



Which Model? Whose Measure?: Sexuality, Morality and Power in *Measure for Measure* and *Basilicon Doron*

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The death of Elizabeth and the accession of James as her successor to the English throne vividly dramatised many issues which had been the focus of intense theoretical discussion during the sixteenth century,¹ centring upon the nature of political authority, in what manner it was accountable to God, and whether or not it was definitively located in the actual person of the sovereign.² In addition, the Reformation made an immeasurable impact upon the intellectual and spiritual life of the British people, emphasising the necessity of personal accountability and law, grace and faith, in a way which prompted a more stringent consideration of the connections between private morality and public legislation, mercy and justice.³ These themes are integral to the pedagogical format of *Basilicon Doron*, where James seeks to outline to his young son the duties, responsibilities and privileges of kingship. His approach is deliberate and serene: confident of the principles he is expounding, and of their practical applicability to the government of the state, James utilises biblical and classical sources in order to establish definitively the relationship a ruler is to have with God, his family, and his subjects, in a manner not open to question or dispute. *Measure for Measure* treats many of the matters that the king raises in his theoretical treatise.⁴ However, it applies these ideas of power, law, grace, and personal authority to the specific and highly contested issue of sexuality, immediately problematising them by recontextualising the debate in a dramatic framework more amenable to searching interrogation than measured dictation. It is the relationship between these two texts, and the variegated ways in which they explore the



nature of political authority, power, gender and morality that forms the focus of the following discussion.

This relationship is set up immediately in the opening scene of the play. Shakespeare enters implicitly into dialogue with the kind of abstract analysis of government in which James has been engaged, only to dismiss it as important in its sphere, but superfluous to the matter in hand:

Of government the properties to unfold
Should seem in me t' affect speech and discourse,
Since I am put to know that your own science
Exceeds, in that, the lists of all advice
My strength can give you.⁵

He is more interested in examining the nature of authority itself, particularly when it is located absolutely in the hands of a single person, and the way this is physically expressed through law enforcement in the personal lives of citizens. The specific situation with which the play opens is complicated further when the lawful ruler, Vincentio, Duke of Vienna, resigns his power, instituting Lord Angelo as deputy during his absence: 'Hold therefore, Angelo:/ In our remove be thou at full ourself' (1.1.42-3). Such rapid transitions raise the question as to whether, in such a highly personalised system, *any* substitute is capable of ruling in a way that will ensure the maintenance of order and justice.⁶ James believed that there was a peculiar, quasi-divine, quality that distinguished the physical body of a legitimate monarch, and helped to ensure the success of his "rule".⁷ Consequently, he encourages his son to avoid a dependence upon deputies: 'be well-acquainted with the nature and humours of all your Subjects ... not lipening to Vice-



royes, but hearing your selfe their complaints ... the principall matters euer to be decided by your selfe' (pp. 31-2). These ideas are supported by the emotional narrative shape of Shakespeare's drama, which concludes with a celebratory reassertion of legitimate authority within the traditional comic framework.⁸ However, the ambivalent role played by the Duke throughout the play, and the mixed emotions with which many of the characters respond to his final ruling, prevent it being accepted unconditionally by the audience.

Measure for Measure insightfully and inexorably deconstructs the mythology of authority itself, as it was projected within Jacobean England,⁹ revealing the arbitrary and potentially destructive operations of power at all levels of society.¹⁰ James, however, typically assumes this mythology as axiomatic. He instructs his son that as king: 'your company should be a paterne to the rest of the people...your person...a lampe and mirrour to your company: giuing light to your seruants to walke in the path of vertue, and representing vnto them such worthie qualities, as they should preasse to imitate...a Prince can neuer without secrecie doe great things, yet it is better ofttimes to try reports, then by credulities to foster suspicion vpon an honest man' (pp. 42, 48-9). In the character of the Duke, these seemingly innocuous attributes of benign omniscience and subtlety develop into a far more equivocal exercise of authority.¹¹ Vincentio's arrogation of divine qualities, when playing the role of priest incognito, render him a dubious role-model, as he invades the privacy of his subjects, utilises the office of confession for his own ulterior motives, and resorts to rather questionable machinations, such as the bed-trick, in order to achieve a form of "justice" while maintaining his secrecy.

Habits of espionage and deception are inherent in the nature of authority as it is explored in the play. Although the Duke appears as a majestic and capable



sovereign in the theatrical staging of the final scene, he is also shown to be a fallible human being, susceptible to very dangerous miscalculations. This is exemplified in his assumption that Angelo will keep his bargain with Isabella and pardon her brother; a mistake that almost costs Claudio his life. This is accompanied by more serious liberties, including his utterly gratuitous decision to make Isabella 'heavenly comforts of despair' (14.3.107), by lying to her concerning the death of her brother.¹² While this may be justified on the basis that the Duke is seeking to instruct her personally on the need to be merciful, for any man to play the role of divine providence creates a degree of unease. The ambivalent context of his general characterisation, calls into question the viability in practice of James's model of the absolute yet beneficent monarch.¹³ These complexities are exposed more humorously through the exaggerated commentary of Lucio, who acts almost as the alter ego of the Duke, defining him with disturbing perspicuity: 'It was a mad fantastical trick of him to steal from the state, and usurp the beggary he was never born to...The Duke would yet have dark deeds darkly answered. He would never bring them to light..the old fantastical Duke of dark corners' (3.2.110, 88-9, 166-8; 4.3.155-6). This invisibility subverts justice and instigates unnecessary suffering. The subsequent disorder reinforces the idea of Vincentio as a necessary element within the state if law is to be upheld. However, Lucio's cutting mockery uncovers the mechanisms of power by which order is maintained, revealing their openness to abuse and potential to cause acute paranoia and pain.¹⁴

This imagery of darkness and light is inverted when one turns to Angelo, who hides the darkness of his nature initially from himself, in self-righteous piety, and then from the world, through a cynically hypocritical manipulation of the



authority entrusted to him. The inner and outer dimensions of the person are thus perceived to be intimately connected; an association enunciated by the Duke in his original commission: 'Mortality and mercy in Vienna/ Live in thy tongue and heart,' (1.1.44-5). James utilises exactly the same mechanism in an attempt to ground the justice, authority, and mercy of the state in the actual person of the sovereign. The entire shape of his treatise is structured around this principle, whereby he first outlines the duty the king has personally towards God and his responsibility to govern himself, before going on to examine the precepts which should guide his leadership of the nation: 'hee (can) not be thought worthie to gouerne a Christian people...that in his owne person and heart, feareth not and loueth not the Diuine Maiestie. Neither can any thing in his gouernment succeed well with him...as comming from a filthie spring, if his person be vnsanctified....' (p. 12). Shakespeare does not question the validity of this assessment, which is deeply rooted in Scripture;¹⁵ in fact he confirms it by repeatedly emphasising that Angelo will be measured finally by the same standards that he has used to judge others: 'If his own life answer the straitness of his proceeding, it shall become him well; wherein if he chance to fail, he hath sentenced himself' (3.2.244-6). But, rather than following James in his optimistic assumption that the one at the head of the state *will* faithfully examine his own conscience before God, and walk in holy fear,¹⁶ Shakespeare creates a deputy who is willing to subvert the public forms of rule for his own advantage:

bidding the law make curtsy to (his) will,
Hooking both right and wrong to th'appetite,
To follow as it draws (2.4.175-6).¹⁷

He thus illustrates, far more brutally than through the disguised Duke, the potential for power to corrupt, distort and destroy, realistically portraying the metamorphosis of a Pharisee, who failed 'above all other strifes, (to) contend especially to know himself' (3.2.222-3), into an amoral Machiavellian figure, who knew himself too well to care for anything else.¹⁸

The interdependence which James sets up between the private and public personas of the king forms the justification for his exercise of absolute authority within the state. This is challenged most thoroughly in the scenes where Isabella pleads before Angelo, effectively undermining the careful distinctions he establishes between personal morality and an abstract Law as the representative of justice, in the name of Christian mercy: 'It is the law, not I, condemns your brother' (2.2.80).¹⁹ She forces him to acknowledge the inescapable connection between his character as an individual judge, and his personal decision to enforce an abstract law very deliberately and physically upon the body of her brother. Tragically, the very success of her intercession awakens him to the strength of carnal emotions. Her plea that he link his application of justice to a tempering knowledge of his own frailty, is tortuously inverted, when he calls upon her to own her professed feminine weakness, by yielding to his sexual pleasure, and so validate the dispensation of mercy she has requested.²⁰ Their critical interviews can almost be read as an ironic commentary upon James's carefully articulated definition of good government, addressed to one he anticipated would rule England after his death: 'as ye are clothed with two callings, so must ye be alike careful for the discharge of them both: that as yee are a good Christian, so yee may be a good King, discharging your Office...in the points of Iustice...establishing and executing...good Lawes among your people...by your behaiour in your owne



person...to teach your people by your example...’ (pp. 20-1). Angelo fails to measure up to this rule at every point, having determined to enforce the law as a rod of oppression, and to corrupt its just execution in order to gratify his own sensual desires, through the pollution of one to whom he owed particular consideration.²¹ As Isabella comments bitterly to her brother:

There is a devilish mercy in the judge,
If you’ll implore it, that will free your life,
But fetter you till death’ (3.1.68-70).

These confrontations between Angelo and Isabella do far more than expose the weakness of James’s preferred form of government in the advent of an evil monarch, however, as they raise crucial issues concerning the character and scope of the law, the nature of justice, and the role of mercy. Such questions are perennially contemporary in any human society, and unsurprisingly, given the religious and political ferment of England in the seventeenth century, they were matters of intense controversy at the time of James I’s accession to the throne.²² In *Basilicon Doron* he makes law absolutely central to his definition of good government, and even the king is to be subject to its authority, except in cases of great necessity (pp. 21-2, 33-4): ‘For the part of making, and executing of Lawes, consider first the trew difference betwixt a lawfull good King, and an vsurping Tyran....few Lawes and well put in execution, are best in a well ruled common-weale’ (pp. 20-2). Concerning their execution he advocates firmness upon the immediate accession to power and then, ‘when yee haue by the seueritie of Iustice once settled your countries, and made them know that ye can strike, then may ye thereafter all the daies of your life mixe Iustice with Mercie, punishing or sparing, as ye shall finde the



crime to have bene wilfully or rashly committed' (p. 22). This reads somewhat sourly in the light of Claudio's experience, where the over-zealousness of a new judge, following the king's advice, is seen to result in politically expedient and arbitrary violence:

Whether it be the fault and glimpse of newness,
Or whether that the body public be
A horse where the governor doth ride,
Who, newly in the seat, that it may know
He can command, lets it straight feel the spur;
...I stagger in' (1.2.157-61, 164).

The play again enters directly into dialogue with theory, poignantly illustrating the individual human cost resulting from a transfer of political power, and the injustice perpetrated by a law inconsistently applied.

Nevertheless, simply exposing the undeniable element of pain inflicted whenever the state exercises its authority through instituted legal means does not eradicate the very practical problem that James is implicitly seeking to deal with in his treatise. How does a responsible leader ensure the security of the commonwealth, and his own position, without oppressing his subjects or stirring up their hatred? He resolves this issue by returning to his central premise, which is wholly dependent upon the assumed character of the ruler as a discerning Christian, who will apply laws drawn from the Old and New Testaments, through appointed judicial channels, reserving to himself the authority to remit a sentence, if he believes that mercy is appropriate or politically necessary (pp. 20-2). James is definitive about the need to exercise the full sanction of the law, with no hope of pardon in certain circumstances,



thus ensuring that justice and mercy are not brought into conflict. He finds the choice of these unforgivable crimes in the operations of conscience: 'yee are bound in conscience neuer to forgive' (p. 23). The possibility that an inept or corrupt monarch may be called upon to perform such critical functions remains a recurrent and problematic silence at the margins of James's text. With a tragic irony, which rivals scenes in Shakespearean drama, James's eventual successor to the throne fully exemplified the catastrophic potential inherent within the dangerous silence created by his wilful neglect of unpalatable political alternatives.

In *Measure for Measure* the argument for law enforcement is made, predictably, by Angelo, and although it is momentarily borne away by the emotional force of Isabella's impassioned plea for charity, it returns as an inescapable problem when the Duke is confronted by the intransigent and unrepentant Barnadine:²³

Condemn the fault, and not the actor of it?
Why, every fault's condemned ere it be done.
Mine were the very cipher of a function,
To fine the faults whose fine stands in record,
And let go by the actor' (2.2.37-41).

The tension over law enforcement turns upon conflicting conceptions of law and grace, and the way in which criminals should be treated. This is heightened when authorities such as the Duke in Vienna, and James I in England, attempt to conflate the spiritual prerogatives of the Kingdom of God with biblical principles of law given to guide secular political powers. The opposition between Old and New Testament principles as they are



understood and applied judicially, is, once again, dramatised in the interviews between Angelo and Isabella, but it reverberates throughout the play. The former asserts that if the law is not revived and rigidly enforced to the very letter, then no one will fear it, and there will be no restraint placed upon ill doing (2.1.1-4; 2.2.100-4).²⁴ This, of course, was the existing situation in Vienna, and the very reason why the Duke had absented himself from the state, positioning him, rather ambiguously, in close association with Angelo (1.3.19-31, 34-43). Isabella, however, while acknowledging the justice of the law and her hatred of fornication as a vice (2.2.29-33), argues that all people are sinners, judge as well as criminal, and that Heaven's moral standards therefore cannot be inflexibly enforced upon earth (2.4.50). She suggestively postulates the grace and mercy of the Lord Jesus upon the cross as the most appropriate model for just rulers to imitate:

Why, all the souls that were were forfeit once,
And He that might the vantage best have took
Found out the remedy...O think on that,
And mercy then will breathe within your lips,
Like man new made (2.2.74-6, 78-9).

These tensions are most exacerbated when touching on issues of private morality, particularly if the state attempts to legally regulate so universal and personal a practice as sexual intercourse, as occurs in *Measure for Measure*. This law, however, is only one specific implication of a more general determination on the part of the secular authorities to monitor issues with the thoroughness of the theocratic Mosaic Law,²⁵ which, under the New Testament, are treated as matters of personal conscience before God, as can be



seen in Jesus's response to the woman the Pharisees took in the act of adultery.²⁶ In *Basilicon Doron*, James does not deal directly with the problem, as his treatise is designed to provide his son with general advice on his personal manner of life and approach to government, rather than with outlining the appropriate subject-matter for a national law-code. His only reference to the issue of sexual conduct occurs when he is giving the prince directions about the regulation of his own moral life and choice of marriage partner. There he firmly reiterates the biblical injunction against adultery, rejecting the double standard of sexuality, and the tendency of some of his contemporaries to treat this matter lightly, as Lucio so obviously did: 'how can ye iustly craue to bee ioyned with a pure virgine, if your bodie be polluted?...I know, fornication is thought but a light and veniall sinne, by the most part of the world, yet...count euery sinne and breach of Gods law, not according as the vaine world esteemeth of it, but as God the Iudge and maker of the lawe accounteth of the same' (p. 39).

Shakespeare, by contrast, *foregrounds* sexuality as the concrete dramatic example through which he can examine the various arguments about theoretical abstracts like law, its authority, scope and enforcement, and the viability of extending mercy. No definitive conclusion on the appropriate practical political balance between law and mercy seems to be presented in the play. The harshness of the Duke's initial verdict, gradually undermined by the personal corruption and intense rigour of Angelo (aided by the overly conscientious bureaucrat, Constable Elbow), is not really satisfactorily modified by the indiscriminate dispensation of mercy in the final scene. It could be suggested that Shakespeare is advocating a temperate and wise median between the two extremes, as expressed by Escalus: 'Let us be keen



and rather cut a little/ Than fall, and bruise to death' (2.1.5-6). This is similar to the approach which James himself adopted and recommended to his son (pp. 20-2). Yet *any* attempt to impose a coherent line of argument or moral pattern upon the play, in favour of strict enforcement, moderation, or unmitigated mercy, tends to fall apart. It appears to be more intent on dramatising critical issues for the sake of interrogation and reflection, than designed to offer any definitive solutions.²⁷ Concerning the wisdom of extending the *scope* of the public law, in an attempt to regulate the private sexual behaviour of subjects, however, the play does seem to offer a particular perspective. The sufferings of Claudio and Juliet are portrayed with great sympathy and Isabella speaks with impassioned eloquence. Even the irrepressible bawdiness of Pompey, Mistress Overdone and Lucio is tempered by a degree of humanity which exposes the fallibility of human authority figures like Angelo and the real possibility that law enforcement agencies will abuse privacy and power.²⁸ It seems safe to infer that *Measure for Measure* argues against the viability of making fornication and adultery, undoubtedly identified as serious offences against God, a crime also punishable by the state.

All these issues concerning sexuality, authority, power, mercy, and self-control intersect most profoundly and poignantly at a personal level in the character of Isabella. Perhaps it is her marginal social position, as a female novice on probation, which makes her such a confronting choice through which to explore the conflict between the private and public dimensions of sexuality,²⁹ and whether or not it is possible to incorporate Christian virtues of intercession, grace, and forgiveness into the institutional structures of the state.³⁰ Of all the characters in the play the one most committed to chastity,



she is forced to plead before a corrupt judge that her brother might be pardoned for his sin of fornication; a rather equivocal position for an aspiring nun, as Lucio's comments make evident:

Go to Lord Angelo,
And let him learn to know, when maidens sue,
Men give like gods' (1.4.80-1).³¹

This precipitates the horrific choice of either acquiescing in the judicial murder of her brother, or sacrificing her own body in an act that she cannot perform because it is a grievous sin against God. Finally, having maintained her purity by virtue of the rather ignominious bed-trick of the Duke, and having succeeded in exposing Angelo publicly, she finds herself faced by the most subtly coercive move of all: the marriage proposal of the Duke. This tense and lengthy scene, which has been 'intent upon deforming Isabella from a sister of Claudio and Saint Clare to a sister of the game,'³² is fractured by a sudden stillness, reminiscent of the earlier response of Barnadine. Isabella, a hitherto prodigiously eloquent character, takes refuge in an enigmatic silence that leaves modern audiences baffled, and can perhaps be taken as symptomatic of the most appropriate, or natural, response to the play as a whole.³³

A parallel can be drawn between the characterisation of Isabella and the portrait of a model wife that James I delineates for his son. This model reveals the tensions and paradoxes that made the role of women in seventeenth century England deeply problematic, particularly for those of high social status, in the immediate aftermath of Elizabeth I's death. Cohen argues that *Measure for Measure* reflects the confusion existing at the historical moment of



James's accession, through its flawed attempt to conflate the genres of romantic comedy and the story of a disguised monarch. The Virgin Queen's deliberate strategy of separating her private sexuality from her public gender as a "prince" was being revised by James, who could obviously integrate these two elements more naturally in his own masculine body. However, the transition was far from seamless, and Isabella appears to act as the symbolic conduit through which these complexities are explored, although not ultimately resolved, as her final silence in the face of patriarchal authority suggests.³⁴ The ideal queen whom James describes is caught in a position of similar ambivalence.³⁵ She is to be mistress of the king's household, a very public institution, and yet never to interfere in affairs of state; to be the equal of her husband, and possessor of his body, yet submissive in all things; to be honoured deeply by her son, and yet willingly defer to his sovereignty (pp. 38-43, 47). An attempt is made to close this gap between the public and private realms within the context of the play, by constructing the law as masculine and mercy as feminine, particularly in the language of Lucio (1.2.175-90; 1.2.16-90; 2.2.43-7, 56, 71).³⁶ However, such gendered characterisations, whether applied to leadership or the law, prove as elusive and artificial as the endeavour to impose sexual conformity through judicial force on the minds and hearts of subject citizens. One is left with a sense of the incredible complexity and intransigence of human society, and the difficulty of balancing the competing demands of justice and mercy; issues which reverberate with a surprising and impassioned relevance for modern audiences.³⁷

To examine the relationship between these generically distinctive texts allows a number of important connections to emerge. *Measure for Measure* dramatises



the intellectual, political, ethical, and spiritual challenge of negotiating a practice of government in the difficult context of human failings and aspirations, and the subtle seductions of power. *Basilicon Doron*, written by a reigning monarch for one he anticipated would succeed him to the throne, grounds such enquiries through an imperative and practical concern with how they should be implemented in a real historical society. It thus considers similar issues from a different and equally necessary perspective. These works do not provide ideal templates for contemporary societies to follow. However, I would argue that they do confront crucial issues like grace, legal sanctions, and sexuality with an honest, creative and sensitive approach. This finely modulates the political amorality and cynicism of *The Prince* and offers an illuminating model against which some of our own deepest and often unquestioned assumptions can be measured.



Notes

¹ A. Kernan, *Shakespeare, the King's Playwright: Theater in the Stuart Court 1603-1613* (New Haven: Yale University Press), pp. 50-70.

² S. Cohen, "From Mistress to Master: Political Transition and Formal Conflict in *Measure for Measure*," *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts* 41 (1999), pp. 431-64.

³ K. Chedgzoy, *William Shakespeare: Measure for Measure* (London: Northcote House, 2000), pp. 1-2.

⁴ The fact that four editions of *Basilicon Doron* were published in 1603 renders it an inescapable cultural and political intertext for Shakespeare's play, whether he intended to deal directly with the royal treatise or not. It is interesting to consider the relationship between the two texts as a method of illuminating their mutual, or conflicting, intellectual, political and dramatic concerns, without assuming that Shakespeare is specifically engaging with or 'echoing' the king's position. To posit such a direct association is inherently problematic due to the general and rather commonplace nature of James I's observations, not to mention the rich material within the play for a highly unflattering construction of the Duke's character. R. Levin, *New Readings Vs Old Plays: Recent Trends in the Reinterpretation of English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), pp. 171-93.

⁵ William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, ed. J. M. Nosworthy (London: Penguin, 1969), 1.1.3-7 (This edition is used for all subsequent citations from the play).

⁶ Machiavelli recommended the withdrawal of the rightful sovereign, and the appointment of a deputy to do his unpleasant political work, as the expedient tactic of a wise ruler. This casts an interesting light upon the characterisation of the Duke, who follows this procedure exactly with Angelo. A. Bloom, *Shakespeare on Love and Friendship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 62.

⁷ J. P. Somerville, ed., *King James VI and I: Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 20, 23-4, 38 (This edition is used for all subsequent references to the *Basilicon Doron* within this essay); P. Curry, *The Making of Jacobean Culture: James I and the Renegotiation of Elizabethan Literary Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 18-19.

⁸ T. F. Wharton, *Measure for Measure* (London: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 9-12; Chedgzoy, *William Shakespeare: Measure for Measure*, pp. 58-66.

⁹ C. Brown, "Duke Vincentio of *Measure for Measure* and King James I of England: "the Poorest Princes in Christendom"," *Clio* 26 (1996), pp. 53, 73.

¹⁰ R. Wilson, "Prince of Darkness: Foucault's Shakespeare," in *Measure for Measure*, ed. N. Wood (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1995), pp. 133-78.

¹¹ James I himself played subtly and theatrically with the emotions of English citizens for his own political aggrandisement. Perhaps the most notable incident occurred in December 1603, just a year prior to the performance of *Measure for Measure*, when the conspirators of the Bye Plot, including Sir Walter Raleigh, had their sentence of execution remitted at the scaffold. Brown, "Duke Vincentio of *Measure for Measure* and King James I of England: "the Poorest Princes in Christendom"." pp. 53-4; A similar pattern of politically astute manipulation, and the careful orchestration of vicarious ignominy, is advocated and exemplified by Machiavelli. N. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. G. Bull (London: Penguin Classics, 1961), pp. 57-8.

¹² A. Piesse, "Self-Preservation in the Shakespearian System: Gender, Power and the New History," in *Measure for Measure*, ed. N. Wood (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1995), p. 54; Wilson, "Prince of Darkness: Foucault's Shakespeare."

¹³ This could, perhaps, be a consequence of Shakespeare's dramatic decision to secularise qualities of magical power, such as those he attributes to Prospero, by locating them in the



earthier sphere of political intrigue, allowing the Duke at times an almost supernatural prescience.

¹⁴ Wilson, "Prince of Darkness: Foucault's Shakespeare." Similarly, the unruly presence of the low-life characters can be seen as an implicit argument justifying the existence of unlimited personal power such as that exercised by the Duke.

¹⁵ See for example Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 15:11; Mark 7:20-23.

¹⁶ This is not to deny that James was fully aware of the potential for a king to fail in this regard, to the destruction of himself and his kingdom. In fact, he makes reference to the danger, but does not stop to consider the possibility of it in action, and the implications that such a consideration might have for the ideal program of enlightened absolutism which he outlines to his son.

¹⁷ Machiavelli grounds his construction of a political system, which is also highly personalised, on the opposite assumption, that a human being will always follow their baser instincts.

¹⁸ N. Machiavelli, *Machiavelli: The Chief Works and Others*, trans. A. Gilbert, vol. 1 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), pp. 57-69.

¹⁹ Ironically enough, Isabella has a greater appreciation for, and understanding of the law, than any other character within the play. She utilises this knowledge in the final scene in order to attain Angelo's reprieve at the request of Mariana; an action which exemplifies her new and painfully acquired capacity for generously sympathetic expressions of mercy.

²⁰ Piesse, "Self-Preservation in the Shakespearian System: Gender, Power and the New History.", pp. 62-75.

²¹ L. Boose, "The Priest, the Slanderer, the Historian and the Feminist," *English Literary Renaissance* 25 (1995), p. 329.

²² Cohen, "From Mistress to Master: Political Transition and Formal Conflict in *Measure for Measure*."

²³ J. Lezra, *Unspeakable Subjects: The Genealogy of the Event in Early Modern Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 257-64.

²⁴ This is in fact what happens in the final scene, when the Duke freely pardons Barnadine, a convicted murderer, no doubt on the grounds which had caused him to object earlier to Angelo's command that he be executed (i.e. that it would be damnable to send someone to eternity whose soul is manifestly unprepared for death). Such reasoning attempts to conflate the spiritual duties of the priest with the responsibility of the government to exercise punitive sanctions upon evildoers, and if carried out consistently would reduce the state to anarchy (4.3.64-7).

²⁵ A. Gash, "Shakespeare, Carnival and the Sacred: *The Winter's Tale* and *Measure for Measure*," in *Shakespeare and Carnival: After Bakhtin*, ed. R. Knowles (London: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 201-2.

²⁶ John 8:3-11.

²⁷ To this extent an interpretation following that of Bakhtin, which sees the play as a carnivalesque exploration of the sacred, may be valid: 'Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person; it is born between people collectively searching for the truth.' M. Bakhtin cited in Gash, "Shakespeare, Carnival and the Sacred: *The Winter's Tale* and *Measure for Measure*," p. 181.

²⁸ M. Widmayer, "Mistress Overdone's House," in *Subjects on the World's Stage: Essay on British Literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. D. G. Allen & R. A. White (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1995), p. 194.

²⁹ Boose, "The Priest, the Slanderer, the Historian and the Feminist.", pp. 332-4.



³⁰ Gash, "Shakespeare, Carnival and the Sacred: *The Winter's Tale* and *Measure for Measure*.", p. 207.

³¹ The language of intercession, of course, becomes a double-edged weapon that is turned against her by one who has the genuinely authoritative right of utterance. There is an interesting parallel here with Elbow's inability to use the language of the law, except as a means of indicting and embarrassing himself.

³² Boose, "The Priest, the Slanderer, the Historian and the Feminist.", pp. 332-3.

³³ Chedgzoy, *William Shakespeare: Measure for Measure.*, pp. 67-8. Similarly, neither Isabella nor Juliet is given any opportunity to voice an emotional response to the sudden resurrection of Claudio, which opens an important interpretive space in theatrical performances.

³⁴ Brown, "Duke Vincentio of *Measure for Measure* and King James I of England: "the Poorest Princes in Christendom".", pp. 332-4; Cohen, "From Mistress to Master: Political Transition and Formal Conflict in *Measure for Measure*". The complexity and dramatic potential implicit within this scene can be illustrated by a very different reading, which views Isabella's decision to plead for mercy on Angelo's behalf as a symbolic representation of the love of God, who renounces a degree of his legitimate power in order to leave the human soul free. Gash, "Shakespeare, Carnival and the Sacred: *The Winter's Tale* and *Measure for Measure*.", p. 207.

³⁵ Cohen, "From Mistress to Master: Political Transition and Formal Conflict in *Measure for Measure*."

³⁶ Lucio's comments also expose the incongruities between James's official representation of the kingly ideal, as expressed in *Basilicon Doron*, and his own actual performance as head of the English state.

³⁷ Chedgzoy, *William Shakespeare: Measure for Measure.*, pp. 1-7.