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Marguerite of Navarre, holding a mirror in her hand.
(The Book of Hours of Catherine de Médicis; Louvre.)

My brother had but justice,
In that he did the thing for which he died:
For Angelo,
His act did not o'ertake his bad intent,
And must be buried but as an intent
That perish'd by the way. Thoughts are no subjects;
Intents, but merely thoughts.

MM 5.1.446-52

IN THE dramaturgical economy of *Measure for Measure*, as in Aquinas's account of fornication, the sexual act is teleologically conflated with its biological end, so that intercourse is always reproduction and fornication is always bastardizing, hence always eventually incest. *Measure for Measure* goes a step further: it conflates intent and act as well, with the result that the mere desire for sex is treated as essentially reproduction, hence as having immediate consequences for the moral standing of an individual and the social organization of the state.

The conflation of act with intent informs an essential political (or legal) and theological dilemma of the play: Should men be judged by their actions or by their intentions? Can they properly be judged at all? On the one hand, the dramaturgical logic of the play identifies intention with action, playacting out the intentions of Angelo and sentencing him as though he had actually enacted them. On the other hand, intent is finally separated from act when Isabella pardons Angelo's un-enacted "intents" on the grounds that they were "merely thoughts" (5.1.452).

Intent as Act

It is one tack of *Measure for Measure* that religious authority conflates intent with act and political authority separates them. Secular authority, on the one hand, can and must concern itself only with visible or audible action, such as the use, or acts, that the Duke requires of Angelo and the public marriage bans that Angelo requires of Claudio. Swinburne writes: "Mortal man cannot otherwise judge of men's meanings, than by their sayings, for the tongue is the messenger of the heart."¹ In much the same strain, in the seventeenth century James I wrote in *Basilicon Doron*, quoting Cicero, "Virtutis enim laus omnis in actione consistit" (The reward of virtue consists in action). He added, "It is not enough that ye have and retaine (as pris-

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oners) within your selfe never so many good qualities and vertues, except ye employ them, and set them on worke, for the weale of them that are committed to your charge.”² If what is within can be known only by what is without, people can and should be judged only by their actions or lack of action, for example, by their sexual activity or actual celibacy.

Religious authority, on the other hand, looks into and must govern the invisible, silent hearts of men. The Church, in the confessional, looks into people’s hearts and discerns the intents upon which human beings—including the saintly Isabella or the good Duke—act. This means that the Church will judge people by the actions they desire or intend, consciously or not; it has already classified those desired actions, as Aquinas urges, by their telos, or impersonal intention as act. In separate requests for Isabella to sleep with Angelo, for example, Angelo intends fornication and Claudio may intend a kind of incest, but, regardless of their individual intentions, the generic telos of the requested sexual union is reproduction and the consequent destruction of the political order by illegitimacy and incest.

So long as we can conceptually separate intent from act in “secular” fashion, laws (such as those in the Old Testament) that forbid and punish acts of adultery and incest may restrain fornication without annihilating the human species. *Measure for Measure*, however, explores the awesome implications of conflating intent (or telos) with act. In its plot, individual intent (satisfaction of concupiscence) is connected with act (fornication) in the same way that sexual intercourse is connected with reproduction (natural “use”) or fornication is connected with bastardizing and incest. All are conflated, so that illicit desire becomes one with illicit reproduction. Jesus argues that repressed (intended) sexual desire is no more acceptable than expressed (enacted) sexual desire because, morally speaking, repressed desire *is* the intended act. The general view of *Measure for Measure* has it that the religious and legal core of the play is the confrontation of justice with mercy; we shall see, however, how that core of the play involves rather the conflation of act (sexual intercourse) both with its individual intent (satisfaction of concupiscence) and with its generic intent (reproduction).

Razing the Old Commandment, or Raising the New Commandment. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus razes the Old Commandment against adultery given the Jews on Mount Sinai by raising it to a new level: “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart”

(Matt. 5:27–28). Jesus here conflates desire (thought) with act. For him, a sinful intent is a sinful act, just as for nature each act of sexual intercourse is, to all intents, an act of procreation. This identification of intent with act makes the temptation to commit a crime the same as the attempt to commit a crime.* Under English common law, both the attempt and the crime itself are punishable by the same law, but Jesus would go one step further. When he presided over the “trial” of an adulteress (John 8), he acted on the most radical implication of this doctrine (assuming no one can completely avoid having intents) by appearing to offer no judgment at all.†

Jesus’ words and actions challenge proponents of secular law and order, who must argue, along with Angelo in the middle of the play and Isabella at its end, that “’Tis one thing to be tempted . . . , / Another thing to fall” (2.1.17–18, cf. 5.1.448–51). According to him, being tempted to kill a man out of anger and actually killing him are one and are punishable (if at all) under the same law. (“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment” [Matt. 5:21–22].) According to a variation of the same principle, intending to marry a woman and actually marrying her are one and the same. For Jesus, the intention of Claudio’s “fast” marriage (1.2.136) might make his secret union with Juliet an actual marriage, but for Angelo the lack of public and visible enactment necessarily outlaws it. From Jesus’ viewpoint, Claudio’s child might be counted legitimate, but from Angelo’s viewpoint, it is a bastard. (From Angelo’s viewpoint, Jesus himself would be counted the illegitimate son of an adulteress rather than the extra-legal Son of God.)

*In his study of Dostoevsky and parricide, Freud to some extent concurs with the general gist of Matthew 5:27–28 that not action but only intent is what counts. “It is a matter of indifference who actually committed the crime,” writes Freud. “Psychology is only concerned to know who desired it emotionally and who welcomed it when it was done. And for that reason all of the brothers are equally guilty” (Freud, “Dostoevsky and Parricide,” p. 236).

†Some interpreters of the New Testament have tried to weaken or obscure Jesus’ powerful, but discomfiting, conflation of intent with act. Schweizer, for example, deflects attention from the discomfiting aspect of the conflation when he says that the tale of the adulteress is intended merely “to protect the rights of women” (Schweizer, *Good News*, p. 121), who, according to the Law, were sometimes punished more severely for adultery than were men. Similarly, A. M. Hunter says the view that looking with lust upon a woman amounts to having sexual intercourse with her is intended to outlaw “not the involuntary waking of the sexual appetite but the deliberate intent to sin” (*Design*, p. 48). Yet Jesus himself, at least as Matthew and John report his words, clearly includes in his conflation of intent with act any act whatever (whether sinful or innocent) and any intent whatever (whether deliberate or involuntary).

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The Implication of Jesus' Position. Jesus says that he has come not to abolish (erase) the Law, but to fulfill (raise) it. He suggests, however, neither that outlawed acts (adultery is a favorite example) are wrong nor that they should be punished. Instead, he presents the awesome argument that, since libertinism is essentially universal, one (or One) must (1) allow it, or else either (2) condemn all people to die or (3) grant some or all people a merciful pardon.

1. Allowing Universal Libertinism. From Jesus' argument that lust is essentially adultery it follows that humans must necessarily accept the widespread practice of adultery—hence relax or erase the laws against it—since men and women cannot always and invariably, at all points in their lives, repress their conscious or unconscious lust on seeing a woman. (Sisters, like the Clares, wear veils to help men, but that is not sufficient; in some situations, indeed, veils even arouse desire.) Such libertine acceptance of fornication has been the norm in Vienna for some fourteen or nineteen years, but it has worked ill, since celibacy and illegitimacy have been the results.

2. Enjoining Universal Genocide. Jesus' conflation of lust with adultery can also lead to the view that mankind should be annihilated. Since adultery is against God's law, since the desire for sex entails commission of the sex act, and since desire is universally human, therefore all men deserve execution (an Old Testament punishment for adultery). In this sense, Jesus "came not to send peace, but a sword" (Matt. 10: 34). Vienna is threatened with this genocidal sword in the middle of the play when Angelo, relying on Viennese laws that confuse the Old Testament punishment for adultery with the one for fornication, plays the role of the heavenly swordsman and Claudio stands for mankind. We may think of Paul, swordsmanlike, condemning the incestuous Corinthians to death.

3. Forgiving Libertinism. A final consequence of Jesus' argument that intent is act is that, although the old law against adultery and the old punishment of adultery (execution) are just, no human being can punish any human being for adultery. Such punishment is unacceptable because the judge and jury, as well as the hangman, are, to all intents, also adulterers. The partly human Jesus suggests that *all* humans are, to all intents, adulterers; it follows that Angelo, if he is merely human (which the ironic Lucio doubts [3.2.99–101, 107–8, 167–68]), cannot sentence Claudio without violating Jesus' rule "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone" (John 8: 7). Escalus uses this argument (2.1.7–16), recalling Jesus' stern warning, "Judge not, that ye be not judged" (Matt. 7: 1). Many readers of *Mea-*

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sure for Measure take this to be the message of the play. But Angelo, if he is to carry out any laws at all—and how could there be a society without laws?—must reject the argument that sinners in intent cannot pass judgment on sinners in act. Angelo does what he must do. “What knows the laws,” asks Angelo, “That thieves do pass on thieves?” (2.1.22–23). Not only must the law pass over actual crimes that leave no material trace (fornication without pregnancy, say), it must also pass over desired crimes that are not enacted (lust without fornication).

Jesus’ argument seems, then, to lead inevitably to the acceptance of widespread libertinism or the relaxation of the earthly punishment of libertinism. Otherwise universal genocide would result, and even genocide would be wrong, since among fully human beings no one is pure enough to execute another for libertinism, not even the partly human Jesus. Only the Father, implies the Son, can properly punish his adulterous children. This is the revolutionary “new commandment” (1 John 2:7–8) that Jesus, though no scribe, figures in the dust at the trial of the adulteress (John 8:6), that scribbling being the only time Jesus (who is, like Socrates, the one who does not write) is reported by the official church apostles to have written.³

The position that we are all sinners is, according to most serious critics since Schlegel, the meaning of the play, and it always leads them to contemplate a sublime leap from justice to mercy. “The true significance of the work,” writes Schlegel, “is the triumph of mercy over strict justice; no man being himself so free from errors as to be entitled to deal it out to his equals.”⁴ This is pleasant, but universal mercy is an impossible position for a political state. Shakespeare cannot rest content with the utopian, or incestuous, vision supposed by the conflation of intent with act and by the consequent demand for universal mercy.

The Partial Education of Angelo

At the beginning of *Measure for Measure*, the Duke suggests that each of the two men he will leave in charge of the state—Angelo and Escalus—has something in him that should come forth. Angelo, for example, has been unable, as underling to the Duke, to act upon or use his knowledge; the Duke’s departure is an opportunity for him to do so. Angelo is pregnant with some hidden quality, and the Duke counsels him to give birth: “Thyself and thy belongings / Are not thine own so proper as to waste / Thyself upon thy virtues, they on thee”; and he warns Angelo, “Heaven doth with us as we with torches

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do, / Not light them for themselves; for if our virtues / Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike / As if we had them not" (1.1.29–35, cf. Matt. 5:15–16).

The Duke refers not so much to the procreation of children or to the particular act of creation, as to action in general. He suggests that, just as Escalus is "pregnant" (1.1.11) in knowledge about the people, urban institutions, and justice, so Angelo has within himself some quality that should issue forth. Just what this quality is, of course, is unclear. Apparently, so far as the Duke is concerned, any issue—any "use"—from Angelo will be good, just as, so far as nature is concerned, any human procreation, legitimate or not, will be good.

Nature never lends
The smallest scruple of her excellence
But, like a thrifty goddess, she determines
Herself the glory of a creditor,
Both thanks and use. (1.1.36)

Like the puritanical Malvolio, as Maria in *Twelfth Night* makes him out to be, Angelo is made out by others (if not by himself) to be "crammed, as he thinks, with excellencies" (TN 2.3.150), but what he finally bears to the world is a monster. If Claudio's sexual use is illegitimate, so, too, we shall learn, is Angelo's moral use.

Perhaps some people, like the apostles' man-god Jesus, can successfully incorporate and transcend human desire and thus be without sin. (In the play, Brother Thomas and Sister Francesca may stand for such people.) The rest of us, however, are morally imperfect—especially if we accept the conflation of thought with act. Most of us could use some moral education. In *Measure for Measure* this education involves knowledge and place.

Knowledge. In *Measure for Measure* the first part of moral education is to recognize one's own lustful thoughts. Angelo, who substitutes in this unpleasant business for the Duke (he is the "King's player"),⁵ gains such knowledge in theory from Escalus (2.1.8–16) and in practice from Isabella (2.2.163–87). It is Isabella who tells Angelo "Go to your bosom, / Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know / That's like my brother's fault" (2.2.137–39); it is, moreover, her presence as woman that makes him do this—she later claims he was ignorant of his lust before he laid eyes on her (5.1.443–45).⁶

Before he learned from Isabella about his own lustful thoughts, the celibate Angelo's severe rulings arose in part from ignorance of what he was, even of where he came from. Lucio suggests that he acts as though he had been created, like Jesus, in an extra-human way: "They

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say this Angelo was not made by man and woman, after this downright way of creation" (3.2.99–101). Lucio further jokes that Angelo is a "motion ungenerative" (3.2.108) and an "ungenitured agent" (3.2.167–68). Angelo seems impervious to the sexual desire that presumably all sexually generated beings must sometimes feel. Thus, for Angelo the apparent virtue of continence has involved no struggle to contain sexual desire within the realm of legitimate action or to transcend it; for him, the apparently virtuous adequation of conscious sexual desires with the enactment of those desires (an adequation that has resulted in his secular celibacy) has been facile because those desires in him seemed to him to be nil. But, as Lucio knows, Angelo is not what he seems, to others and himself, to be: "He's coming: I perceive't" (2.2.126).

The coming out of Angelo's repressed desires—the first part of his practical moral education—unpleasantly forces Angelo to recognize, perhaps for the first time, that he has desires in conflict with a moral or political law. In his psyche there thus develops a schism between what he consciously desires and what he feels he ought to do. Having been aroused by Isabella, for example, he can choose to act continently or incontinently, to obey his conscience or disobey it; but in either case his soul will be split.

In the past Angelo's sexual temper had not been stirred:

Never could the strumpet (2.2.183)
With all her double vigour, art and nature,
Once stir my temper . . .
. . . Ever till now
When men were fond, I smil'd, and wonder'd how.

His meeting with Isabella has shown him that, after all, he is neither a physiological eunuch nor an impotent man, and that his past celibate life was the result not so much of his desire to serve the state as of a certain repression. His celibacy had been merely one response, albeit an extreme one, to the political or familial pressures that make not for an external (hence public) castration of the private parts but for an internal (hence private) castration of the mind. (Compare Rom. 2 : 29: "Circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit.")

Dom Gregoire Lemerrier, discussing his monks' treatment by a woman psychoanalyst, says: "There are eunuchs who are born such at the breast of their mothers; there are eunuchs who have become such through the acts of men; and there are eunuchs who have made themselves such for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven [Matt. 19:12]. Psychotherapy reveals that many Brothers who had thought them-

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selves eunuchs of the third class are in reality eunuchs of the first two classes.”⁷ Such a revelation is a precondition for becoming eventually one who has made himself a eunuch truly for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven.⁸ But it is not a sufficient condition; thus for Angelo self-knowledge is only the first part of the cure.

Place. Most critics argue that Angelo’s basic fault is not hypocrisy but lack of self-knowledge.⁹ It is precisely an increase in self-knowledge, however, that creates one precondition for his becoming a conscious hypocrite (i.e., acting out a virtuous part on stage). His new place, which creates the official stage from which he can seem to others to be virtuous, is the second precondition.

Angelo’s ignorance of his own desires was one restraint on his actions, but that restraint is removed when he sees and hears Isabella. Will Angelo’s newly discovered desire rule his conduct, so that he becomes incontinent? Or will the old law rule his conduct, so that he becomes knowingly continent?

For Angelo the option of incontinence is made more likely by the removal of a second restraint on his actions, his fear of punishment by authority or withdrawal of authority’s approval. It is thus part of Angelo’s moral education to have the ducal place, which, he believes, confers on him an invisible and all-seeing power. (In the *Republic* Plato relates how this power was once given to the tyrant Gyges in the form of a magic ring.)¹⁰ In *Measure for Measure*, Angelo thinks that his actions are invisible (he is sure that no one will believe Isabella’s account of the bargain he proposes [2.4.153–55]) and that the actions of everyone are visible to him (he is sure that he knows what is going on in the vineyard and the prison). That is how the office indicates the man.¹¹

Insofar as these two restraints on his actions—ignorance of his desires and fear of external authority—are removed, Angelo is given a rare liberty to act out his intents. His desires, once repressed, can now be expressed freely without fear of external authority. Angelo can do what the Duke wanted him to: he can give birth to his intents as acts and thus become “unpregnant” (4.4.18) of his thoughts.

From one point of view, Angelo’s new freedom is an extreme test of morality. (The test would be more extreme if a third restraint on action, bad conscience of the kind that Angelo suffers [4.4.18–32] but Plato’s Gyges does not, had also been removed.) But from Jesus’ point of view, it is really no test at all. From the first point of view, Angelo’s choosing incontinence (lack of restraint) over continence (restraint) would be a sign of moral weakness or strength. For Jesus, however, moral weakness resides in the desire itself: Angelo’s desire per se makes goodness impossible, whether Angelo represses or expresses

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that desire. If lust and adultery are the same, so too, if one continues to desire, are continence and incontinence. Only the self-mastering of desire is truly moral, as Theseus points out when describing a nun's life in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: "Thrice blest they that master so their blood / To undergo such maiden pilgrimage" (MND 1.1.73–74). Dom Gregoire Lemercier associates such self-mastering with making oneself a eunuch for the sake of God; it could also be associated with Aristotelian moderation or the temperance of James I.¹²

The process of the play shows that what had kept Angelo from acting badly was not only ignorance of his desires but also fear of being seen by a master external to himself. When the substitute duke (Angelo) learns that the supposedly absent duke (Vincenzio) was present, he is unhappy not so much that he acted badly as that he was seen acting badly:

O my dread lord, (5.1.364)
I should be guiltier than my guiltiness
To think I can be undiscernible,
When I perceive your Grace, like power divine,
Hath looked upon my passes.

The last act of the play constitutes a "confession" (5.1.370) of what Angelo desires, but it also indicates that Angelo has not learned how to live without such negative restraints as those represented for him by what he calls, more in need of an authority figure than in flattery, the god-like Duke. Angelo has not learned temperance.

Fearful Continence vs. Loving Temperance. The distinction between acting well out of fear and doing so out of love is precisely the distinction between contrition and attrition with which the Duke as Friar tests Juliet's repentance.

... but lest you do repent. (2.3.30)
As that the sin hath brought you to this shame,
Which sorrow is always toward ourselves, not heaven,
Showing we would not spare heaven as we love it,
But as we stand in fear—

At the end of the play, as in the middle, the "fornicatrix" Juliet is closer to true repentance (as she stands in love) than Angelo the fornicator (as he stands in fear).¹³ (Similarly, in *Richard the Second*, the Duke of York accuses his treasonous son: "Fear, and not love, begets his penitence" [R2 5.3.54].)

Angelo's fear of the Duke is not Christian in the fraternal sense; he acts more like the slave of a Roman emperor than the free son (*liber*) of the Holy God as Father. Paul warns: "For all who are led by the

Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship [or, according to the Vulgate, “the spirit of sons of adoption,” *spiritum adoptionis filiorum*]. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!,’ it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” (Rom. 8: 14–16; Rev. Stand.) “We wait for adoption as sons,” says Paul, not as slaves (Rom. 8: 23; Rev. Stand.). *Measure for Measure*, set in the seat of the Holy Roman Empire, explores the view that joining a fraternal order can turn slavery into filial freedom (liberty) under the Father. (Jesus, who is both an equal brother to all men and an equal son to God the Father, equalizes the sons with the Father.) Similarly the play explores the view that freedom may be found in being a “free dependant,” like the Provost obedient to the Friar with the ducal ring (4.3.90), or in being mutually interdependent (“What’s mine is yours, and what is yours is mine” is the marriage relationship the Duke ultimately proposes to Isabella [5.1.534]). But Angelo’s fearful slavishness, connected to the patriarchal figurehead by earthly rather than heavenly sonship—or by the boundary in his consciousness between what he now knows he wants to do and what the father figure will let him do—keeps him from the freedom that universal fraternity, or liberty, might allow.

At the beginning of the play, Angelo is a self-ignorant man whose known desires are adequate to what he does. In the middle, he becomes an incontinent tyrant. At the end, he is a continent subject who is conscious of his “bad” desires but, if he will now act well, will do so only out of slavish fear: Angelo never gets to the point of being “good” for any reason other than the negative desire to be free from guilt or from espial by a father figure. The process of the play thus educates Angelo only partway toward making his known desires adequate with his acts, toward the Aristotelian moderation, temperance, or self-mastery by which the two parts of his split psyche—desire and law—might be rejoined in a higher union.¹⁴

James I, in the *Basilicon Doron*, says of the virtues that a man should make “Temperance, Queen of all the rest within you. I mean not the vulgar interpretation of Temperance, which only consists in *gustu & tactu*, by the moderation of these two senses; but I mean of that wise moderation, that first commanding your self, shall as Queen, command all the affections and passions of your mind.”¹⁵ In *Measure for Measure* Angelo is unsuccessful in temperately uniting desire with act, or in becoming, to quote Escalus’s praise of the Duke, “a gentleman of all temperance” (3.2.231). Yet the play itself moves toward the con-

scious adequation of known intent and act, toward the mastering of one's own desire rather than the tyrannical enslaving of another human being (Angelo's attempted subjection of Isabella) or to another human being (Angelo's subjection to the Duke).

For Angelo and most all of humankind, belief in and fear of a visible and all-seeing external authority is necessary to restrain desire. In Vienna the Duke is called paternal, royal, even divine, because most people are morally weak; in order to behave well they need to personify authority in him, to mythologize him. At least two persons, however, probably have few illusions about the Duke: Escalus and Lucio. Escalus knows that the Duke as yet only contends to know himself (3.2.226–27). (The ancient advisor may be impotent sexually as well as politically, so that his need for a fictional authority is small. The incontinent Lucio, not without insight, accuses the Duke both of having illicit sexual desires and of acting on them (3.2.122–24). But society as a whole is composed of such childish men as the ignorant, celibate Angelo and the incontinent Froth, men who require and believe in the visible presence of the authoritative and parentarchal law. For them, liberalism is dangerous because through incest it destroys the law by making impossible the myth of the Parent that grounds the law.

However needful for Angelo and most all of humankind, parentarchal authority is essentially problematic, and not merely because it may be a mere fiction. Childish subjection to authority encourages, not the development of true moderation, but a continence in which one has bad intents but does not act on them because of fear. Such continence is not essentially good, since, as Jesus says, it is essentially the same as incontinence. Put another way, people who are subject to parentarchal authority are likely to act more out of fear or lack of fear than out of love. Perhaps the liberal Duke knows this and conducts his experiment in Vienna in the hope of making his presence as ducal patriarch unnecessary—in the hope of turning Vienna into a kind of liberal (even incestuous) democracy in which all would become educated about their desires and some become moderate. The case of Angelo, who is no worse than most men, shows that the experiment is a failure. The process of the play replaces Angelo's self-ignorance with self-knowledge, but it can replace his incontinence only with continence, not moderation. Because continence requires authority, Vincentio must eventually give up his liberal disguise as Friar and take up again his patriarchal place as Duke.

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The Education of the Duke

Oh, what may man within him hide,
Though angel on the outward side!

(3.2.264–65)

A parentarchal ruler should be visible to childlike subjects; to quote James I, “Kings being publike persons, by reason of their office and authority, are . . . set . . . upon a publike stage, in the sight of all people.”¹⁶ Vincentio, however, wants to give up his patriarchal role and become invisibly a member of the liberal community that a ruler should be seen overseeing:

I love the people, (1.1.67)
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.

Vincentio feels within himself the tension between authority and liberty (king and children) that informs the sexual and political life of Vienna. He wants to be of the people rather than, or as well as, above them—to be Son as well as Father. The ducal officer, in the words of the disguised King Henry V, still learning the art of governance, “is but a man, as I am” (H5 4.1.101–2).^{*} Seeking a middle ground on which to transcend the tension between place (office) and man, Vincentio changes his own place to Brother of the Church and Angelo’s place to father of the state.

Like Angelo, Vincentio is no angel. Critics have noted this, but they have condemned merely his past lack of action (e.g., his laxness in punishing fornicators and murderers) and present actions (his secret stratagems to save Claudio).¹⁷ Vincentio’s main weakness, however, is the all-too-human one Shakespeare introduces in his conversation with the doubting Friar Thomas: he has illicit, if natural, sexual intents, which are most likely hidden even from himself.¹⁸ Vincentio’s knowledge of his own intents and sexual activity is questionable. As confessant, Vincentio, with godlike assurance, says to Friar Thomas, “Believe not that the dribbling dart of love can pierce a complete bosom” (1.3.2–3). Yet doubting Thomas implies that Vincentio wishes to disguise himself to carry out some love scheme. As Friar, Vincentio tells Lucio, “I have never heard the absent Duke much detected for women” (3.2.118–19), yet Lucio, to the credibility of whose innuend-

^{*}Vincentio disguises himself in the hood of the order of Friar Thomas so as not to stage himself to the people, just as Henry V, once the liberal Hal, disguises himself in the cloak of Sir Thomas in order to stage the troops to himself.

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does we shall return, says that the duke “had some feeling of the sport” (3.2.115–16) and “would mouth with a beggar” (3.2.177).

In the same vein, Escalus tells Friar Vincentio that the Duke “contended especially to know himself” (3.2.226–27). Maybe this was “a very high tribute . . . during the Renaissance,”¹⁹ but to consider only its meaning as compliment is to deflate the literal meaning of ancient Escalus’s words: the Duke does *not* know himself. In ancient Greece the motto “Know thyself” was inscribed on the gates to the temple of Apollo at Delphi (echoed in Shakespeare’s “Delphos,” literally, “womb,” from which the oracle’s judgment is brought in *The Winter’s Tale* [2.3.195]). There, it inspired Socrates to search for wisdom—unlike Vincentio, he knew that he did not know.²⁰ Apollo’s oracle likewise encouraged the ignorant, know-it-all Oedipus to strive to know himself by seeking out his family origins. Before he falls for Isabella, Vincentio, like Angelo, knows himself no better than Oedipus before Oedipus knew his daughter Antigone to be his own sister.

Like Angelo, Vincentio seems to fall in love with Isabella at first sight.²¹ Why? What does it mean to fall in love with a maiden made invisible by her hood and by the darkness of a prison cell? The Friar-Duke’s earliest wooing of Isabella (“The hand that hath made you fair hath made you good” [3.1.179–80]) has a spiritual and a natural level, but to insist, as one critic does, that “at the ‘natural’ level the wooing constantly suggests the conventions of chivalric romance,”²² is to obscure how and why Vincentio is naturally drawn toward the novice nun. Does the Duke, like his angelic substitute, “desire to raze the sanctuary”—that is, Isabella—precisely because she seems to be one of the “saints” (2.2.171, 181)?

Wordplay in *Measure for Measure* suggests that, at some psychological level, from his first sight of the veiled Isabella the Duke wants to have sexual relations with her. His very first words already require of her a “satisfaction” (3.1.154)—meaning a penance (as her father confessor) but foreshadowing the “satisfaction” (3.1.264), or sexual union, that Angelo will require and that Vincentio (also as confessor) will exact from Mariana in her stead.²³ The Friar-Duke says that “the satisfaction I would require is likewise your own benefit” (3.1.154–55), and he promises to “benefit” (3.1.200) Mariana as well. But by Elbow’s memorable malapropism a “benefactor” is also a “malefactor” (2.1.50), and if means do not justify ends (as the complex teleology of the play suggests), Vincentio aims at a malefice. A similarly appropriate malapropism conflates “respect” with “suspect” (2.1.159–75). The Friar-Duke, who has often stilled Mariana’s “brawling discontent” (4.1.9), asks her, “Do you persuade yourself that I respect you?” (4.1.53); but

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by Elbow's malapropism "respect" comes to mean "an obscene public thing."²⁴

To be left alone with Isabella in the prison, Vincentio must reassure the seemingly suspicious Provost that "no loss shall touch her by my company" (3.1.177), when in fact he will use his disguise to woo Isabella in exactly the way Friar Thomas guessed he would.* Fornication between a father confessor and his spiritual daughter (or penitent) is "spiritual incest"; mediated by Vincentio-as-Friar's unrecognized intention to commit spiritual incest, the wooing of Isabella—overheard accusing her brother of "a kind of incest" (3.1.159)—by Vincentio-as-Duke begins.

In *Measure for Measure*, such ducal intentions, however unconscious, go hand in hand with—even lead to—actions. Angelo, the disguised Duke's right-hand man, acts out (gives birth to) Vincentio's desires and hence as substitute educates Vincentio by demonstration, without bringing the Duke into disrepute. During the course of the play the liberal desires of Vincentio thus come out from the "covent" (4.3.128), just as Isabella comes out of the convent.²⁵ As it progresses, Vincentio learns that his lax, or liberal, attitude toward carrying out the old law of Vienna matches his own lustful, or liberal, feelings.²⁶ He comes to know as his own the vice of fornication intended or actual: "Shame on Angelo, / To weed my vice, and let his grow!" (3.2.262–63).²⁷ Insofar as intent is (according to Jesus) act or is (in the play) substituted for act, the Duke's vice is an act of fornication, the fornication that he oversees his appointed substitute intending to enact or (as that substitute, Angelo, sees it) actually enacting. Only through his stand-in does the Duke come to learn where he stands.

That Angelo acts for Vincentio by taking his sexual as well as political place is one gist of Isabella's remarkable denunciation of some unnamed person who, like Angelo, seems to be good—seems, that is, either to himself (since he may be ignorant of his own desires) or to others (since he may keep his misdeeds invisible).

Make not impossible (5.1.54)
That which but seems unlike. 'Tis not impossible
But one, the wicked'st caitiff on the ground,
May seem as shy, as grave, as just, as absolute
As Angelo.

*The Provost remains present during the Friar-Duke's "satisfaction," or "confession," of Juliet (2.3. cf. 2.2.25), just as Francisca probably remains present during the conversation between Isabella and Lucio. (See Lever's introduction in his edition of *MM*, p. xxvi, discussing stage directions in 1.4 and 3.1.)

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Lucio and the Duke himself have used “shy” and “grave” to describe the Duke (3.2.127, 1.3.5). What is unlike is not impossible: Vincentio, for whom Angelo is the sexual surrogate as well as the deputied political substitute, is, to all intents, the principal caitiff in *Measure for Measure*, the one whose conscious and unconscious intents Angelo acts out. Insofar as intent and act are inextricably connected in the way that Jesus suggests, Vincentio is the whore-chaser that Lucio claims he is (3.2.127–85, 4.3.163–64). The accuracy of Lucio’s claim, which enlightens us about the Duke’s intentions by telling not impossible tales about his actions, is what makes Lucio so threatening a figure to Vincentio.