

Hello, my name is Anna Sicari and I am currently in my first year of the Master's Program here at St. John's University. It is my pleasure to announce that I will be the next Editor-in-Chief of the St. John's *Humanities Review*. Following my predecessors' example, John Nance and Christianne Cain, I hope to continue the excellent work of the journal, while hoping to advance it to an even higher level of work, a level that I know St. John's can, and should, attain. For the next *HR*, I believe that a different approach is needed for the upcoming year. We are all aware of the economic challenges facing the nation and St. John's. Thus, in order to ensure that the *Humanities Review* continues to be a quality publication, there will only be one *HR* next year, scheduled to come out in the middle of the spring semester of 2011. However, I see this as a change for the better; with one *HR*, I believe there will be available ample time to ensure that only work of the highest quality is accepted. This is where you, readers, come in. For the next publication, I hope to receive essays from well-known, high-profile people in their respective fields. Professors, faculty, and students of the English Department alike should feel that they are a part of *The Humanities Review*: a work that represents what the St. John's English Department sets out to do, advance new ideas and implement critical change through writing. Together, I truly believe we can make this journal one of excellence. My goal is to start this summer reaching out to scholars and writers, asking them for contributions to this journal. I ask of you to do the same; if you know of anyone who would be interested in submitting to the *HR*, please contact me. Along the same lines, if anyone has any ideas, concepts, suggestions—or just wants to be a part of the *Humanities Review* team—let me know and I'd love to have you on board. I look forward to working with you next year.

Anna Sicari

“I will encounter darkness as a bride”: *Death and the Possibilities of Comedy in Measure for Measure*

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In *Measure for Measure*, more than in any other work, Shakespeare reshapes the ends of comedy by exposing the inhabitants of Vienna to death. From the threat of Claudio's execution to the risk of fatal syphilitic infection in the city's brothels, the overriding presence of mortality disrupts the conventional matrimonial resolution of comedy. The play does, of course, conclude with a series of marriages and espousals: Claudio to Juliet, Angelo to Mariana, Lucio to Kate Keepdown, and, perhaps, Duke Vicentio to Isabella. Yet these marriages fail to dispel the fatal impulses of human nature which govern the play. For in Shakespeare's Vienna, as Claudio explains to Lucio, “Our natures do pursue / Like rats that ravin down their proper bane, / A thirsty evil, and when we drink we die” (1.2.129-30).¹ In *Measure for Measure*, Shakespeare triangulates desire, death, and marriage to establish a flexible comedic mode that confronts the issue of death. Instead of resolving the problem of death through the traditional matrimonial union between men and women, he presents three forms of marriage to process the mortal impulses of desire: ceremonial marriage, the joining together of marriage and death, and spiritual union between individual and God.

Even though Shakespeare includes multiple responses to the problem of mortality, he does not resist the unitary structure of comedy. On the contrary, his expansion of the comedic form serves to disrupt the audience and reader's expectations. Indeed, the designation of *Measure for Measure* as a problem comedy confirms its unsettling themes and its departure from more stable Shakespearean comedies. Responding to these apparent problems, eighteenth-century theatrical editions of the play added various epilogues to conform it to generic conventions. At the conclusion of a 1722 acting edition, for instance, Duke Vicentio explains to Isabella, “Thy virtuous Goodness, which alone has Charms / To make thee worthy of a Monarch's Arms.”² He then

proceeds to describe himself as a monarch who "[r]esumes the Scepter, and gives Laws again: / On sure Foundations learns to fix Decrees, / Like the Supreme, by judging what he sees." This epilogue clarifies the Duke's marriage proposal to Isabella as well as explicitly associates his governance of Vienna with divine authority. In so doing, it removes any ambiguity surrounding Isabella's conspicuous silence at the conclusion of the play and transfers it to the Duke's imperial power. Similarly, in a 1779 edition of *Measure for Measure*, the Duke accentuates his romantic attraction to Isabella:

Shade not, sweet saint, those graces with a veil,
Nor in a nunnery hide thee; say thou'rt mine;
Thy Duke, thy Friar, tempts thee from thy vows.
Let thy clear spirit shine in public life;
No cloister'd sister, but thy prince's wife.³

These additions transform Duke Vicentio from an unromantic figure with a "complete bosom" immune to the effects of "the dribbling dart of love" at the beginning of the play into an amorous suitor by its conclusion (1.2.2-3). Furthermore, they depict the cloistered life as a confined space opposed to the public sphere, a life that would diminish Isabella's "clear spirit" when compared with marriage to a prince. Both of these eighteenth-century interpolations emphasize the Duke's political power and bring his relationship with Isabella into alignment with the other romantic couples in the play.⁴

Following the two vectors established by these eighteenth-century editions, modern critics frequently ground their interpretations on Duke Vicentio's political authority and his apparent marriage proposal to Isabella. Jonathan Dollimore's reading of Claudio's description of the moment of death in erotically charged marital terms, "If I must die, / I will encounter darkness as a bride, / And hug it in my arms," provides a representative interpretation of the Duke's power (3.1.81-3). He argues that the Duke's counseling of Claudio reinforces the control of the state: "What is being dramatized here is the way in which a philosophy of death appears to work as an ideology of social control, converting transgressive desire into complete submission to authority, even to the point of welcoming death only to fail."⁵ Such an interpretation, though it concentrates on the negative aspects of the Duke's godlike authority, reiterates the eighteenth-century interpolation that he judges "[l]ike the Supreme." By reading the Duke as the authoritarian center of the play, moreover, this approach often depends upon Isabella's acceptance of Duke Vicentio's marriage proposal. Robert Watson, for instance, asserts that "Isabella is positioned as a holy virgin only to be displaced into

an object of sexual and reproductive desire"; yet, this reading presupposes Isabella's submission to the Duke's marital desires: "Presumably she surrenders her quest for immortalizing chastity by taking the Duke's hand in the final silence of the play."⁶ Like the Duke's wooing in the eighteenth-century addition, this approach assumes that "silence means consent" and that Isabella, either joyfully or reluctantly, chooses marriage over the religious life.⁷

At the conclusion of *Measure for Measure*, however, Shakespeare refrains from indicating either Duke Vicentio's position as a godlike authority or Isabella's consent to his marriage proposal. In fact, Isabella's silence joins the murderer Bernardine's refusal to repent in illustrating the limits of the Duke's authority and, at the same time, signaling that mortality acts as the ultimate authority governing the play. The Duke, as his frequent dependence on the Viennese friars indicates, also recognizes the limitations of his power when confronted with death. In directing the action of the play, though often as "an imperfect, even bungling playwright," he does not desire to exercise absolute control over his subjects.⁸ Rather, he intends to prepare them for death, to instruct them in the *ars moriendi*. The Duke's plan to test Angelo complements the concerns of Isabella, Escalus, and the friars regarding the adequate preparation for death. Ranging from Isabella's and Duke Vicentio's counseling of Claudio to the friars' care of Bernardine, they not only evoke the imminence of mortality, but also signal the connection between desire and death. In doing so, they identify the means for sufficiently preparing for death: the bridling of unregulated desire and the transferral of it into the three ritualized forms of marriage.

Before examining this transformation of desire, it is first important to consider how Shakespeare represents early modern marital practices in *Measure for Measure* and to trace the emerging connection between marriage and death in the sixteenth-century. Shakespeare's knowledge of English matrimonial law, as Margaret Randal observes, stems from "the circumstances of his own marriage, and his participation in the 1610 Belott-Mountjoy lawsuit which concerned the financial arrangements of a marriage contract."⁹ Throughout his works, Shakespeare accordingly portrays betrothals according to contemporary conventions, often focusing on espousals and marital contracts. His concentration on these aspects of marital law appears in the two central dilemmas *Measure for Measure*: the postponement of Claudio's and Juliet's public, ecclesiastical marriage results from a delay in the "propagation of a dow'r" (1.2.150) and Angelo abandons Mariana after "brother Frederick was wrack'd at sea, having in that perish'd vessel the dowry of his sister" (3.1.216-8).

Duke Vicentio's marriage proposal to Isabella similarly reflects Shakespeare's realistic depiction of betrothals. When the Duke states, "If he be like your brother, for his sake / Is he pardon'd, and for your lovely sake, / Give me your hand, and say you will be mine, / He is my brother too," he meets the basic requirements for a valid private marriage in early modern England (5.1.489-93). David Cressy explains:

In principle, a marriage existed if the man and the woman committed themselves to each other by words of consent expressed in the present tense. It would be enough to say "I N. do take thee, N., to be my wedded wife / husband." A marriage valid in law by this contract or spousals *per verba de presenti*, providing there was no overriding impediments. A contract *de futuro*, made in the future tense (such as, "I will marry you"), became immediately binding if followed by sexual intercourse.¹⁰

While such *de presenti* spousals were valid, they were discouraged by civil and religious authorities. "The canons of 1604," observes Anne Barton, "had tightened the laws on licences issued without banns, forbidden marriage without parental consent (except in the case of widows) for all couples regardless of age."¹¹ In addition, private marriages were considered irregular because they were not solemnized by ecclesiastical officials. Claudio's and Juliet's marriage falls into this category because they "do the denunciation lack / Of outward order" (1.2.148-9). Similarly, after Mariana and Angelo, albeit unknowingly, consummate their private nuptials in the bed-trick, their union still requires ecclesiastical solemnization. Though on a different register, so, too, does the union between Lucio and Kate Keepdown; for, as Mistress Overdone reveals, "Mistress Kate Keepdown was with child / by him in the Duke's time; he promis'd her / marriage" (3.2.199-201). According to English law, then, each of these couples would be validly married either through *de presenti* contracts or through the sexual ratification of a *de futuro* contract.¹² Yet each of these unions lack the expected public matrimonial ceremonies.

Under ordinary circumstances, the solution to this problem would be to marry publicly and, in some cases, to perform public penance. Hence Isabella's simple solution to Claudio's dilemma: "O, let him marry her!" (1.4.48). However, Angelo's determination not "to make a scarecrow of the law" removes the typical means for rectifying sexual intercourse before a marriage could be solemnized (2.1.1). Despite the austerity and mercilessness of Angelo's decree, it reflects Shakespeare's ongoing concern over the observation of matrimonial ceremonies. In *The Tempest*, for instance, Prospero's

discussion with Ferdinand about his marriage contract with Miranda essentially reiterates Angelo's condemnation of Claudio:

But
If though dost break her virgin-knot
All sanctimonious ceremonies may
With full and holy rite be minist'red,
No sweet aspersion shall the heavens let fall
To make this contract grow; but barren hate,
Sour-ey'd disdain, and discord shall bestrew
The union of your bed so loathly.
That you shall hate it both. (4.1.14-22)

While neither Angelo nor Prospero executes their threats, these harsh reactions evidence the need to perform marriage rites before consummating a relationship. By repeatedly calling attention to ritual component of marriage, Shakespeare foregrounds the necessary regulation of desire through its transferral from the private sphere to the public realm of ceremonial marriage. But this shift cannot be accomplished simply through the "outward order" of ecclesiastical marriage, as the Viennese laws and Prospero's warnings demonstrate (1.2.149). Instead, it requires the internalization of this mode of regulated desire and its redeployment into a marital framework. In this sense, Shakespeare's depiction of marriage as a means to bridle desire stems from common medieval attitudes towards marital sexual desire. During the Middle Ages, ecclesiastical authorities proscribed sexual activity in any form outside of marriage and restricted sex within it to the teleological purpose of procreation. "The moral ideal," writes Pierre Payer, "was that people bring themselves into line with natural teleology by appropriating it into their subjective intentions."¹³

Shakespeare's representation of marriage also engages the connection between marriage and death that emerged in the sixteenth century.¹⁴ By the composition of *Measure for Measure* at the turn of the seventeenth century, early modern dramatists, including Shakespeare, had frequently associated marriage and death on stage. The most famous example of this connection, as Michael Neill observes, is Desdemona's requests to Emilia in *Othello*: "Lay on my bed my wedding sheet, remember; / And call my husband hither" (4.2.104), and "If I do die before thee, prithee shroud me, / In one of those same sheets" (4.3.24-5).¹⁵ The intrusion of death into marital rites also appears in visual art such as Hans Holbein the Younger's *The Dance of Death* (1524-6). In his engraving of *Die Edelfrau* (The Newly Married Lady), Holbein depicts the allegorical

figure of death playing the musical accompaniment for the bride and groom, thereby marking marriage not in opposition, but as a step nearer, to death. Similarly, Middleton indicates the relationship between marriage and death, though he employs it for comic effect, when Moll Yellowhammer and Touchwood Junior use their burial sheets as wedding sheets in the final act of *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (1613).¹⁶ In *Measure for Measure*, then, Lucio's complaint that "Marrying a punk, my lord, is pressing to death, whipping, and hanging" is not merely the desperate outburst of shamed nobleman, but a reflection of early modern associations between marriage and death (5.1.522-3).

In Shakespeare's Vienna, death overshadows every form of desire, equally infusing Angelo's lust for Isabella, Mistress Overdone's brothels, Abhorson's gallows, and Juliet's womb. Angelo's first soliloquy exemplifies this binding of sexual desire and mortal decay: "Not she; nor doth she tempt; but it is I / That, lying by the violet in the sun, / Do as the carrion does, not as the flow'r, / Corrupt with virtuous season" (2.2.164-7). Incapable of separating death and desire, he "can speak his bodily desire to himself only as the stirring of maggots in dead flesh."¹⁷ Such a visceral image of dissolution is consonant with Angelo's detached iciness (the Duke relates that the deputy "scarce confesses / That his blood flows") but it signals that, he, too, participates in the fatal economy of desire governing Vienna (1.3.51-2). The syphilitic brothels provide another illustration of the advance of death into desire. The First Gentleman's remark to his companion that "Thou art always figuring diseases in me; but thou art full of error, I am sound" indicates an attempt to efface the fatal consequences of desire, to escape from its "abhor'd pollution" (2.4.183). However, the name of Vienna's executioner, Abhorson, advances that desire's fatal undercurrents cannot be effectively suppressed. And Pompey's remark that in the prison "[o]ne would think it were Overdone's own house, for here be many of her own customers" further calls attention to the resonances between the gallows and the brothels (4.3.2-4). Whereas the clientele of Mistress Overdone's establishment deny the inevitability of death, the prisoners subject to the executioner's "trade ... are now 'for the Lord's sake'" (4.3.19).

Despite the problems resulting from the Duke's reinstatement of Vienna's moral statutes, they nevertheless succeed in revealing the imbrications of death and desire. They force Juliet to recognize that death permeates even her unborn child, who becomes a "character too gross ... writ on Juliet" that exposes Claudio's transgression of Vienna's laws.¹⁸ Moreover, Juliet's complaint – "O injurious love, / That respites me a life whose very comfort / Is still dying horror" – signals the corruption of regeneration into an image of that "still dying horror" (2.3.40-2). Rather than offering escape from

the fatal consequences of desire, procreative unions become the public "sin carr[ied]" by pregnant women and an icon of death's encroachment upon the living (2.2.19). Sexual desire serves to mask temporarily the immanence of death even as it drives individuals towards their fatal end. The intrusion of death into desire threatens not only the generative possibilities of procreation, but also the stability of individual subjectivity.

The Duke signals the dissolution of the individual as a consequence of the leveling effect of death through his statement: "O, death's a great disguiser" (4.2.172). His substitution of Ragozine's head for Claudio's evidences the dissolution of identity in death, for it transforms the individual into an interchangeable object. Throughout the play, as James Trombetta observes: "Desire betrays individuality to that which is nameless and redundant. The fact that the major characters are defined so completely by how they hold themselves in relation to sexuality – prude, lecher, virgin – suggests that the threat of lost identity is always present."¹⁹ The counseling scenes in Act 3 illustrate how the continual infiltration of death into life compounds this threat to individuality. For, as the Duke explains to Claudio, death devalues life to "a thing / That none but fools would keep" (4.1.7-8) and turns the individual into "death's fool" (3.1.11). Death's mastery over the individual fractures the unified self: "Thou art not thyself, / For thou exists on many a thousand grains / That issue out of dust" (3.1.19-21). Instead of resisting this effacement of identity, the Duke advises Claudio to submit to the "death we fear that makes these odds all even" (3.1.41). As such, his counsel follows the traditional Pauline rejection of the "workes of the flesh" and privileging of the spirit set forth in the *ars moriendi* the *contemplatio mortis* (*Gal.* 5:19).²⁰

For a moment, Claudio recognizes his mortality and remarks: "To sue to live, I find I seek to die, / And seeking death, find life. Let it come on" (3.1.44-5). In many ways, his declaration of his readiness for death echoes Hamlet's speech on providence in the final act of *Hamlet* in which he declares: "Since no man, of aught he leaves, knows what is't to leaves betimes, let be" (5.2.223-4). In contrast to resigned prince, however, Claudio loses his resolve immediately after Isabella tells him of Angelo's proposal. Faced with the possibility of reprieve, he recounts the sufferings of the after-life and requests: "Sweet sister, let me live. / What sin you do to save a brother's life" (3.1.132-3). In response, Isabella rebukes her brother for requesting her to compromise her chastity and religious vows:

Die, perish! Might but my bending down
Reprieve thee from thy fate, it should proceed.
I'll pray a thousand prayers for thy death,
No word to save thee. (3.1.143-6)

Appalled by Isabella's condemnation of her brother, critics have often described Isabella's speech as an example of her callousness or puritanical religiosity.²¹ Yet R.W. Chambers's objection to this criticism long ago illustrates the appropriateness of her response: "To perceive that Shakespeare gave these burning words to Isabel so that we should perceive her to be selfish and cold, is to suppose that he did not know his job. The honour of her family and her religion are more to her than mere life, her own or Claudio's."²² Indeed, after rebuking her brother, she continues to exhibit concern for his soul as well her sacred vows: "I am now going to resolve him. I had rather my brother die by the law than my son should be unlawfully born" (3.1.189-91). Claudio indicates that he, too, has recognized that his plea was a grave mistake when he asks the Duke: "Let me ask my sister pardon. I am so out of love with life that I will sue to be rid of it" (3.1.171-72). This parting comment also reveals that Claudio, despite his initial resistance, has oriented himself towards death and separated himself from his former "trade" of sinfulness (3.1.148). His preparedness for death is further demonstrated when he remains steadfast even when later confronted with the warrant for his execution.

Although Claudio never embraces the expected "darkness as a bride," he nevertheless encounters its forerunner in his betrothed Juliet. Throughout the play, marriage moves beyond the private consummation of sexual impulses and functions as a means for processing fatal desire and thereby preparing for death. This movement becomes evident through the development of three characters' relationships to their sexual desires: Claudio, Angelo, and Lucio. Of these, Angelo's is the most complicated because of his radical shift from sexual disinterestedness to lustful tyranny. Janet Adelman detects the significance of this transformation when she identifies the awakening of "his bodily desire" as "the secular equivalent of original sin and the fall into death."²³ Yet her emphasis on the bed-trick as a method to efface maternal origins sexuality diminishes the most important lesson that the Duke intends to teach his deputy: he must recognize that he is subject to death. The Duke's explanation to Friar Thomas illustrates this underlying purpose: "Lord Angelo is precise / ... scarce confesses / That his blood flows; or that his appetite / Is more to bread than stone" (1.4.50-3). Describing himself along the same lines, Angelo portrays his attraction to Isabella as a new sensation:

Never could the strumpet,
With all her double vigor, art and nature,
Once stir my temper; but this virtuous maid
Subdues me quite. Ever till now,
When men were fond, I smil'd and wond' red how. (2.2.182-6)

To see "[i]f power change purpose: what our seemers be," the Duke elevates his deputy to a position of authority over life and death (1.4.54). In so doing, he tests Angelo's "mettle" by forcing him to confront death's absolute governance over Vienna (1.1.47).

Instead of proving his mettle, however, Angelo denies the imminent reality of mortality and instead myopically focuses on enforcing Vienna's laws. He becomes, in Isabella's words, a ruthless giant: "To have a giant's strength; but it is tyrannous / To use it like a giant" (2.2.108-9). In the meantime, he overlooks the power of death that will inevitably subvert his power and, as Isabella explains to Claudio, level the giant and the beetle: "And the poor beetle that we tread upon / In corporeal sufferance finds a pang as great / As when a giant dies" (3.1.75-80). Even after he consummates his sexual desire through his unknowing participation in the bed-trick, he remains absorbed in his own power. However, once Isabella and Mariana reveal his sexual transgression, he appears not simply to understand the possibility of his death, but to embrace it eagerly. Submitting himself to the Duke's authority, he states:

But let my trial be mine own confession.
Immediate sentence then, and sequent death,
Is all the grace I beg. (5.1.372-4)

Angelo does not ask to be executed because he is adequately prepared for death, but rather because he submits himself to Vienna's statutes. He still follows the retributive system of justice he employed as governed in which, as Duke Vicentio outlines, "An Angelo pays for Claudio, death for death!" (5.1.409). Against Angelo's request, the Duke commands him to marry Mariana and thus shifts his deputy's desire for death from the legalistic domain to ritual framework of ceremonial marriage. The Duke therefore moves beyond a type of homiletic insistence on the imminence of death which he employed with Claudio and uses his authority to bind Angelo and Mariana. He nevertheless insists on Angelo's execution to evidence that marriage does not escape from death, but only enables individuals to conform to its authority.

Yet, the traditional matrimonial resolution of comedy is not the only marriage capable of preparing one for death. In addition to Duke Vicentio's counseling Claudio to "[b]e 'absolute for death,'" his treatment of Bernardine provides another example of his near obsession with bringing his subjects to an awareness of death and to prepare themselves adequately (3.1.5). His questions of whether Bernardine has "borne himself penitently in prison" (4.2.140) or "wants advice" (4.2.146) register his reluctance to put a soul in jeopardy. He initially orders Bernardine to be executed, but rescinds

this command after realizing that the prisoner is "[a] creature unprepar'd, umeeet of death, / And to transport him in the mind he is / Were damnable" (4.3.67-9). Such an execution would be "damnable" for the prisoner because he is unrepentant and for the Duke himself because he would fail in his duties as a "ghostly father" (4.3.48-9). His determination to "[p]ersuade this rude wretch willingly to die" (4.3.81) further illustrates his unrelenting attempts to reconcile his subjects to death and instill within them a recognition of the afterlife. Indeed, he continually attempts to reform Bernardine and goes so far to forgive his "earthly faults" so that he might "apprehend... further than this world / And squar[e] [his] life accordingly" (5.1.481-3). Despite the Duke's efforts to reform his unrepentant subject, however, he recognizes the limitations of his political authority to instruct his subjects in the art of dying. In the end, he knows that even though he possesses the authority to condemn and to forgive earthly crimes, he must depend on the "accident[s] that heaven provides" (4.2.164) and can only succeed in "delaying death," rather than eliminating it altogether (4.3.77). Hence he eventually defers to the abilities of the Viennese friars – "Friar, advise him, / I leave him to your hand" – whom he also relies upon to instruct him in spiritual matters (5.1.485-6).

This reliance upon the friars indicates that the religious life complements the two other forms of marriage in the play. Besides the numerous friars, Isabella and the Duke are the two principle characters that embrace the spiritual life in order to prepare for their death. Shakespeare's representation of Isabella as a novitiate in the Order of Poor Clares connotes the Catholic identification of the female religious as brides of Christ. Unlike Angelo or Claudio, she is prepared from the beginning of the play to submit to the dominion of death. For instance, in her description of the imagined tortures inflicted by Angelo, she describes her willingness to offer her body to death:

That is, were I under terms of death,
Th' impression of keen whips I'd wear as rubies,
And strip myself to death, as to a bed
That longing have been sick for. (2.4.100-3)

This statement reinforces her expressed desire for "strict restraint" in the convent as well as her readiness to sacrifice her life to save her brother. Isabella prepares for death by chastening her desires and channeling them into her religious devotions.

Likewise, the Duke separates himself from desire of "burning youth," explaining to Friar Thomas: "Believe not that the dribbling dart of love / Can pierce a complete bosom" (1.3.2-3). Furthermore, while disguised as a friar, he tells Lucio "I never heard

the absent Duke much detected for women, he was not inclin'd that way" (3.2.121). More than just a disguise, Duke Vicentio assumes the habit of a friar and acts as a ghostly confessor to realize his spiritual ends. Yet if Duke Vicentio forsakes sexual desire, his marriage proposal to Isabella is extraordinarily problematic, for it turns his denial of the love of "burning youth" into the same position held by Angelo at the beginning of the play. Moreover, it is "contextually problematic, for it is spoken to one who has already chosen to be a bride of Christ."²⁴ Yet the Duke's deferral of the marriage rites until a "fitter time" (5.1.493) and the ambiguity of the final lines of the play – "What's yet behind, that[s] meet you all should know" – implies that his proposed relationship with Isabella will complement, not undermine, her religious vows (5.1.539). Given the Duke's overriding concern with preparing his subjects for death and his own distance from romantic desire, his proposal is a "motion much imports your good" because it would ultimately be directed towards a heavenly goal. The Duke's espousal does not locate its end in physical consummation, but rather in the preparation, the good that the Duke and Isabella alike have been seeking, of the elimination of desire and a preparation for death. Following the ceremonial marriage between the couples, the preparation of Claudio and Bernardine for embracing death as a bride, the spiritual relationship between Duke Vicentio and Isabella anticipate their final end.

By the conclusion of *Measure for Measure*, the three forms of marriage confront and reorient the fatal consequences of desire. Just as the characters are "advis'd ... for th' entertainment of death," so, too, are the play's audiences and readers (3.2.312). "Enhanced by the immense power of theatrical metaphor," writes Michael Flachmann, "Claudio's preparation for dying also helped prepare the audience, who were made fit by the play for their eventual struggle with death."²⁵ In this sense, Shakespeare's decision to retain multiple possibilities marks a shift from an earlier comedy such as *Love's Labour's Lost* where romantic marriage, though deferred for one year by death, makes these odds all even. It also departs from an easy negotiation of the trauma caused by death in a comedy like *Twelfth Night*. In Shakespeare's Vienna, there is no Feste to quickly mend Olivia's mourning with the summary reassurance: "The more fool, to mourn for your brother's soul, being in heaven" (1.5.70-1). Instead, Malvolio's claim that Feste can only mend "till pangs of death shake him. Infirmity, that decays the wise, doth ever make him the better fool," which is dismissed in his play, governs the characters of *Measure for Measure* (1.4.75-7). Given the widespread plagues in London during the early seventeenth century, this shift in register is certainly caused by immediate circumstances. On a more general level, it results from the ongoing development

of early modern attitudes towards death and the afterlife that Shakespeare increasingly addresses in his works, an engagement that regularly crosses generic boundaries. His concentration on the issue of death in *Measure for Measure* thus corresponds to his tragedies (*Hamlet* and *King Lear*), comedies (*All's Well that Ends Well* and *Troilus and Cressida*), and even poems (Shakespeare's *Sonnets* and *The Phoenix and the Turtle*). At the turn of the seventeenth century, then, death fills Shakespeare's works just as it permeates Duke Vicentio's Vienna.

Shakespeare's treatment of death in *Measure for Measure* differs from these works because its sustained consideration of the different forms of marriage specifically responds to the gradual elimination of celibate desire, most notably in the elimination of female religious and priestly celibacy, and in the consolidation of desire within companionate marriage in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.²⁶ Certainly, Duke Vicentio's marriage proposal to Isabella would have evoked for early modern audiences and readers the most famous repudiation of clerical celibacy in the early modern period: the 1525 marriage of Martin Luther, a former Augustinian monk, to Catherine von Bora, a former Cistercian nun.²⁷ It would also have recalled the elimination of the monastic orders and the acceptance of priestly marriage in England. From one perspective, Shakespeare's representation of the Duke casting off his clerical robes and marrying a votarist of St. Clare signals the success of the Reformation and the end of the traditional regime. However, Shakespeare's positive depiction of the friars and, more significantly, Isabella's silence at the end of the play resists such an interpretation.²⁸ This ambiguity generates the possibility that companionate marriage is neither the universal solution for controlling desire nor for responding to the fatal impulses of desire. By concluding the play with the Duke's uncertain lines about "[w]hat's yet behind, that[s] meet you all should know," Shakespeare implies the possibilities beyond the form of marriage embraced by the Established Church (5.1.539). In the multiple forms of marriage in *Measure for Measure*, Shakespeare introduces a remodeled, flexible form of comedy to illustrate the multitude of physical and spiritual spousal embraces capable of confronting mortality and preparing for the promised end.

Notes

¹ All quotations from Shakespeare are taken from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd Edition, gen. ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

² William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, A Comedy (London, 1722), reprinted. London: Cornmarket Press, 1969, 84.

³ *Measure for Measure*, A Comedy (London, 1779) 19.

⁴ The tendency to depict an amorous conclusion continued well into the nineteenth and even twentieth centuries. For an overview of the staging of the final scene, see Michael D. Friedman, "'O Let him marry her!': Matrimony and Recompense in *Measure for Measure*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 46 (1995): 454-64.

⁵ Jonathan Dollimore, *Desire, Death, and Loss in Western Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1998, 115. For similar interpretations of the Duke's authority, see Harold C. Goddard, *The Meaning of Shakespeare*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1951. 436-55; Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1988. 137-42; Robert Watson, *The Rest Is Silence: Death as Annihilation in the English Renaissance*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1994. 103-33; and David McCandless, "'I'll Pray to Increase Your Bondage': Power and Punishment in *Measure for Measure*," *Shakespearean Power and Punishment: A Volume of Essays*, ed. Gillian Murray Kendell. Madison: Farleigh Dickinson UP, 1998. 89-112.

⁶ Watson 125. For similar readings, see William Witherle Lawrence, *Shakespeare's Problem Comedies*, 2nd Edition, New York: Frederick Ungar, 1960, 78-121; Richard Levin, "Refuting Shakespeare's Endings," *Modern Philology* 72 (1975): 337-49 and 75 (1977): 132-58; James Trombetta, "Versions of Dying in *Measure for Measure*," *English Literary Renaissance* 6 (1976): 74; Darryl J. Gless, *Measure for Measure: The Law and the Convent*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1979. 177-255; Northrop Frye, *The Myth of Deliverance: Reflections on Shakespeare's Comedies*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1983. 20-33; and James Ellison, "*Measure for Measure* and the Executions of Catholics in 1604," *English Literary Renaissance* 33 (2003): 44-79, esp. 72-7.

⁷ Referring to *The Taming of the Shrew*, Margaret Loftus Ranald, "'As Marriage Binds, and Blood Breaks': English Marriage and Shakespeare," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 30 (1979), explains: "After her angry retort, 'I'll see thee hang'd on Sunday first,' Kate remains silent, and by the legal principle that 'silence means consent' she is considered to have agreed to the contract" (71). See also Levin, "Refuting Shakespeare's Endings" (1975) 341.

⁸ Diehl, "'Infinite Space': Representation and Reformation in *Measure for Measure*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 49 (1998): 410.

⁹ Ranald 68.

¹⁰ Cressy, David. *Birth, Marriage, & Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997. 317

¹¹ See Anne Barton, "'Wrying but a little': Marriage, Law, and Sexuality in the Plays of Shakespeare," *Essays, Mainly Shakespearean*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994. 26.

¹² However, when placed in the context of sixteenth-century Vienna, these unions would have been explicitly condemned by the Council of Trent (1546-63), which considered private marriages to be a mortal sin and, consequentially, nonbinding. Shakespeare is less concerned with Catholic attitudes towards marriage than with English marital law. As Ranald notes: "What Shakespeare is doing is transferring the English canon and civil law of marriage to Vienna without concerning himself with legal anachronisms" (78).

¹³ Payer, Pierre. *The Bridling of Desire: Views of Sex in the Later Middle Ages*. Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 180.

¹⁴ The connection between desire and death, see Phillippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver. New York: Vintage, 1982. 369-81. Ariès locates the connection between death and desire in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century.

¹⁵ Neill, Michael. *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy*. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1997. 165-67; Neill notes similar occasions in *Hamlet*, Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, and Ford's *The Broken Heart*.

¹⁶ On Middleton's use of the trope, see Rick Bowers, "Comedy, Carnival, and Class: A Chaste Maid in Cheapside," *Early Modern Literary Studies* 8 (2003): 1-22.

¹⁷ Adelman, Janet. *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, Hamlet to The Tempest*. London: Routledge, 1992. 92.

¹⁸ Neill summarizes this early modern understanding of the presence of death: "[There] is a notion of death not as merely imminent (as in the *memento mori* tradition) but immanent, as an ending implicit in every beginning, and constantly present in every middle. This was the death whose immanence Dekker traced to the origins of the plague... [and] which Jonne Donne imagined as already inscribed upon the foetus" (73).

¹⁹ Trombetta 67. On the threat of anonymity caused by death, see also Marshall, Peter. *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002: 6-47 and 265-308.

²⁰ On the subject of *Measure for Measure* as a type of *Contemplatio Mortis*, see Michael Flachmann, "Fitted for Death: *Measure for Measure* and the *Contemplatio Mortis*," *English Literary Renaissance* 22 (1992): 222-41. For an overview of the *ars moriendi* in England, see Nancy Lee Beaty, *The Craft of Dying: A Study in the Literary Tradition of the Ars Moriendi in England*. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1970.

²¹ Goddard, for example, writes that Isabella is "[d]runk with self-righteousness, she who but a moment ago was offering her life for her brother... This is religion turned infernal" (442).

²² Qtd. in *A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare: Measure for Measure*, Mark Eccles, ed. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1980: 444.

²³ Adelman 92.

²⁴ Baines, Barbara. "Assaying the Power of Chastity in *Measure for Measure*." *Studies in English Literature* 30 (1990): 297.

²⁵ Flachmann 238.

²⁶ For a discussion of literary representations of celibacy, see John N. King's *Spenser's Poetry and the Reformation Tradition*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990. 155-60. King notes that Protestants did not disparage the celibate life, but opposed the Roman Catholic elevation of it over matrimony.

²⁷ Shell, Marc *The End of Kinship: "Measure for Measure," Incest, and the Ideal of Universal Siblinghood*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1988, 167-69, discusses the connection between the two marriages.

²⁸ Shakespeare's positive portrayal of religious in the play has recently been discussed by David Beauregard in "Shakespeare on Monastic Life: Nuns and Friars in *Measure for Measure*," *Religion and the Arts* 5 (2001): 249-72.