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Zagreb

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Figures of Power in *Measure for Measure* and *The Tempest*

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Kandidatkinja: Nikolina Dadić
Mentorica: dr. sc. Iva Polak, docent
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INTRODUCTION

In the “intensely, pervasively, visibly hierarchical” (Greenblatt, *Will* 76) society of Shakespeare’s time, the monarch is undoubtedly at the very top of this rather rigid structure, serving as the focal point of political and cultural interest. *Measure for Measure* and *The Tempest* both present the reader with a manipulative duke temporarily disguised, either as a friar in darkened corridors of Vienna (*Measure for Measure*) or invisible on the spirit-haunted island (*The Tempest*), as a central figure and instigator of the plot. In both instances, the disguise hides their social position and allows them to be privy to everything going on in their kingdoms.

The paper shall argue that the two dukes are built around the same notions of power, justice and mercy prevalent in Elizabethan and Jacobean England. It will also explore the mechanisms of power that produce the spectacles of justice and punishment present in both plays, as well as how it all plays into the theatricality of royal life. It will, furthermore, compare the stage-managing tactics employed by the dukes to control the characters involved in their plots with Shakespeare’s own playwriting practices.

SHAKESPEARE’S SOURCES

Measure for Measure

As many scholars have noted, the story of a morally corrupt governor who bargains with a woman in exchange for her husband’s or brother’s life “had a wide currency during the Renaissance period, appearing in numerous versions shortly after the middle of the sixteenth century” (Izard qtd. in Prouty 131 *fn.* 1). Geoffrey Bullough lists several possible sources for *Measure for Measure*, beginning with a passage from a sermon by Saint Augustine of Hippo and the Latin tragedy *Philanira* by Claude Rouillet (“Measure” 399-400, 418-19). Shakespeare, however, most likely used George Whetstone’s two-part play *Promos and Cassandra* (1578) as “the principal source” for his play (Prouty 131). But to better understand the innovation to the well-known story that Shakespeare brought in *Measure for Measure*, we must first start with the direct source for Whetstone’s work: Giraldi Cinthio’s *Hecatommithi* (1565). What differentiates Cinthio’s novella from earlier versions of the story is that Cinthio “made the victims brother and sister, not husband and wife, and the

governor's temptation a test of his fidelity to Justice" (Bullough, "Measure" 401). Whetstone follows in Cinthio's footsteps for the most part: a beautiful sister is pleading for her brother's life, a devil's bargain is made with the governor who secretly goes back on his promise, and the young woman seeks justice from a superior ruler to whom she "recount[s] [her] wretched state" (Whetstone 479). The major differences introduced by Whetstone come in the form of the comic sub-plot of low-lives in the city and the substitution of the heads, both of which are inherited by Shakespeare. Whetstone graciously spares Cassandra's brother and she receives "[a] dead mans head, that suffered th'other day" (471) instead of the sibling's dead body that Cinthio's Epitia had delivered to her. In both instances this prompts the "anguished" heroine to plead to a King whose involvement in the plot up to that point has been minimal. As "visitor[s] from outside" (Bullough, "Measure" 410), Whetstone's Corvinus and Cinthio's Maximian stand in stark contrast to the (over)involved Duke in *Measure for Measure*.

Shakespeare takes all the ingredients present in *Promos and Cassandra*, but he expands upon Whetstone's vision, adding complexity and intrigue to his plot and characters. While in Whetstone's play "the king appears only as *deus ex machina*, listening to pleas for mercy and handing out justice with exemplary correct moral responses," (Nicholls 11), Shakespeare's disguised ruler is far more ambiguous and duplicitous than his predecessor. While Whetstone's King saves Cassandra's honour "in making [her Promos'] wife" (Whetstone 500), Shakespeare spares his Isabella from such fate by creating the role of Mariana. Mariana's body is substituted for Isabella's body in bed to mirror the substitution of bodies on death row. Shakespeare replaces Cinthio's Epitia who was "taught in philosophy" (Cinthio 422) with Isabella who was taught religious morality. Shakespeare's Isabella is a novice, a social position which only strengthens her refusal of Angelo's proposal. As Geoffrey Bullough writes, making Isabella a novice means that "her refusal becomes inevitable, his demand outrageous" ("Measure" 408). Her unwillingness to trade herself for her brother's life comes from adherence to laws above those of Vienna.

The Tempest

To create the plot of *The Tempest* Shakespeare borrowed from the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century travel narratives and shipwreck reports. He was almost certainly familiar with William Strachey's *True Reportory of the Wracke, and Redemption of Sir*

Thomas Gates. Strachey had been aboard *Sea Venture* when a hurricane sank the ship and drove it on to Bermuda's rocky coast – with all the passengers and crew reaching the shore safely and surviving for nine months in Bermuda (Vaughan 41). His descriptions of the miraculous survival of the mariners and passengers on Bermuda in July 1609, as well as the island's bounteous flora and fauna, and their governance by a dominant and resourceful leader all bear much resemblance to Shakespeare's fictional island (Vaughan 41-2). Such use of an account of real-life events accords with Barnaby and Wry's claim that "[i]n Renaissance drama [...] topical reference might be understood as serving the same function that 'historically given names' served in classical tragedy: establishing the conditions of persuasiveness (the historical plausibility, we might say) of the story" (1227).

Among the possible literary analogues to the setting, plot and characters in *The Tempest*, *The Mirrour of Princely Deedes and Knighthood* (1578) seems to share most of its plot points with Shakespeare's play (See Bullough, "Tempest" 45-246). Bullough claims that Shakespeare "certainly knew *The Mirrour of Princely Deedes*" which was "very popular" ("Tempest" 247). However, even though this lengthy Spanish romance deals with themes and motifs present in Shakespeare's play, such as royal fathers and their children, otherworldly islands and the study of the 'Arte Magicke', storms and monsters, Vaughan notes that the resemblances between them are "too fleeting for [*The Mirror of Knighthood*] to be considered more than a tangential source" (55). *The Tempest* is full of these "familiar, highly traditional motifs" (Greenblatt, *Will* 84) fairly common for the period.

Northrop Frye suggests another source from which Shakespeare could have drawn his inspiration: the character types of *commedia dell'arte*. According to Frye, "Prospero has both Pantalone and Dottore elements; Caliban, Pulcinello ones; and Stephano the butler and Trinculo the jester (dressed in a harlequin costume) are typical *zanni*" (*On Shakespeare* 174). In his *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye further points to "[a]nother eiron type [which] has not been much noticed" – a generally older man who begins the action of the play by withdrawing from it, and ends the play by returning (*Anatomy* 174). In addition to Prospero whose grand reveal at the end of the play signals its end, Vincentio in *Measure for Measure* also fits into this category – the Duke seemingly leaves Vienna at the beginning of the play which sets the whole plot into motion, and his "return" puts all things into their proper order.

AUTHORITY AND SUBVERSION

As is befitting a loyal royal subject and a member of the King's own troupe, Shakespeare's attitude towards authority needed to be respectful, at least outwardly. However, Stephen Greenblatt remarks that Shakespeare had "a complex attitude toward authority, at once sly, genially submissive, and subtly challenging" (*Will* 152). Since deviancy is radically subversive and authority figures usually want it curtailed as fast as possible, every criticism on the subject of authority needed to be presented cleverly and surreptitiously. And even though it seems that the complex medieval world picture found itself in a "precarious position" in the sixteenth century (Tillyard 16), "the conception of order [was] [...] [still] taken for granted" as "a part of the collective mind of people" (17). Through the use of subversive figures, Shakespeare subtly picked at the holes and inconsistencies within the dominant social "system." He challenged the notion of a "universe divinely ordered throughout" (16) in front of a society which, although it may have been familiar with Niccolò Machiavelli's "radical" ideas, still by and large subscribed to an idea of an orderly, coherent universe and their designated place within it.

The extent of Machiavelli's influence on Jacobean society in general and Shakespeare in particular, largely depended on the availability of Machiavelli's writings in Elizabethan and Jacobean England. This issue remains "a controversial one", and while there is some evidence that Machiavelli's works were "circulating among the English readership as far back as the 1530s" (Petrina 14), there was no printed English version of *The Prince* until 1640 and Shakespeare presumably did not know Italian. He could have hypothetically acquired one of the Latin or French versions of the text, or even a circulating manuscript translation, but Norman N. Holland surmises that it is unlikely that Shakespeare himself read Machiavelli and "[i]t is rather more likely that he read the so-called 'Anti-Machiavel' of Innocent Gentillet (1576), which had been published in an English translation in 1602, somewhat a year before Shakespeare began *Measure for Measure*" (17). Gentillet's denunciation of Machiavelli's ideas has traditionally been regarded as a Protestant response to the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre which happened a few years earlier in France (Soll 31). It is no wonder that John D. Cox describes the *Contre-Machiavel* as "virulently anti-Machiavellian" (112). Thus, if Shakespeare drew his knowledge about Machiavellian principles of government from Gentillet, we can expect to find some discord between his representation of Machiavellian

principles and those depicted in *The Prince*. Nevertheless, there is a distinct cluster of plays within Shakespeare's opus most commonly associated with the topic of power similar to Machiavelli's *Prince*, and almost all of them, according to Hugh Grady, "date from the period 1595 to 1600: *Richard II* (1595), *King John* (1596), *1 Henry IV* (1596-97) *2 Henry IV* (1597- 98), *Henry V* (1598- 99), *Julius Caesar* (1599), and *Hamlet* (1600-01)." Grady further concludes that "[t]he fact that these themes predominate in a compact five-year period in Shakespeare's career [...] suggests that there might be some external influence on this pattern" (Grady 124). We can stretch this Machiavellian shadow just a bit further, to encompass the plays which don't strictly belong to this cluster.

Barnaby and Wry write that "[p]erhaps more obviously than any of his other plays, *Measure for Measure* marks Shakespeare's obsessive fascination with exposing the mechanisms of power that produce and sustain a cultural order" (1237). Mechanisms of power which are laid bare in *Measure for Measure* touch upon manipulation, spectacle, substitution, the structure of exchange, life and death, and marriage. Vincentio uses the public perception of authority and his popularity and approval by the masses as solid weapons in his royal arsenal. He spreads his influence by weaving a web of hidden influences over other characters in the play.

Prospero's manipulations are much blunter. He does not just whisper suggestions into willing ears, he commands other's bodies. Even though the dukedom of Milan is on the line in *The Tempest*, the tension is reduced because Prospero's magic leaves little room for free will compared to Vincentio's efforts. The elliptical action of the play denies the reader the opportunity to glimpse in to the island and its inhabitants before Prospero's arrival. We cannot directly observe "the monstrous" Caliban before his freedom was taken away by Prospero. All we get is Caliban after the fact –a former king now reduced to the position of a slave. "This thing of darkness", speaks Prospero of Caliban, "I acknowledge mine" (*The Tempest*¹ 5.1.275-276). He becomes Prospero's creation and the main agent of subversion in *The Tempest*. Prospero's power lies in his words – what he says becomes; once spoken, it is so. His magic needs to be verbalized and he does it by flinging commands left and right throughout the play. He also intentionally adds conflict to Ferdinand's and Miranda's budding relationship (*TT* 1.2.451-457) because Prospero, like any good playwright, knows that a small dose of adversity breeds closeness between characters.

¹ Hereinafter *TT*.

Richard Abrams suggests that “it is the Machiavel who most faithfully gives back to the playwright the image of his own powers and aspirations; his privilege to do nearly whatever he pleases within his artistic creation” (44). Prospero is a textual equivalent of a playwright who uses his abilities to cast the characters in the roles which he needs to further advance the plot. He “edits” his play beginning to end. Depending on the perspective one chooses to take, he successfully plays both the hero and the villain. Both the Machiavel and the playwright share a distinct amount of strict control exercised over their agents and actors. Prospero manipulates every character on his island, herding them like sheep towards the big finale. Still, we cannot look at Prospero as a pure “Machiavellian character” for he is a prince who was overthrown by his brother – a prince who had trouble “in keeping atop” (Machiavelli 28). And after all of Prospero’s machinations, his takeover of the island, his intrigues, manipulations, and punishments, there is no death, no brutal, irrevocable retribution at the end of the play – just a promise of “the story of [Prospero’s] life” (77 5.1.305) soon to be told by the magical Duke himself.

In chapter VII of *The Prince*, Machiavelli cites the life of Cesare Borgia as an example of a leader who succeeded in eliminating his rivals and winning the approval of his followers. Borgia solves the dilemma of princes “hav[ing] little trouble in rising, but much in keeping atop” (Machiavelli 28) by appointing a deputy to restore order in Romagna – a certain Messer Ramiro d’Orco/de Lorqua. Ramiro is described as a “swift and cruel man” who “in a short time restored peace and unity with the greatest success” (Machiavelli 33). Borgia later executes Ramiro to show that “if any cruelty had been practised, it had not originated with him [Cesare], but in the natural sternness of the minister [Ramiro]” (33). To summarize the comparison between Duke Vincentio and Cesare Borgia, in Act 3, Scene 1, Vincentio

gives, in all, four reasons for making Angelo his deputy: he wants to enforce “most biting laws” that have fallen into disuse (19-21); he cannot enforce them himself, because he would be tyrannous in punishing what he himself had permitted (35-39); he wants to pass on to Angelo the slander that such belated enforcement will produce (39-43); finally, he wants to test the angelic Angelo (50-54). (Holland 18-19)

Duke Vincentio is concerned with the problem of “keeping atop” at the beginning of *Measure for Measure*: if he is the one who suddenly starts implementing harsh new laws, it

could turn the public against him. Shakespeare puts that same sentiment into Vincentio's own mouth when the Duke says:

Sith 'twas my fault to give the people scope,
'Twould be my tyranny to strike and gall them
For what I bid them do. For we bid this be done
When evil deeds have their permissive pass
And not the punishment. Therefore, indeed, my father,
I have on Angelo imposed the office

(*Measure for Measure*² 1.3.35-40)

However, the Friar reminds the Duke that he has the authority and the responsibility to start enforcing the law: "It rested in your grace / To unloose this tied-up justice when you pleased," and concludes that "in it [he] more dreadful would have seemed / Than in Lord Angelo" (1.3.31-34). The Duke replies that he fears that he would seem "too dreadful" (1.4.34). Actions of a "demi-god" (1.2.119) Angelo are inherently *less*. They carry less judgment, they carry less power, and they can be overturned by the highest authority in the City, the Duke himself. Angelo is placed to act as Vincentio's safeguard, to test the waters and take the consequences so the Duke's image can remain untainted. Vincentio is aware that he needs to stage himself favourably to the public eye, so sending Angelo to do his "dirty work" seems like a reasonable political move.

So, just like Borgia, Shakespeare's cunning Duke appoints a deputy to power to enforce previously neglected laws and waits for the unsuspecting deputy to overstep his boundaries and become unpopular among the people. His plan culminates in a spectacle of the rightful ruler returning and punishing the stand-in authority. Stephen Orgel claims that "it is the *image* of the monarch that is crucial, the appearance of virtue, whether it accords with an inner reality or not" (42). Both Borgia and Vincentio appease the populace dissatisfied with their respective deputies' cruelties in implementing the law, and succeed in laying down a good foundation for their own popularity and power. While Shakespeare's Duke only *threatens* Angelo with death, his tactics and results are quite similar to Borgia's. Machiavelli writes that "[t]he barbarity of this spectacle caused the people to be at once

² Hereinafter *MFM*.

satisfied and dismayed” (32). Vincentio also attempts to inflict this sort of “just punishment” when he theatrically condemns Angelo:

‘An Angelo for Claudio, death for death.’

Haste still pays haste, and leisure answers leisure;

Like doth quit like, and Measure still for Measure.

(*MFM* 5.1.407-409)

Both Borgia and Vincentio use their political cunning to frighten and satisfy the people in equal measure. In chapter XVII of *The Prince*, Machiavelli addresses the question of whether it is better for a prince to be feared or to be loved. Machiavelli does acknowledge that “one should wish to be both,” but deems it “much safer to be feared than loved” when one must choose between the two (79).

This sentiment seems to work well for Prospero in *The Tempest*, who learnt his lesson the hard way: by losing his throne. Prospero terrifies almost every other player on the island – he tortures Caliban physically, and everybody else mentally, leaving them “all knit up/ In their distractions: they now are in [his] pow’r” (*TT* 4.1.89-90). By disseminating fear through the island Prospero secures his reinstatement to power and only then he promises “calm seas” and “auspicious gales”(5.1.315) to the shipwrecked royals.

And while in *The Tempest*, all of the problems that befall other characters on the islands are consciously orchestrated by Prospero, in *Measure for Measure* “that which apparently threatens authority seems to be produced by it” (Dollimore, *Shakespeare* 14). There would be no need to punish Claudio if the authorities did not interfere – his marriage to Juliet, which would have happened anyways, would effectively counter the sin which almost got him killed. And if Angelo didn’t insist on the strict adherence to the letter of the law, there would be no need for him to be punished for the hypocritical decisions that he made. On the other side, deviancy in *Measure for Measure* also ends up confirming authority: Angelo’s disastrous short rule ends up confirming Vincentio’s superiority. The Duke cleverly used Angelo’s unacceptable attempt at curbing deviancy to reaffirm his own authority and popularity by overriding Angelo’s orders.

Jonathan Dollimore claims that the Duke knows that “integrity should be publicly displayed in the form of reputation” and that Lucio’s casual slurring of the Duke’s reputation

is perhaps the most subversive thing in the play (*Transgression* 83). When Lucio remarks to Isabella that “[t]he Duke is very strangely gone from hence” (*MFM* 1.4.50), he becomes the only character to dare to question the Duke’s actions. Lucio’s daring words in front of the disguised Duke, his own loose tongue, his “pretty tales of the Duke” (4.3.164) prove to be his downfall. Vincentio does not take lightly the damage done to his image and Lucio’s punishment at the end of the play reflects that. Although Vincentio claims that he forgives Lucio’s slanders (5.1.517), just a few lines earlier the Duke vividly recalls Lucio calling him “a fool, a coward, / One all of luxury, an ass, a madman” (5.1.498-99) and the punishment given to the loud-mouthed young man reflects that.

The drunken prisoner Barnardine is another extreme example of a subversive character testing the limits of power. Death may be “a great disguiser” (4.2.171), but it is worthless once Barnardine simply refuses to die and returns to his cell. The Duke, at that moment, “does not really control anyone’s actions; on the contrary, he constantly prepares choices for others” (Wilson 379), but Barnardine’s simple refusal of an order brings a bit of balance to the power exchange between a superior and a subordinate.

It seems that even if Shakespeare was familiar with Machiavelli’s works, he did not fully accept his ideas. We can consider the possibility that *The Prince* and Machiavelli’s other works are indirectly related to Shakespeare’s works through the ideas which underlie them. Their indirect influence comes especially to light if we consider Machiavelli “less a literary source for Shakespeare than a cultural locus, recollected in order to define a historical continuum whose origin is assigned to *The Prince* and whose culmination is, in *Measure for Measure*, located on the boards of the English popular stage” (Mullaney 92). His plays, therefore, “go beyond the logic of *The Prince* to critique certain of its premises and to explore the cultural crisis of meaning that its logic creates” (Grady 121). Just as Jan Kott surmises: “Shakespeare does not distinguish between a good king and a tyrant, just as he does not distinguish between a king and a clown. They are both mortals. Terror and struggle for power is not a privilege of princes; it is a law of this world” (329). The complex interplay of political realism and idealism in Shakespeare’s works *could* stem from his encounters with Machiavellian thought, or at least, with what is the essence of a Machiavellian prince – an adaptable monarch who balances between fear and love, cruelty and mercy, a prince who controls his subjects through carefully constructed spectacles and political tactics.

JAMES I AND SHAKESPEARE – A PLAYWRIGHT AND HIS KING

As the parallels with Machiavelli show, even though Shakespeare's plays are considered timeless, one can easily find historically specific meanings woven into their very fabric. Northrop Frye warns that "[w]e have to keep the historical Shakespeare always present in our minds, to prevent us from trying to kidnap him into our own cultural orbit, which is different from but quite as narrow as that of Shakespeare's first audiences" (Frye, *On Shakespeare* 1). Therefore, we cannot divorce the playwright from the Tudor regime which infused his works with its own dramatic tensions. Shakespeare was not above referencing and agreeing with the King or the Queen, since, after all, the theatrical scene of the era relied heavily upon the monarch's good graces.

By 1603, Shakespeare's company had come directly under the king's patronage,³ and it undoubtedly left a mark upon his writing. As James's own "liveried servants", Shakespeare's company enjoyed "a certain prestige" (Barton 123). The royal patronage enabled them to divide their time between the public theatres and the court, and to reap profit and success at both locations. Nonetheless, being the King's favourites did not come without its own set of difficulties for both the troupe and its principal playwright. Greenblatt notes that James "displayed a peculiar quality that contemporaries would repeatedly note: he was nervous, sensitive, and on occasion dangerously paranoid, but then unexpectedly he could ignore or even laugh uproariously at what others – and not only absolute monarchs – could have taken as gross insults" (*Will* 364). Maintaining the patronage of such a king demanded caution – a lesson Shakespeare's company learned after they decided "to test the conventional limits of representation" (339) and present before the King a play about his own narrow escape from assassination which was "evidently banned" (341). The play apparently pushed the envelope a bit too far and greatly displeased some Councillors.

Another reason which made royal patronage indispensable to theatre troupes, apart from the opportunity for profit and fame, is that the religious authorities considered the theatre a troublesome social abnormality. Theatres often suffered bouts of being closed for extended periods of time, either for being seen as a threat to public decency and religious and civic hierarchies or because of outbreaks of plague. The Privy Council was under

³ For circumstances surrounding this appointment, see Greenblatt, *Will* 329, 339-40 and Orgel 44-45.

pressure from the officers of the city of London to “pluck down” the theatres because of the “greate disorders committed in the common playhouses both by lewd matters that are handled on the stages and by resorte and confluence of bad people” (qtd. in Thomson 69). Shakespeare may have referenced this threat of closing of theatres and public houses in *Measure for Measure* when Pompey announces to Mistress Overdone that all of the brothel quarters in the suburbs will be pulled down (*MFM* 1.2.92-110). It also indicates at the precariousness of the status of theatre in Elizabethan society. Anne Barton claims that the only thing that enabled the Privy Council to consistently override the City’s objections to the public theatres was Queen Elizabeth’s “insistence that plays were necessary for her ‘solace’ at court” (124). Under such pressure from the City’s moral brigades, it is no wonder that the royal patronage was so desirable. The monarch and the state exist in a state of structured interdependence, with the theatre being the third component of this complicated relationship in this case. As Tennenhouse puts it:

Given that the existence of the theatre depended upon serving the interests of monarchy, it is far more likely that dramas were staged to remain constant to their purpose of authorizing the monarch and the state that supposedly materialized his power. (156)

The Tempest has often been viewed as a mirror image of the Jacobean court, with Prospero reflecting James. Vaughan explains the parallels between the play and events at court as follows:

While Shakespeare was crafting *The Tempest*, negotiations were under way for the marriages of both Prince Henry and Princess Elizabeth; the political problem of royal marriages and dynastic arrangements were on the public’s mind. James hoped to establish his reputation as a peacekeeper by balancing a Catholic marriage for Henry with a Protestant alliance for Elizabeth. (...) In late October 1612, Prince Henry suddenly took ill; his death on 6 November sent England into profound mourning for the popular royal heir. In the wake of Henry’s funeral, Elizabeth’s wedding to the Elector Palatine was postponed until Valentine’s Day (14 February) the following year. As David Scott Kastan observes, ‘Alonso’s sadness at having apparently lost his son and married his daughter to a foreign prince might well have seemed a virtual mirror of the [royal] situation’ (Kastan 96-7). (37-8)

To contrast Prospero's competency, at the very beginning of the play other royals are portrayed as a nuisance to sailors who are trying to keep the ship afloat. The Boatswain cries out:

[...] You are a councilor: if you can command these elements to silence and work the peace of the present, we will not hand a rope more; use your authority. If you cannot, give thanks you have lived so long, and make yourself ready in your cabin for the mischance of the hour, if it so hap. (TT 1.1.21- 27)

The Boatswain demands that, unless they can command the weather, the royals leave the sailors alone to work. The division between Prospero and the rest of the royal entourage is immediately drawn. Only Prospero is genuinely powerful, capable of incredible feats of power and imagination. What he gives, he can just as easily take away. The storm is orchestrated and then abruptly stopped by him. The banquet is laid before the eyes of hungry and exhausted castaways, but on Prospero's command, the food is taken away.

Stephen Orgel writes that "Shakespeare's figure of Prospero, the royal illusionist, derives from a profound understanding of court theatre and the quintessentially courtly theatrical form of the masque. Masques are the expression of the monarch's will, the mirrors of his mind" (Orgel 45). Since the closing of the theatres during the 1603-1604 season resulted in having the Globe's repertoire brought to the court for royal consumption, Shakespeare needed to be well-versed in royal preferences.

The significance of the masque is best explained if we keep in mind that the masque "presents the triumph of an aristocratic community" (Orgel 40) and that at its centre is "a belief in the hierarchy and a faith in the power of idealization" (40). The masque's *gravitas*, in spite of it usually containing light-hearted motifs and focusing on lively mythological characters such as nymphs, comes from the royal presence. The occasions that

gave rise to the masque and pageant entertainment resonate with political significance: the Christmas festivities of the court, the installation of a prince as Prince of Wales, the wedding of a royal child or courtly aristocrat, the procession of a monarch through a city, the inauguration of the new Lord Mayor of London. By definition the simple physical presence of

the sovereign or other royal family member equals politics, and the drama with its vivid spectacle reinforces this truth. (Bergeron 207)

In the winter of 1612- 1613, *The Tempest* was performed at court in honour of Elizabeth Stuart, the King's daughter, and Frederick V, Elector Palatine. It is unclear whether the masque was an original part of the play or if Shakespeare added it exclusively to celebrate the royal wedding. The masque in *The Tempest* is, of course, not a proper masque, but rather a "dramatic representation of one" (Orgel 45). Prospero arranges the masque in front of Ferdinand and Miranda (who at that moment are almost certainly meant to mirror the real-life royal couple) because he wants to "[b]estow upon the eyes of this young couple / Some vanity of [his] art" (TT 4.1.40-41). He calls upon the spirits to "enact / [His] present fancies" (4.1.121-122). But before the masque begins, Prospero commands "No tongue! All eyes! Be silent." (4.1.59) aiming it at the audience as much at Ariel. What follows is an important act of artistic creation: it is an extension of Prospero's power; it is a belief in the *power of the art*. Prospero's "most majestic vision" (4.1.118), as Ferdinand refers to it, may contain spirits performing to the soft music (4.1.60-117), but there is no doubt that the dramatist Prospero exerts absolute control over his spirit-actors. After Ariel gives his speech at the banquet, he is instantly undercut by Prospero, and "[o]ur attention is switched from what Ariel is saying to the mechanics of saying it, as though we were not at a performance but at a rehearsal with Prospero directing" (Frye, *On Shakespeare* 173). We cannot bypass the monarch at the centre of this play, because no matter where we look, Prospero has already construed a scene for us there.

Since *Measure for Measure* was most likely the first new comedy to be presented by the King's Men before the new monarch, James I, it gave Shakespeare an opportunity to examine the role of the monarch and the transfer of political power in front of the court and the King. In this "problem play", Shakespeare outlines the "twin" obligations of an absolute monarch, justice and mercy. David L. Stevenson remarks that the "Duke of Vienna who exercised absolute power in affairs both civil and divine [...] touched on well-known Jamesian attitudes, political, theological, and personal" (256). *Measure for Measure* opens with the transference of power from Duke Vincentio, who has been lax about enforcing Vienna's laws for the past fourteen years, to Lord Angelo, "[a] man of stricture and firm

abstinence" (1.3.12). Angelo thus gains the right to sentence lawbreakers to death and a privilege to exercise mercy (1.3.40-43).

Shakespeare's depiction of this kind of power transfer comes on the heels of *Basilikon Doron* (published in Latin in 1599, in English in 1603), a treatise on government written by James I as a private letter and a guide for his eldest son Henry. *Basilikon Doron* is separated into three books, with the second, named "Of a King's Duty in His Office," being the closest to the lessons portrayed in *Measure for Measure* and *The Tempest*. In this part of the document, James outlines the king's responsibility to avoid becoming tyrannical by governing his subjects both judiciously and wisely, taking the time to study both his subjects, their needs, and the best way to provide prudent government. In their own cunning ways, Prospero and Vincentio follow James's directives for prudent government. Vincentio appoints a deputy to avoid striking tyranny and galling the people for what he bids them do (*MFM* 1.4.36-37). Prospero may have "neglect[ed] wordly ends" (*TT* 1.2.89) in the past, but he is not going to make the same mistake twice – a man previously unaware of the going-ons in his kingdom is now hyperaware of everything happening on his island. In Vienna, Vincentio retreats to the shadows to familiarize himself with his city and his subjects. This allows him to be privy to information previously unavailable to him and to use that information to govern and fulfil his royal duty in accordance with James's guidelines.

The extent to which *Measure for Measure* reflects the interests of the newly crowned king can be ascribed to the dominant cultural code found in seventeenth-century England. Angelo acknowledges Vincentio's authority as one of supernatural proportions when he says:

When I perceive your Grace, like power divine,
Hath looked upon my passes. Then, good prince,
No longer session hold upon my shame,
But let my trial be mine own confession.
Immediate sentence then, and sequent death,
Is all the grace I beg.

(*MFM* 5.1.367-70)

In this passage, Vincentio is presented as the final source of justice and grace. In that moment he is the desired, prototypical Jamesian monarch: he is both the Alpha and the

Omega, the undisputed power in his kingdom, the dispenser of life and death, the “primate” among the class of men in the great chain of being (Tillyard 37).

Measure for Measure was written in 1604 – the same year in which James initiated his Bible project – “the great collaborative effort [...] that would lead seven years later to the publication of the King James Bible, a project through which James sought to extend his ‘prerogative’ both over and by means of the most authoritative of all languages in Renaissance England, biblical texts.” (Barnaby and Wry 1228). This project “sought to ratify his authority by controlling the reception of Scripture among his subjects” and, therefore, “it is not unreasonable to see in Duke Vincentio's deliberate and politically self-serving misapplications of biblical ‘letter and spirit’ a topical engagement in, even a critique of, James's own ‘authorized version.’” (1235). The King was dissatisfied with the notes found on the margins of the so-called *Geneva Bible* and commissioned a new, state-sanctioned translation of the Bible. As Barnaby and Wry note,

James's attentive involvement in the project, so different from his usual detachment from the business of state, was motivated not simply by his perception of the need for a “uniforme” translation of the Bible but also, and more critically, by his desire to replace the most accessible version currently in use, the Geneva Bible (the one Shakespeare himself used), with one “ratified by his Royall authority.” (1232)

Hence, it is no surprise that *Measure for Measure* likewise deals with royal sanctioning and the appropriation of religious discourse by the powers that be – in this case, Vincentio, the Duke, and, in his absence, Angelo, the Deputy. *Measure for Measure* consequently serves as a sort of a cautionary tale about the dangers of following the letter of the law and the word of God blindly and indiscriminately, especially in secular political contexts. Following too “close the rigor of the statute / To make [somebody] an example” (*MFM* 1.4.67-68) does not usually win any favours in the public eye for the kings and magistrates involved. The title of *Measure for Measure* is often linked to the verse from the Sermon on the Mount: “Judge not, that ye be not judged: for with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again” (Matthew 7:1-2). This brings the image of balance and harsh justice before our eyes:

measure for measure, flesh for flesh, Angelo for Claudio. It is a play that has all the makings of a tragedy, and yet it is not one.

Vincentio, much like the newly crowned King James, needs to promote his private interests through indirect practices. For Vincentio that royally sanctioned figurehead is Angelo, for King James it is the Bible. James made it clear that, “because religious issues were inseparable from political ones, any efforts at reform would be carefully scrutinized for their political implications, and especially for possible infringements on the prerogatives of the Crown” (Barnaby and Wry 1229). This view of a king as an absolute, divine authority that James I very obviously leaned towards is reflected in the before mentioned Angelo’s passage when addressing the Duke: “your grace, like power divine, / Hath looked upon my passes” (*MFM* 5.1.367-8).

Naturally, the divine and earthly laws do differ, and Shakespeare was aware of that as much as James was. When Isabella exclaims to Angelo: “’Tis set down so in heaven, but not in earth.” (*MFM* 2.4.49), she means to say that determining the severity of punishment for various crimes (such as fornication and murder) is done differently in heaven than on earth. If Shakespeare did try to hint at the illogical nature of parts of the law, he most likely did it in Act 4, Scene 2 of *Measure for Measure*, when Pompey points out how strange it is that it is illegal for him to be a bawd, but it’s completely legal for him to be an executioner: “Sir, I have been an unlawful bawd time out of mind, but yet I will be content to be a lawful hangman.” (4.2.14-15). Earthly laws are visibly fallible and sometimes do not make much sense, and that is something that the king, the playwright, and the character need to keep in mind.

Shakespeare utilizes the English king’s duality of responsibility and power when he dons Vincentio in a Friar’s habit. The Duke as himself speaks with the authority of the prince of Vienna, but as a Friar the Duke assumes the authority of the Church and redirects religious language to work on his behalf. He becomes the confessor to all the other characters and gains Isabella’s and Mariana’s trust. A maiden of good standing, particularly one as devoted as Isabella, would not take guidance from anyone. But a Friar’s mantle gives the Duke both anonymity and power over others. The authority of the ruler himself is de facto “exhibited only in the beginning and the ending of the play to define the scope of action” (Dunkel 280). The Duke appears as himself only to hand over his position and to assume it again at the end.

The ruler must prevent any disorder, but he is not all-seeing. Indeed, it is only once the Duke relinquishes his position as the Lord of Vienna that he truly sees what is going on in the city. He encounters Lucio and hears about his transgressions; he has a first row seat to Angelo's fall from grace; he is able to sympathise with Isabella, Claudio, and Mariana; and he is capable of showing mercy at the right moment. Even undesirable thoughts need to be suppressed, and that is not something a ruler can control unless it is internalised. All the monarch needs to do is find the right buttons to push.

THE ROYAL SPECTACLE AND THE POWER OF THE STAGE

Elizabethan and Jacobean royals were well-versed in positioning themselves on the stage of everyday life. Queen Elizabeth I was already aware of the necessity of the royal exposure when she remarked in her speech to Parliament in 1586: "We princes, I tell you, are set on stages, in the sight and viewe of all the world" (Lever 1.2. n. 67-72). The theatre of noble life found its next proponent in Elizabeth's successor, James I.

When performing a play in front of the members of high-born society, one must keep in mind that the primary audience is the royal spectator. As Orgel argues, "[t]he king must not merely see the play, he must be seen to see it" (16). He needs to be in the full view of the audience, even if that is not the best position for viewing the play. After all, next to the real life king, a play performing on stage is only secondary. The primary performance is happening in the royal seat, conveniently placed in the most prominent position, sometimes even on the stage itself, among the actors. After all, "the Renaissance monarch understood himself or herself as deriving power from being the object of the public gaze" (Tennenhouse 155). And they were not only *passively* exposed to the public gaze, but also *actively* every time when the courtiers participated in the performances. And when that happened, when the king or other royals were part of the performance, they expressed the Renaissance beliefs about the nature of kingship – about "the ruler as an exemplary figure" (Orgel 42) whose "extravagance (...) was not a vice but a virtue" (38), because who better to play the king than the King himself? The difference between a theatre performance, produced for a wider range of audience, and a court performance, produced exclusively for royal consumption is undeniable:

The Elizabethan public theatre established a hierarchy that was primarily economic, though of course it had intellectual and social implications as well. (...) But when the king brought his players to court the nature of the audience changed, as, often did the function of the performance. (Orgel 8-9).

"I love the people," says the Duke in *Measure for Measure*, "But do not like to stage me to their eyes. / Though it do well, I do not relish well / Their loud applause and avehement" (1.1.67-70). This is an obvious parallel to the royal attitude towards the crowds and their enthusiasm. Public approval is necessary for the government to function effectively. Like James, Vincentio absolutely recognizes, and later utilizes, the power of the public gaze, even though he does not "relish (...) their loud applause" (*MFM* 1.1.68-70). The King is the product of the perception of his people and the spectacle produced for them is his weapon. When the Duke, finally back "in his own habit," returns triumphantly and rather pompously back to Vienna, that act is a carefully staged experiment placed at the city gate for maximum exposure. The charade is closing to an end, and the participants of this farce are not yet even aware that they were a part of somebody else's grand scheme. Vincentio's triumphant return effectively continues the folk theme of "return of the king" (Nicholls 45) and also serves as the calm before the storm, before the meting out of justice and punishment commences.

Prospero, who spends most of the play invisible to most of the characters, uses his final act to stage not only himself, but also Miranda and Ferdinand to the eyes of the people. His entire scheme depends upon this final act, the ultimate reveal. His strategies are derived from the theatre: the manipulation of the gaze, the illusion inseparable from reality, the use of disguise to build up the tension, the playwright's art of story-telling. The rest of the characters are simply pawns unwittingly participating in a game devised by the mastermind Prospero. The power of the stage "was precisely the power of fiction, the power to induce an audience or an Angelo to view themselves as actors in their own lives, as artificial and artfully manipulated constructions, as indeed they were, whether they existed onstage or off, whether they were constituted by a playwright or by larger cultural forces of determination" (Mullaney 113). In the epilogue, Prospero addresses the audience directly, stating that his "charms are all o'erthrown," (*TT* 5. epilogue.1) and asking to be set free by the audience's

applause. This is the only Shakespearean epilogue of “this sort, directed straight at the audience” (Kott 296) and as such allows for ample comparison between fact and fiction.

If we approach this epilogue from a biographical standpoint, the island becomes the theatre, Prospero’s art becomes the art of playwrighting, and the Duke’s departure from the island symbolizes Shakespeare’s retirement. Greenblatt remarks that “*The Tempest* is the last play Shakespeare wrote more or less completely on his own (...) and it has the air of farewell, a valediction to theatrical magic, a retirement” (*Will* 373). Frye agrees that “the central figure, Prospero, has characteristics that seem to suggest some self-identification with Shakespeare. So it could be Shakespeare’s play in a special sense, his farewell to his art” (*On Shakespeare* 171). Just like Shakespeare served as an in-house playwright for Globe Theatre, Prospero functions as an interior-playwright for *The Tempest*. Caliban says to Stephano: “Remember / First to possess his books; for without them / He’s but a sot” (*TT* 3.2.90-93). Books are the source of Prospero’s power because they are the source of language, a tool which Shakespeare used so well. Prospero brings the role of an overworked author to life all through the play. He distractedly mutters after the masque ends that he “had forgot that foul conspiracy / Of the beast Caliban and his confederates / Against [his] life” (*TT* 4.1.139-141). He needs to keep so many narrative threads in minds that forgetting one was bound to happen. From the opening storm to the closing epilogue, under Prospero’s guidance, the play challenges the boundaries between illusion and reality. Actors and audiences alike are “such stuff / As dreams are made on” (*TT* 4.1.156-7). Through his final words Prospero erases the distinction between an actor, an author, and audience. The image of an omniscient author who gives up absolute power, reclaims his birthright and returns to a home he left long time ago can be applied in equal measure to Prospero at the end of the play and to Shakespeare at the end of his career.

Another form of the royal spectacle comes from the theatricalization of punishment. Shakespeare lived through a real-life, high-profile case of such a spectacle: the exercise of theatrical and psychological intimidation inflicted upon the Raleigh conspirators in 1603-4. According to Steven Mullaney, the events unfolded as follows:

With Raleigh watching from his prison window, Markham, Grey, and Cobham were brought to the scaffold in succession. On the verge of death, Markham was told he was insufficiently prepared and returned to his cell; Grey was brought out, allowed his final words, then

informed that the sequence of execution had been changed; Cobham next mounted the scaffold, said his prayers and his last dying speech, but on the verge of execution the proceedings were halted so that his fellow condemned could join him. 'Now all the actors,' as one account put it, were 'together on the stage (as use is at the end of a play),' and the sense of theatre was not lost upon the men themselves; they 'looked strange upon the other, like men beheaded and met again in the other world.' Again they prepared themselves for death and were even induced to acknowledge the justice of their fates, at which point they were informed that the king had granted them their lives. (106)

James I had apparently perfected the punishment spectacle which inflicts the maximum of mental anguish upon the subjects and the audiences. By using the Raleigh conspirators as examples, James showed that he is as merciful as he is powerful. He brought all the actors on the stage to participate in the final act of the reality-play orchestrated by the King. He crafted this theatrical display to showcase the magnitude of his power.

In *Measure for Measure*, a similar spectacle unfolds: a long-time prisoner Barnardine is brought out of his cell to be executed only to be granted a reprieve after he objects and is deemed "[a] creature unprepared, unmeet for death" (*MFM* 4.3.66), not unlike the Raleigh conspirators. Barnardine is first dragged out of his prison cell in Act 4, Scene 3 of *Measure for Measure* and expected to accept his execution. The Duke is shocked by Barnardine's refusal to yield to his plans. Barnardine exclaims "Not a word." (4.3.61) and returns to his ward. The shocked Duke accepts another substitute for Claudio who appears "by the provision of heaven" and orders that Barnardine be put in a secret hold along with Claudio. The spectacle is completed at the end Act 5 when Barnardine is once again dragged in front of the Duke and the assembled crowd, pardoned and advised to "take this mercy to provide/ For better times to come" (5.1.482-483).

When it comes to the world of *The Tempest*, punishments inflicted upon Caliban are numerous and overwhelmingly physical. Prospero sends spirits to torment Caliban while he works (*TT* 2.2.1-3). Throughout the entire play Caliban is characterised almost purely by his physical characteristics: Miranda does not want to look at him (1.2.310) and Trinculo comments how people in England would pay to see an odd thing like him (2.2.27-30). While Miranda averts her gaze from Caliban, Trinculo represents the equally cruel subset of the

population which would exploit the “unusual” looking creature for the pleasure of a fascinating sight.

THE ILLUSION OF JUSTICE

In the hour of his people’s need, the Duke is “not to be found” (*MFM* 1.2.174). The seemingly absent Duke is in the thick of it under the guise of a friar, but even though he witnesses firsthand the tragedy in the making, he decides to play an elaborate game instead of revealing himself. When the final scene of the play arrives, the trap is meticulously set and all the chess pieces are positioned exactly as the Duke intended. Isabella demands justice (*MFM* 5.1.20-25) and Vincentio once again switches the responsibility from himself to Angelo: “Lord Angelo shall give [Isabella] justice” (*MFM* 5.1.27). The guilty party in this case, the villain, is asked to dispense justice. This flawed moment of justice is foreshadowed in Act 2, Scene 1, when he doesn’t deny that “[t]he jury passing on the prisoner’s life / May in the sworn twelve have a thief or two / Guiltier than him they try” (2.1.19-21). The corrupt judge plot is not a new development in the history of literature, but this dark comment in *Measure for Measure* serves to illustrate the hypocritical and limited nature of justice. Both Isabella and Mariana tear into Angelo from different angles, as was the Duke’s intention, accusing him of carnal crimes. Angelo soon recognizes that “[t]hese poor informal women are no more / But instruments of some more mightier member / That sets them on” (5.1.235-237), but he has no idea who exactly is behind it. In the final act of the play, “two interpretations of ‘measure for measure’ are presented to Isabella - and, in pleading for Angelo’s life, she chooses the right one” (Siegel 317).

It can be debated whether or not the ending of *Measure for Measure* brings anybody any sort of justice. It “bears arbitrariness of a *deus ex machina* ending: the enforced marriages either belie what has gone before and represent marriage as punishment, or attest to the quasi-divine ruler’s ability to bring about legitimate personal and social order” (Cunningham 317). The four marriages are distributed by the Duke like unwanted gifts – with the exception of Claudio and Juliet, who intended to get married anyways, Mariana, who was saved from her secluded existence by conveniently timed bed-trick, and Vincentio himself, who reigns supreme over his idyllic decision. Isabella on the other hand seems stunned, Angelo has fluctuated between life and death several times within a few lines and

is forced to wed Mariana despite all of his schemes to avoid it, and Lucio's betrothal cannot be construed as anything else than rather imaginative punishment. Both Angelo and Lucio are offered a choice which isn't really a choice: marriage or death, or, more precisely, first marriage then death. Lucio's punishment, however, has very little to do with his crime towards an unknown woman and much more to do with his "crime" against the Duke. Vincentio himself exclaims: "Slandering a prince deserves it" (*MFM* 5.1.522).

Simply proclaiming the Duke's final decision as a moment of idealized divine symbolism would mean overlooking the importance of law, politics, circumstance, and the prevailing opinions of the age. To the audience enjoying the play, the slew of weddings at the end signaled "a retaliation which makes the audience feel that the punishment has been made to fit the crime and yet that justice has been tempered by mercy" (Siegel 318).

The tale told in *The Tempest* is, at its core, one character's quest for the restoration of his former glory. Prospero presents himself as a man working to right the wrongs which had been done to him, but his idea of justice and injustice is not very consistent. While he is furious that his brother has seized his throne, he has no qualms about taking the island from Caliban and keeping him and Ariel as his servant-slaves. Prospero's hypocrisy is similar to Angelo's. Both of them think that they can break the rules and fulfil their desires while nobody is looking and intimidate the individuals affected by their schemes into silence. The idea of justice presented in *Measure for Measure* and *The Tempest* is highly subjective and usually falls into the hands of one character who wields the highest amount of power and influence.

This concept was not unknown to the Elizabethans who "attached great importance to the principle in law called equity, the principle that takes account of certain human factors" (Frye *On Shakespeare* 142). Since equity is not bound by the precedents, it allows the Dukes in both plays to pass judgements and dispense justice outside the common law. According to Dunkel, Shakespeare "has provided us not only with the conflict for the comedy but also has created the basis for recognizing the necessity for justice with equity" (285). However, neither play offers us an exemplary model of a royal judge. Duke Vincentio in *Measure for Measure* has self-admittedly been careless in implementing the law and eschews the responsibilities by appointing a deputy, Angelo, who while a stickler for the letter of the law is also two-faced. And Prospero, who in Milan has lost his kingdom by being negligent and letting his brother take over his duties, became overly involved and vindictive

on the enchanted island. The Dukes do not seem to care for the anguish through which they have put even the “innocent” characters. They are single-minded in the pursuit of their version of justice.

Both Vincentio and Prospero toy with the notion of death in their quest for justice and punishment. Prospero makes Alonso believe that his son is dead, and then exploits his grief to deepen the impact of the final reveal. He makes a game out of life and death. Vincentio also revels in his command over people’s very existence. Claudio is advised to resign himself to death (*MFM* 3.1.5-41) and his “death” is exploited till the end of the play when it is revealed that he is actually alive. Barnardine, who was supposed to die instead of Claudio, astonishingly refuses to cooperate with the Duke’s plan to kill him instead of Claudio. The Duke disguised as a friar comes to advise, comfort and pray with the drunken prisoner (4.3.50-51), but Barnardine refuses to consent to his own death. The Duke deems him “unfit to live or die” (4.3.63) and switches his plan to using a head of a pirate who died in prison that morning. The Duke proclaims it “an accident that heaven provides” (4.3.76). So even though Barnardine is a murderer, and Claudio is guilty of fornication, a sin easily corrected in the eyes of society by marrying, why is it that the Duke does not ask for “measure for measure” in Barnardine’s case? The Duke’s notion of justice is not constant. He spares Barnardine outright because he has “a stubborn soul / That apprehends no further than this world / And squar’st [his] life according” (5.1.478-480), but performs a ruse when sparing Claudio by deceiving everybody – from Angelo to Isabella to Claudio himself. Both Claudio and Barnardine are imprisoned at the same place and put at the tender mercies of the same authority, however, one of them simply refuses to yield. Just as Caliban refuses to bow down to Prospero, so Barnardine swears that he “will not die today for any man’s persuasion” (*MFM* 4.3.59) which prompts the Duke into pardoning him at the end of the play.

In *The Tempest* Prospero succeeds in subjugating Ariel by keeping him chained by the promise of freedom. Ariel was confined in a cloven pine and released into a very conditional form of freedom by Prospero (*TT* 1.2.274-7). Ariel’s position is that of an indentured servant, a step above complete slavery and confinement. He even calls Prospero his “noble master” (*TT* 1.2.299). Paul Brown dubbed Ariel’s situation a “mode of symbolic violence”: the gentle island spirit “is, paradoxically, *bound* in service by this constant reminder of Prospero’s gift of *freedom* to him, in releasing him from imprisonment in a tree” (60). Caliban, on the other

hand, proves not to be susceptible to Prospero's tricks. Although he is tortured for it, he refuses to completely internalise Prospero's teachings. When he is ordered to speak, Caliban uses the language which Prospero taught him to curse his master (*TT* 1.2.363-365), the man who refers to him as "my slave" (1.2.307). In *Measure for Measure* the Duke says of Pompey: "Correction and instruction must both work / Ere this rude beast will profit" (3.2.30-31). However, in this case Prospero's "correction and instruction" as well as his "magic" fell on stony ground and bore no fruit – Caliban's mind remains his own. He is a "beast" in the eyes of trespassers who took his island from him. From his point of view, he is a last bastion of defiance from Prospero "encroach[ing] on the prerogatives of a creative and providential divinity" (Abrams 49).

In the end, the only value placed on people's lives in *Measure for Measure* and *The Tempest* is the one assigned to them by Vincentio and Prospero. The two Dukes return people from the dead, unite families,⁴ and bask in the glory of their powers. Mariana and Isabella prostrate themselves (*MFM* 5.1.428-452) before the Duke's "unknown sovereignty" (5.1.385). By going down on their knees, they acknowledge the highest power present in the play – the master manipulator and their ruler, the Duke. This act of "kneeling" and submissiveness is subverted in *The Tempest* by Caliban prostrating himself in front of Stephano and Trinculo, a butler and jester respectively. He proclaims Stephano "a brave god" who "bears celestial liquor" (*TT* 2.2.115), and decides that he "will kneel to him" (2.2.116) and "kiss [his] foot" (2.2.146). Caliban furthers this parodic re-visiting of Prospero's arrival to the island by drunkenly promising to show his new "master" "every fertile inch o' th' island" (2.2.145).

DECEIT AND MULTIPLICITY

Measure for Measure, just like *The Tempest*, can be viewed both as the complete product and the process of making a play. We can begin identifying the instances of mirroring and doubling of the plot by following Jan Kott's line of thinking that

⁴ For more on this concept, see Tennenhouse 177-184.

Shakespearean dramas are constructed not on the principle of unity of action, but on the principle of analogy, comprising a double, treble, or quadruple plot, which repeats the same basic theme; they are a system of mirrors, as it were, both concave and convex, which reflect, magnify and parody the same situation. (303)

The plot of *Measure for Measure* is “structured to keep doubts alive” and “opens with a dramatic and specific change that evokes immediate uncertainty” (Cunningham 321-322). The very opening of the play contains change, an immediate deviation from the standard rules of government – the usual ruler leaves the scene and his deputy is left to enforce a previously obsolete law. The power is transferred from the regal, but apparently inefficient Duke to the rigid and obviously inexperienced Angelo. The highest authority in Vienna steps down temporarily and leaves the city in the hands of an untried young man. The whole episode seems like an experiment staged by a curious sociologist. As the play unfolds, intrigue multiplies: Claudio is put on death row, Isabella has entered the game, and Angelo’s fall from grace has begun. At this point in the story, the disguised Duke steps in. Frye notices that the play structurally breaks in two in Act 3, Scene 2 when the disguised Duke steps forward to speak to Isabella. The rhythm switches from blank verse to prose and from now on the disguised Duke is “producing and directing” the show (Frye, *On Shakespeare* 148).

The Duke in *Measure for Measure* excels in the art of substitution: Vincentio is replaced by Angelo as the commander of Vienna, the Duke becomes a false friar by donning the robes, and Isabella needs to take hers off to become the Duke’s wife. Barnardine’s head was supposed to replace Claudio’s on the chopping block, but he was fortuitously saved by the conveniently already dead pirate who bears some resemblance to Claudio. Claudio’s situation is doubled in his sister’s predicament which is tripled in Mariana’s troubles, with Lucio’s wrongdoing paralleling Angelo’s abandonment of Mariana. Furthermore, Angelo intended to take Isabella to his bed instead of his rightful fiancée, instead Mariana surreptitiously replaces Isabella under the cover of the night. This complicated bed-trick comes full circle when “[t]he doubleness of the deceit is redoubled” and “Isabella is induced to project herself, both publicly and psychologically, back into the situation of her surrogate” (Mullaney 109). Isabella then publicly adopts the role she did not play in private and takes the blame and the shame for a moment until Mariana unveils herself and exposes her face

to “cruel Angelo” (*MF* 5.1.206) who did not recognize his betrothed. Finally, almost every female character in the play is promised marriage, and almost every male character is threatened with death at one point or another.

In *The Tempest* this complicated doubling goes even further. The real beginning of the play is in Milan, when Antonio banished Prospero into exile. What is presented to us on the stage is only the second half of that full story. Prospero was overthrown by Antonio, so he overthrew Caliban. Prospero is trying to get his kingdom back, but so is Caliban. Prospero’s story begins with his brother back in Milan, and Caliban’s story begins with Prospero arriving on the island. Antonio tries to talk Sebastian into killing his brother Alonso and seizing the throne for himself (*TT* 2.1.201-293). Meanwhile, Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo plan to kill Prospero and steal his power in Act 3, Scene 2 of the play. To further complicate this system of reflections, Prospero’s role explicitly mirrors the role of an author creating a story. He stages the masque in *The Tempest* as a form of double deceit, a smoke mirror which distracts from the real plot going on behind the scene. If we take this even deeper, and equate Prospero with Shakespeare, then the fictional playwright mirrors the real playwright in the exact moment of penning the play. Their attitudes towards art and life overlap, they share an ability to create illusions and alter space and time. The thin line between reality and illusion, actor and character, the island and the stage is exposed both *in* and *out* of the world of the play. Alonso does not know whether it really is Prospero or another enchantment before him (*TT* 5.1.111-116) and whether Ferdinand is really alive or is “a vision of the island” (5.1.176). Blurring the lines between fiction and reality creates doubt even in the most sane of minds and weakens the brain until it is “troubled” (*TT* 4.1.159). The wary magician warns us in Act 4, Scene 1 that his magic, much like life, will eventually melt into thin air and that “[w]e are such stuff / As dreams are made on, and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep” (4.1.156-158).

DISGUISE AND DE-FROCKING

Elizabethan and Jacobean England were societies notoriously divisive based on a person’s social status. In Shakespeare’s society, “the first question you would ask yourself about anyone would be: is he or she a social superior, inferior or equal? Every aspect of your

behaviour toward him or her would depend on your answer to that.” (Frye, *On Shakespeare* 6) In the face of such stratification of classes, clothes truly did maketh man. And since nobody could wear any clothes that did not befall their social status, discarded garments usually found its way to the most socially mobile of groups: actors. Elegantly dressed actors wore the clothes of real noblemen and this means that “when the ordinary Elizabethan went to the theatre to see a play about royalty, he might have thought of the drama as a mere fiction, but its trappings were paradoxically the real thing.” (Orgel 5-6). In *Will in the World*, Stephen Greenblatt explains how social restrictions on clothing played into the “carefully calibrated gestures of respect” which permeated Elizabethan society: “It wasn’t simply a question of money. By royal proclamation, silks and satins were officially restricted to the gentry. Actors were exempted, but outside of the playhouse they could not legally wear their costumes.” (76) Both Prospero and Vincentio are obvious social superiors who take on disguises to blend into the masses. The disguised ruler trope allows the people who are born above to immerse themselves into the lives of their subjects. Vincentio’s disguise allows him to test other characters. He questions their loyalty (in the case of Escalus), their opinions of him (Lucio), their love for their family (Isabella), and finally their moral fortitude (Angelo). Although a friar’s habit is a step-down from Vincentio’s usual ducal robes, it brings with it a different kind of weight:

Shakespeare’s Duke is unique in the disguise he adopts: he takes off one mantle of authority to put on another, one which allows him not only to “visit both prince and people” incognito and spy into their overt deeds and expressed sentiments, but also to visit, as a ghostly father, the inner recess of their souls. While he stages his return, he does not relinquish the power he has enjoyed as a confessor – to Isabella, Marina, Claudio, and even, or so he claims, to Angelo – but rather translates that power into a new form and forum. (Mullaney 104)

By donning the friar’s robes, Vincentio can glide between the characters undisturbed, he can observe, plot, and act unhampered by the responsibilities of dukedom. Lucio says that the Duke disguise as friar Lodowick is “honest in nothing / but in his clothes” (*MFM* 5.1.262-263). But those clothes are the biggest lie of them all, used by the Duke to give him a kind of influence reserved only for the wearer of a religious garment. Of course, the protection usually guaranteed by the habit is not always effective – in Isabella’s case, it should have

served as an immediate sign of her innocence and devotion and as a repellent for Angelo, but it did the exact opposite.

Prospero's power is reflected in his clothing. The stage direction found in *The Tempest* explicitly states "Enter Prospero, in his magic robes." On the island Prospero's garments indicate his status as a conjurer, and, consequently, as a playwright. "I will discase me, and myself present / As I was sometime Milan" (*TT* 5.1.85-86), Prospero says to Ariel before he puts his ducal attire back on for the big finale. Once he renounces his power, his magical robes must also disappear, and he must take his rightful place in his rightful clothes. The same clothes which give Prospero authority result in ridicule when worn by the wrong person. Stephano steals Prospero's clothes, but that doesn't make him royalty. No matter how many times Trinculo and Caliban call him king, when faced with real authority, Stephano remains a "drunken butler" (*TT* 5.1.277). To conclude the absurdity of the situation, Caliban dubs himself a "thrice-double ass" for "worship[ing] this dull fool" (*TT* 5.1.297-299).

KNOWLEDGE AND OMNISCIENCE

Prospero's invisibility enables him to observe uninterrupted the unfolding of his master plan on the island. He is the only character who acts of his own free will, and the only free character who fully understands what is going on. Compared to Prospero, the rest of the cast is just like his daughter Miranda "ignorant of what [they] art, nought knowing / Of whence [Prospero is], nor that [Prospero is] more better / Than Prospero, master of a full poor cell" (*TT* 1.2.18-20). Prospero is a spiritual father of knowledge, the playwright who knows what will happen before it is even written. Everything that happened before the storm is recounted by Prospero to Miranda. He gives us the background on not only himself, but on every major player currently shipwrecked on the island.

In the beginning scenes of *Measure for Measure*, Duke Vincentio gives us a similar insight into the personalities of the major players at his court, as well as his own. The Duke begins the play by acknowledging Escalus's superiority when it comes to Vienna's laws and people (*MFM* 1.1.5-7). This presents before the reader a picture of a Duke aware of his limitations, a man who is not afraid to say that somebody else's knowledge exceeds his own. However, we are also almost immediately faced with morally and politically ambiguous

decisions made by the Duke. He leaves Vienna in charge of Angelo instead of the older, wiser Escalus. He also admits that he did not enforce the law as he should have, but decides to pass the unpopular task to his deputy. And that opens up the central question about Vincentio's and Prospero's competence in running the country.

Unlike Prospero, Duke Vincentio acquires his knowledge about the going-ons in Vienna mostly by accident, forcing him to excel in the art of improvisation. He assumes a position of marginality and eavesdrops on Isabella from the shadows (*MFM* 3.1.). His disguise as a neutral, well-meaning friar allows him to look in from the outside. This marginalized position gives him a kind of knowledge which he would be hard pressed to acquire as the Duke of Vienna. Vincentio needs to *step out* of his role to gain insight and knowledge. Also unlike Prospero, we are not given an overview of Vincentio's plans, and therefore, the audience does not know the purpose of the Duke's actions until they are explicitly stated. Why is the Duke hiding in plain sight? Why is he allowing Angelo to resume his terror over Vienna for so long? While Prospero's actions are provoked by the injustice done to him, Vincentio's actions cannot be prejudged – because they begin while they *do not yet* have a cause. These are some of the reasons why *Measure for Measure* has long been considered a “problem play”. The “doubtful morality, [and] its discordant techniques” (Wilson 375) all contribute to the play's ambiguous status. No one else except the Duke is in a position to explain the entirety of the proceedings. But he chooses to keep it a secret until the final pages of the play, showing that he shares Prospero's flair for the dramatic.

Nicholls calls the Duke “an insecure authority figure aware that his rule has created a stagnant corrupt Vienna” (15). Prospero, on the other hand, did not do his duty, but let his brother take care of his subjects and cast upon his brother the responsibilities of government while he dedicated himself to his craft (*TT* 1.2.71-77). Prospero “[a]waked an evil nature” (1.2.93) in Antonio because his “trust [...] had indeed no limit” (1.2.96). For all his complaining about his “perfidious” brother (1.2.68), Prospero mercilessly re-enacts Antonio's treachery by betraying and enslaving Caliban.

CONCLUSION

Vincentio, “[t]he duke of dark corners” (*MFM* 4.3.157) and Prospero, “a prince of power” (*TT* 1.2.55) have much in common. They are both master manipulators, who have

been, at different times, both vengeful and benign. The ever-present theatricality of power permeates both *Measure for Measure* and *The Tempest*. Both plays present us with complex, ambiguous worlds, and though Prospero's circumstances are a bit more extreme in nature than Vincentio's, both Dukes occupy similar functions in the fabric of their respective plays. They are the instigators, the playwrights, and the mediators. They offer us an "exploration of the workings and limits of exemplary power [...] and of the cultural pressures that [...] necessitate its increasing theatricalization" (Mullaney 92). Through drastic transformations of Dukes into meddling magicians and friars, *Measure for Measure* and *The Tempest* explore the inner workings and transitions of power, and the consequences it brings to everybody involved in this transaction. And at the end of their carefully orchestrated plots, both Dukes return to their rightful positions of power: Vincentio to his appointed role as the ruler of Vienna, and Prospero, after breaking his staff and drowning his book, plans to leave the island and reclaim his original throne in Milan.

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Abstract

The paper compares the two dukes in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* and *The Tempest* as they pull the strings in advance the plot in their respective play. Prospero, the exiled Duke of Milan, lords over an enchanted island in *The Tempest*, and Vincentio, who dons a disguise to be able to walk around his city unnoticed, rules Vienna in *Measure for Measure*. The tactics that the authority figures, Vincentio and Prospero, employ in order to maintain or regain their power and influence are examined in the context of prevalent cultural and political conditions in Jacobean England.

Since the paper argues that Prospero's and Vincentio's power is reflected in their clothing in a society notoriously divisive on the basis of social status, they need to resort to disguising themselves to blend in. By doing so, they gain firsthand knowledge about the information which would otherwise be unavailable to them. This increased level of omniscience results in a series of decisions by the dukes who display a rather flawed understanding of justice and mercy. The primary goal is to punish the characters who participated in the act of transference of power opposite the dukes: Vincentio's deputy Angelo who proved himself to be corrupt and hypocritical, and Prospero's brother Antonio who ended up usurping his throne. Both dukes approach to disciplining the offenders is by staging a punishment spectacle.

The stage-management, manipulation and deceit exhibited by both dukes are linked to Shakespeare's own theatrical practices and, in the case of Prospero, as a possible self-referential farewell letter before his retirement. Both plays are underlined by a complicated system of reflections which double, triple, and subvert the plot by using the lower class characters when necessary. This serves to emphasize the theatricality of royal life and the complete arbitrariness of justice in some cases.

Key words

Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, *The Tempest*, authority, spectacle