the brother,
Here lie the wife and the husband,
Yet there are but two bodies here.

Like all epigrams, these should be considered together with the place where they are inscribed. The second appears in the exact middle of the collegial church of Ecouis, in the cross aisle. Its solution involves a local story: "The tradition is that a son of Madame d'Ecouis had by his mother, without knowing her or being recognized by her, a daugh-
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ter named Cecilia, whom he afterwards married in Lorraine, she then being in the service of the Duchess of Bar. Thus Cecilia was at one and the same time her husband's daughter, sister, and wife. They were interred together in the same grave at Écouis in 1512."96 The riddle is about how a woman and man are, at one and the same time, wife and husband, sister and brother, and daughter and father; it is inscribed in a church, a religious institution devoted, like a nunnery, to transcending all relationships of consanguinity through a figure at once Son and Father. Similar epitaphs appear in other churches in Europe; Luther likewise retells such stories of incest.97

Shakespeare begins Pericles of Tyre with a similar riddle about a kind of incestuous self-consumption:

I am no viper, yet I feed
On mother's flesh which did me breed.
I sought a husband, in which labour
I found that kindness in a father.
He's father, son, and husband mild;
I mother, wife, and yet his child:
How they may be, and yet in two,
As you will live, resolve it you.

During the course of Pericles, the hero discovers within himself the desire for father-daughter incest that he abhorred in Antiochus; the end of Pericles resolves, or atones for, that desire. The vital solution in Pericles requires a kind of resurrection—wife and daughter, believed dead, are reborn from their living deaths in a religious institution and a brothel. Dramatically, the solution to the riddle of Antiochus involves assigning to Pericles and Marina the roles of Antiochus and Antiochus's daughter; beyond the resurrection of the two women, the plot enacts a final rebirth, as Pericles calls it, of the father, Pericles, from the daughter, Marina. ("Thou that beget'st him that did thee beget" [PER 5.1.197].)96 In this atonement, Pericles foreshadows kinship relations in all the other romances.

In Christianity, such atonement would be achieved by a wonderful transcendence of earthly incest in the Holy Family. It is depicted nowhere more clearly than in certain works of the devoutly religious sixteenth-century libertine Marguerite of Navarre, or Marguerite d'Angoulême.

Marguerite, who had been influenced by Marguerite Porete and the Brethren of the Free Spirit,99 gave protection for a time to the Libertines, a pantheistic, antinomian sect attacked by Calvin in his pamphlet Against the Fantastic Sect of the Libertines.100 (Lucio calls the Duke
“fantastical” [3.2.89] and is himself described as a “Fantastic” in the Dramatis Personae.) The Libertines believed that everything is alike a manifestation of the Spirit of God, thus undoing the distinction between good and evil acts, since nothing can be truly outside God, hence truly bad. They were widespread in France by 1545, the year Calvin wrote his pamphlet, and their doctrines endured into the eighteenth century, when they influenced the “liberty, equality, and fraternity” of the French Revolution.

Shakespeare may have known the works of such English libertines as John Champneys, who argue that God condones, for his chosen people, such “bodily necessities” as “theft, fornication, adultery, murder or any other sin.” He very probably knew the work of Marguerite of Navarre; her influence is suggested by his depiction of academic celibacy in Love's Labor's Lost, whose Princess is modeled on Marguerite of Valois, her grandniece, and also by his apparent reliance in that play and in Measure for Measure on at least two of Marguerite's writings about physical and spiritual incest, The Heptameron and The Mirror of the Sinful Soul.

In these works, Marguerite of Navarre expresses the relationship of religious celibacy to both earthly and spiritual incest. For example, the central tale in the Heptameron (the thirtieth of the third day) concerns a young man who unknowingly has sexual intercourse with his mother and then marries the offspring of this union—his sister, daughter, and spouse. The mother had chosen for her young son “a schoolmaster, a man of holy life”; but “Nature, who is a very secret schoolmaster taught him a very different lesson to any he had learned from his tutor.” Neither the son nor the daughter ever learns of their blood kinship, and for them (if not for their knowingly incestuous mother) the tale ends happily: “And they [the son and daughter] loved each other so much that never were there husband and wife more loving, nor yet more resembling each other; for she was his daughter, his sister and his wife, while he was her father, her brother and her husband.”

In The Mirror of the Sinful Soul, Marguerite takes up a similar theme, but there the sin of earthly incest appears as the blessing of heavenly incest. The protagonist in the Mirror is a woman who compares herself with the Virgin Mary—the mother and sister of God the Son, and the daughter and spouse of God the Father. She acknowledges that her wicked desire for physical sex, even incest, can be overcome only by a liberating, graceful transformation, a raising, of the physical into the spiritual.

Love's Labor's Lost echoes Marguerite's two works in its treatment of
the attempt to repress what Shakespeare calls natural “affects.” The Heptameron says of the woman who knowingly slept with her son that “she must have been some self-sufficient fool, who, in her friar-like dreaming, deemed herself so saintly as to be incapable of sin, just as many of the Friars would have us believe that we can become, merely by our own efforts, which is an exceedingly great error.” The woman’s presumption was trusting to her individual power to overcome lust “instead of humbling herself, and recognizing the powerlessness of our flesh, without God’s assistance, to work anything but sin.”

The same position, that without grace flesh will out, is discussed during the founding of the “little academe” (LLL 1.1.13) in Shakespeare’s Navarre in Love’s Labor’s Lost. The King of Navarre believes that he and his fellow courtiers are “brave conquerors—for so you are, / That war against your own affections” (LLL 1.1.8–9); it requires Berowne to say (if not to believe) that “every man with his affects is born, / Not by might master’d, but by special grace” (LLL 1.1.150–51). The courtiers of Navarre do not successfully keep to the rules they outline—including the rules that “no woman shall come within a mile of my court” (LLL 1.1.119–20) and that “if any man be seen to talk with a woman within the term of three years, he shall endure such public shame as the rest of the court can possibly devise” (LLL 1.1.128–31). The Sisterhood in Measure for Measure is like the little academe in Love’s Labor’s Lost: just as Isabella leaves the Sisterhood sometime after Lucio enters the nunnery to ask her to plead for her brother, so the courtiers in Navarre leave their little academe when “a maid of grace” (LLL 1.1.135) enters.* Finally, Costard’s statement stands: “It is the manner of a man to speak to a woman” (LLL 1.1.206–7).

The Heptameron suggests that it is also the manner of men to commit incest. Incest of one kind or another is inevitable because without grace repression of incestuous desire is bound to be unsuccessful. There is a biographical dimension to Marguerite’s concern with incest; her love for her brother, King Francis of France, is the subject of her greatest poetry. Saintsbury remarks that “it has been asserted that improper relations existed between the brother and the sister,” though the historical evidence is not conclusive on the side of either chastity or incest. Certainly sibling incest, whether physical or spiri-

*So, too, the “votaries” or “votarists” in the two plays are comparable (LLL 2.1.37, 4.2.132; MM 1.4.5). Although in Measure for Measure virginity is associated mostly with religious institutions, academic celibacy (which is foremost in Love’s Labor’s Lost) is at least hinted in the “science” of Old Escalus (1.1.5) and the learning of Angelo. Rejecting marriage is a traditional aspect of seeking secular wisdom as well as of religious righteousness. The wise man, according to Theophrastus, takes no wife (Jerome, Adversus Jovinianum, 1:49, in PL, 23:294; discussed in Dumm, Virginity, p. 49).
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tual, informs her work. In *The Mirror of the Sinful Soul*, for example, she quotes and appears to draw forth the libertine implications for sibling lovers of such universalist passages in the New Testament as Matthew 12:50, "For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." When one rejects earthly kin and is reborn to do the will of God the Father, all men—including one's consanguineous kin—become equally members of one's new family. In this account, sexual desire for anyone who does the will of God is incestuous. Christian universalism as understood by Marguerite considers all sexual desires and acts to be incestuous and imposes on believers the torment of the soul that Marguerite's poem reflects.

Princess Elizabeth of England, in her translation of Marguerite's poem—originally titled *The Glasse of the Synnefull Soule* but significantly retitled *A Godly Medytacion of the Christen Soule* (1544)—generally comprehends the tension in Marguerite's work between the desires for physical incest and for spiritual incest. In ancillary epistles Elizabeth hints that, for herself as for Marguerite, the solution to the desire for physical incest is a spiritual libertinism in God. If by physical incest one becomes at once the sister and wife of one earthly being (the quality and number of kinship relations varies from case to case), one becomes, by spiritual incest, at once the mother, daughter, sister, and wife of one heavenly being. The latter union is the spiritually incestuous one that Elizabeth seeks: "O what union is thys syth (through fayth) i am sure of thee, and nowe i maye call thee sonne, father, spowse, and brother. Father, brother, sonne, husband. O what giftes thou doest gyuve by the goodnes of those names. O my father: what paternite. O my brother: what fraternite. O my childe: what dilection. O my husband: O what comonction." Lest we miss the extraordinary quality of the poetess's love, which both incorporates and transcends incest, she asks of her unnamed quadrifold kin, presumably Jesus: "Is there any loue that maye be cmpared vnto this, but it hath some yuell condicion?"

That the young Elizabeth should understand Marguerite's work on the transformation of physical into spiritual incest is not surprising: Elizabeth's mother Anne Boleyn had been executed for committing sibling incest, and Elizabeth was heiress to the throne of England only because her father had committed sibling-in-law incest with Catherine of Aragon. Working from a copy of the *Mirror* that Marguerite of Navarre had given in friendship to Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth comes to English terms with the spiritual incest with God that informs this work of the unorthodox French spiritual: "Thou does't handle my
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soule (if so I durst say) as a mother, daughter, syster, and wife,” and “Alas, ye, for thou hast broken the kindrede of myne olde father, callinge me daugther of adoption.”

This Renaissance riddling recalls one solution to the inscription in the center of the church at Ecouis: the doctrine of the Catholic Church concerning the adoption that makes God a brother, father, husband, and son. The feminine term for this four-sided relationship, “spouse of Christ,” emphasizes a woman’s marriage with Christ the son in sibling incest, the sort of incest that Marguerite makes her poetical kingpin, that pervades the history of monachal orders, and that motivates the plot of Measure for Measure.

The Political Dimension of Monachism

Because it transcends earthly kin relations in a spiritual conflation where all are one, the spiritual liberty of the monachal orders tends to have the same effect on the earthly polity as does physical sexual liberty, with its threat of bastardy. Both attack the state by undermining the basis of political hierarchy and the ownership and transmission of property.

Liberty and Property, or Communism. Isabella’s entering a Sisterhood may solve, or sublimate, a sisterly fear of earthly incest or of the corrosive liberty that threatens Vienna. However, Sisterly (spiritual) incest threatens to dissolve parentarchal authority in Vienna as much as does the earthly kind because the essential kinship structure of the religious orders militates against the earthly patriarchalism of Vienna.

If we were all wholly children of one Father, we would be equal members of a state in which legal niceties like the ultimately essential Viennese one that treats men differently according to their different fathers would cease to exist. (Compare Angelo’s stridently revolutionary, or liberal, claim to be able to do away with blood ties in administering justice to Claudio: “Were he my kinsman, brother, or my son / It should be thus with him” [2.2.81–82].) In such a state, no one would be superior to another in the way that a father (patriarch) is superior to a son (liberal); none could say with truth, “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30), with the exception of a man-god, like the son-father Jesus. There could be no visible, or ducal, authority.

Monachism, both in origin and in Tudor England, was, if only spiritually, an essentially revolutionary movement against political authority. Even before the formal establishment of eremitic communities in the early Church, both male and female ascetics would join
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together in a single residence in a family-like relationship. (The Pseudo-Clementian epistles “To Virgins” [fourth century] refer to Church members who lived in a “spiritual marriage” as brothers and sisters.) 117 The Church equivalent of political authority, in the persons of patriarchal critics like Eusebius of Emesa, viewed such practices with alarm because they furthered “either radical asceticism or radical libertinism.” 118

To the sexual radicalism of the orders there corresponded a propertal one. Just as the incest taboo can be related to the need to structure property relations, so the monachal injunction to commit spiritual incest often includes an injunction to end all merely human property relations. Saint Jerome, for example, writes, “Since you have been consecrated to perpetual virginity, your possessions are not your possessions [tua non tua sunt], because they now belong to Christ,” and Saint Gregory praises his sister, Sister Macrina, who “found delight in temperance” and “thought it affluence to own nothing.” 119 The fraternal orders do not merely endorse poverty; in some sense, they raze all property relations just as they raze all sexual relations. Saint John Chrysostom says, in his essay on virginity, “Now is not the time for matrimony and possessions; rather it is the time for penury and for that unusual way of life that will be of value to us in the time to come.” 120 He succinctly expresses the politically threatening aspect of this rejection of possessions by calling virginity isaggelos politea, an extreme homogenization at once communist and incestuous. 121 In its essential form, monachal fraternity militates against any and all property ownership. This attitude makes property potentially a germ of conflict between monachal fraternity and patriarchal authority.

Elizabethans greatly feared political dissolution, which is implicit in such a rejection of ordinary kinship structure (the parentarchy) and ordinary economic structures (property), and they linked political dissolution with sexual liberty. 122 Bishop Stephen Gardiner, for example, relates the libertine position “all is for the flesh, women and meat with liberty of hand and tongue” to the political “dissolution and dissipation of all estates.” 123 Apart from any connection between the monastic orders and liberty either sexual or political (propertal), few in Tudor England would have overlooked the connection between the monastic orders and a more specific threat of political chaos—revolt. In the general fear of Catholics and foreign Catholic infiltration, Catholic recusants (possibly including Shakespeare’s father) were subject to arrest and severe punishment, and during Elizabeth’s reign about two hundred Catholic priests were executed. 124 Monks had fig-
ured in such anti-Tudor plots as the Northern Rebellion and the Arch-
priest Controversy. They had also been prominent among the op-
ponents of Henry VIII, and one of the reasons he gave for dissolving
the monasteries was a fear that monks would incite the commons to
rebel. (Ironically, one of the primary motivations historians now ac-
cept for the Dissolution is the very large amount of worldly property
the crown gained thereby.)

While monachal resistance to the English king in the sixteenth cen-
tury can be explained to some extent by specific historical circum-
stances, the strictly monachal doctrines that one should "Call no man
father" and that one should own things only through a common God
suggest how the resistance of liberal monks to parentarchal monarchs
is a logical and ideological extension of fraternalism. In Measure for
Measure, which explores the essential ideological basis of such a con-
flict as that in sixteenth-century England, the conflict between political
authority (a parentarchal and royal duke) and fraternalistic liberty
(Brothers and Sisters) is hinted in Brother Vincentio's claim concern-
ing Duke Vincentio that "His subject am I not" (5.1.313).

Shakespeare's choice of the Clares rather than another order for his
play highlights property relations, for the Clares' unique privilege
concerned property. One sign of the potential subversiveness of the
vow of poverty for which Clare struggled is that adherents of the
original intents of Saint Francis were accused of heresy. Church au-
thorities regarded his goal of mendicant poverty as appropriate for
eremitic but not for conventual life, and Pope John XXII eventually
passed legislation that effectively undermined it. Clare's special privi-
lege requires that her Sisters own nothing; this creates a potentially
subversive association of monachal poverty with such begging as that
of the mendicant orders and mere rogues.

Our very word "beg" reflects a similar association. It derives from
the names Beghard and Beguine, which denote the men's and wom-
en's components, respectively, of a lay order established in the twelfth
and thirteenth centuries, subject to no rule beyond the obligation to
good works and (when members lived in a religious community) to
chastity. The Beguines and Beghards originally had no vow of pov-
erty, but they fell under the influence of the mendicant orders (which
eventually subsumed many of their communities) and of various mys-
tical and heretical movements. The name Beghard thus became asso-
ciated with groups of wandering mendicants of a physically as well as
spiritually libertine bent (hence "beggar"), who were often associated
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with the Brethren of the Free Spirit and similar groups. At last their spiritual libertinism became too much for the Church authorities, and they were first restricted and finally persecuted.

In Measure for Measure, the enlightening Lucio characterizes the Duke as a beggar. “It was a mad, fantastical trick of him,” Lucio says, “to steal from the state and usurp the beggary he was never born to” (3.2.89–90). In fact, the Friar/Duke tries to prepare Claudio for death by reminding him, as would any mendicant, that to live one must beg: “For all thy blessed youth / . . . doth beg the alms / Of palsied eld” (3.1.34–36). In Measure for Measure, moreover, begging is further compared, if not identified, with libertine fornication. Thus the debtor Master Caper, now a beggar (4.3.12), is in prison with fornicators, and Lucio follows his reference to the Duke’s usurped beggary (which is ironically exact, since the Duke stands before him in the garb of a mendicant friar) with the accusations that the Duke would “mouth with a beggar” (3.2.177) and, with “your beggar of fifty,” would “put a ducat in her clack-dish” (3.2.122–23). Lucio’s association of sexual license with begging would be unnecessary (any harlot will mouth, any prostitute take a ducat, so there is no need to seek out beggars) if he did not intend to connect sexual license with begging.

Measure for Measure most clearly suggests the potential connection between begging and popular upheaval when Pompey describes (and may also show) the prison filled with clients of the whorehouse, now begging: “All great doers in our trade . . . are now ‘for the Lord’s sake’” (4.3.18–20). “For the Lord’s sake” is the cry both of beggars and of libertine prisoners shouting from the windows of their prison.

Enter Lucio

Henry VIII, Robert Filmer, and others feared in certain religious and lay movements a tendency toward liberty. They believed that the public needed to believe, or they wanted the public to believe, in the “strange kind of domineering phantom” of the father, as Filmer’s critic John Locke called it. The absolutist king and his apologist were right in one sense: the struggle between liberty and absolute monarchy did involve the breakdown of the old family order and the development of a new political one.

Libertine religious groups argued that where liberty is, there is the spirit of God—“Ubi libertas, ubi spiritus.” They replaced patriarchal authority with a divine spirit that sanctions such liberal (if extreme) acts as incest, an act that in itself militates against the patriarchal social
order. Eventually, political radicals in revolutionary France—intellectual descendants of the libertines\textsuperscript{133}—attempted to bring “liberty, equality, and fraternity” to a new nation of free sons (\textit{liberi}), and they beheaded the sovereign father. And political radicals in America, planning to overthrow a patriarchal king but fearing to destroy the developing idea of federalist patriotism, argued, not that liberty is where God is, but that one’s fatherland is where liberty is. \textit{Ubi libertas, ubi patria} was the motto of the American revolutionary James Otis.\textsuperscript{134}

In \textit{Measure for Measure}, both Isabella and Claudio represent the libertine or fraternal faction: Isabella, because as novice she is about to espouse Universal Siblinghood and become the spouse of God; Claudio, because as the producer of an illegitimate child he makes for a world in which everyone will be potentially a sibling. From this viewpoint, both siblings are in alliance against the state, and the play’s Hegelian moment is the instant when the novice Isabella must decide whether she will serve as everyman’s Sister, hence remain in the nunnery, or serve as Claudio’s sister, hence leave the nunnery with the pimpish Lucio.

At the beginning of the play, before she meets Lucio, Isabella has presumably begun to raze the Old Testament prohibition against earthly incest by raising her family to heaven. Just as she is about to join the Christian Sisterhood, however, Lucio tells her that a fellow child of God the Father (a brother like all men) is in trouble with the law, and that the fellow also happens to be the child of her father and mother (a brother like no other man). When Isabella follows Lucio to plead before Angelo, she moves from an intended spiritual marriage with Christ, whose quintessentially incestuous birth is of questionable legal status, to serving her brother Claudio, whose legitimacy she comes to question. The novice leaves the liberal religious order and reenters the world of earthly familial relationships, including sister, mother, and wife. She moves away from homogeneity in liberty to political and patriarchal heterogeneity.

The Cathars of the Middle Ages renounced procreation and called sexual intercourse, even in marriage, “fornication.” (It was to counteract their “Albigensian heresy” that the Roman church eventually imposed celibacy on the clergy.)\textsuperscript{135} The Shakers renounced physical marriage in favor of a spiritual union (\textit{syzygia}).\textsuperscript{136} Unless we are, like them, truly universalist, incorporating and transcending both libertinism (in sex) and communism (in property)—that is, unless we are genuinely fraternal or liberal—Isabella’s exit from the Sisterhood will make us glad for the sake of the parentarchal earthly order and for the sake of
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the propagation of the human race. We can sigh with relief that Isabella's exit from the nunnery figures "generation redeemed." 187 Many readers and spectators experience this comfortable gladness when Isabella leaves the nunnery in Act 1; at that point their feelings are in keeping with the gist of the play. But at that point the play has just begun, the dilemma is hardly stated, and the precise kind of generation that the play redeems is still unknown. It is the business of the rest of the play to bring that generation, indeed all human generation, under a new and discomforting scrutiny.