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What Our Seemers Be: Misreading Text, and Voice in "Measure for Measure"

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WHAT OUR SEEMERS BE:
MISREADING, TEXT, AND VOICE
IN MEASURE FOR MEASURE

A Thesis
Presented to
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by

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ABSTRACT

This project’s purpose is to analyze the “problem” comedy Measure for Measure, focusing primarily on two events that conclude its plot: Isabella’s silence following Duke Vincentio’s proposal to her and Lucio’s punishment for slandering the Duke. These two dramatic moments have generated a great deal of contestation in the scholarship and are regarded as the dramatic events that most “problem” the play. Because of Isabella and Lucio, the criticism concerning the play is inconclusive over what the play may actually mean.

Isabella is central to fulfilling the deceptions and plots of the play, but her silence in its final moments separates her from its resolution. Consistently acknowledging her silence as a form of expression, scholars assign Isabella dramatic power in order to avoid thematic discontinuities her silence produces. Such analyses elide textual evidence that undercuts their credibility. Isabella continually conveys the desires of other characters, which are misinterpreted as her own, but never expresses desires only attributable to her. Isabella, both in the plot and by scholars, is misread as a dramatic power, when she really perpetually disguises the dramatic power that controls what she does, and influences what she speaks and how she speaks it.

While Isabella conveys the plot to its resolution, Isabella’s relationship with Claudio informs the structure of its problem. A form of incest threatens to dissolve the stability of their siblinghood, forcing them into either one of two tragic outcomes. By way of several substitutions, the Duke averts the tragedy; but incest reemerges as a formative basis of his relationship to his would-be wife Isabella. Siblinghood is central to Measure’s plot, so incest is central to Measure’s teleology, manifesting the fundamental dramatic crisis the plot must solve. By confronting Isabella with the threat of incest from beginning to end, Measure for Measure is never dramatically resolved.

However, defining incest as Measure’s dramatic and thematic impetus misreads a solipsistic desire which incest disguises. Where incest is described as sexual desire for another, solipsism is described as the desire to be another. Rather than desire structured as incest, Measure for Measure is motivated by desire structured as solipsism. Focusing on the Duke and Lucio, I claim both manifest solipsistic agencies because of their access to extra-textual information which greatly impacts the play’s drama. As their conflict for control throughout the final act suggests, the Duke and Lucio are two dramatic powers whose simultaneous presence forms Measure’s continuous conflict by disrupting the fulfillment of the other’s desire. I conclude that identifying solipsism as Measure’s telos offers no solution to the play’s problems because each voice of solipsism erases itself during the very conflict of authority that it engages with others.
WHAT OUR SEEMERS BE
THE PROBLEM WITH PROBLEMS: CRITICISM, MISREADING, AND UNCOMFORTABLE SILENCES

The two most common words used by scholars studying Measure for Measure over the last 100 years are "problem" and "failure." Samuel Johnson was the first of numerous critics to argue that the play was a "problem" because it lacks closure. The label "problem play" originated in 1896 as a pejorative term, coined by George Bernard Shaw, in order to distinguish the narrative superiority of the Realist playwrights over Jacobean and Enlightenment dramatists. The problem of Measure for Measure's seeming lack of closure became its greatest dramatic shortcoming. It therefore also became a "failure" because of its seeming inability to resolve the thematic and moral issues that it raises. Robert Watson is one of many scholars who readily admits that "we can hardly deny the inadequacies of the comic resolution of Measure for Measure, the darkness it fails to dispel."\(^1\)

Analyzed as a generic tragedy, or analyzed as generic festive comedy, Measure for Measure consistently frustrates criticism. Its blend of the more generic Shakespearean dramatic forms and its historical placement between his last comedies and the great tragedies has marked it within the canon as either a transition between or a departure from both.\(^2\) Measure for Measure adapts narrative situations and affects thematic resonances of both genres: from the comedic, the use of disguise, the confusing effects of passion and

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\(^2\) The earliest evidence of Measure's existence dates one performance of it in 1604 which positions its composition (generally) contemporaneous to Hamlet's, while some figure it as early as Twelfth Night's or as late as Othello's.
sexual love, and the marrying off of the main characters at the play's end; from
the tragic, issues of loyalty, political ethics, justice, punishment and death.
Ultimately, however, neither generic model fits Measure for Measure, whose
Green World is a prison and whose impending tragedies, Isabella's rape and
Claudio's execution, are both narrowly averted.3 Its position between genres
has given rise to its description as a tragicomedy, a designation no more stable
for contemporary critics who inevitably reduce their conclusions in favor of one
element, either tragic-comedy or tragic-comedy.4 While evoking the dominant
generic structures, Measure for Measure abandons both. One could go so far
as to say that this play actively provokes confrontations with even the most
vigorous readings, confrontations that always result in problems for readers and
failures in their analyses.

In light of Measure's complexity and the uncomfortable contention within
its critical discourse, I have come to the opinion that most criticism of Measure
for Measure seeks to minimize the intense uneasiness that it so easily
generates. The play provokes many questions about its own complexity which
make it a very rich text to examine: if Duke Vincentio is "good," why does he
constantly deceive? why does the Duke propose marriage to Isabella? why
doesn't she respond? shouldn't one characterize Lucio's punishment as unduly
severe, and Angelo's not severe enough? and, last but not least, is any of this

3Meta-dramatic critics vary severely over the issue of whether Duke Vincentio is a master of
dramatic manipulation. Melvin Seiden says in Measure for Measure: Casuistry and Artistry
(Catholic University of America Press, 1985) that "we cannot deny that he is energetic, alert,
resourceful, and decisive.... the duke that we observe is a doer, a man in his prime" (p105), and
JD Hubert in "The Textual Presence of Staging and Acting in Measure for Measure" (NLH vol18
no3 pp583-96) compares the Duke's narrative control to Hamlet's and Henry V's.
4Watson rather accurately manifests the contention among formalist analyses, while contrasting
his with other critics': "The eagerness of commentators to dismiss these juxtaposed
substitutions [the bed trick and the switch of Ragozine's head for Claudio's] as merely two
proximate moments of inferior dramaturgy may partly reflect an unwillingness to see the play's
darker purpose - its tragicomic thrust - which is to challenge the sentimental notion of our
individual significance" (p128).
actually funny? But criticism that fails to respond to any one of these questions risks undermining the very possibility of a meaningful interaction with the text, leaving open-ended one's reading of the play in its final moments when all of the major events are quite consciously brought to the stage. It is precisely in the final moments of the play - in its last one hundred lines, in fact - that criticism falls into dispute with the text and itself because of the sudden occurrence of two events, the Duke's proposal to Isabella and Lucio's punishment for slander, neither one anticipated at any time prior in the play. 

One can anticipate the resolution of most of the play's developments: Angelo's come-uppance, the restoration of Mariana's honor, Claudio's absolution, and his marriage to Juliet. But "accounting" for the marriage proposal and Lucio's punishment entails rereading Measure for Measure, entails making these events "fit" into reading the text, fit into criticism. And if one word describes the sleight-of-hand that criticism undergoes in order to massage its discomfort, it would be "omission": although contemporary critics are not as blatant as those nineteenth-century stage productions that actively censored the more "morally disagreeable" aspects of Measure's narrative, they nonetheless choose cohesion at the expense of discomfort, omitting textual evidence that subverts their own critical claims.

These two events that conclude Measure for Measure have motivated active choosing among scholars more than any other moments in the play because of their unexpectedness and the silence that they impose upon two of the figures who are the most vocal throughout the play. Duke Vincentio's marriage proposal to Isabella immediately following her brother Claudio's surprising release in Act V: "For his sake,/Is he pardoned, and for your lovely sake-/Give me your hand and say you will be mine-/He is my brother too" (V i 486-90) is perhaps the more noticeable of the two because Isabella, the
character whose eloquence is instrumental in resolving the drama, never gives a response. No dramatic moment before the proposal suggests it. The proposal is unsettling because it is so unexpected; Isabella, with the Duke’s help, spends most of the play avoiding a proposed sexual encounter. Should one understand her silence as acceptance or rejection? One standard analysis of Isabella’s silence is to read it as her immediate, expressed consent, according to the New Criticism’s reliance upon a Biblical allegorical model of Measure’s narrative; the saintly, too-prudish Isabella undergoes a progressive change towards humanist love, all managed underneath the tutelage of a Duke who is "like a kindly father, and all the rest are his children." On the other hand, more recent post-structuralist criticism contends that her silence represents friction within phallocentric hegemony, or political resistance in the face of authoritarian coercion, or just plain old indecision. Despite writing an illuminating study of the structure of Measure’s sexual politics, Amy Lechter-Siegel actually aligns herself with the very critical factions that she wishes to avoid because she too reads Isabella’s silence as if it were expression (if only the expression of defeat): "The problem with all these views, it seems to me, is that they are value judgments imposed from outside... and they do not consider the ending in terms of Isabella’s own behavior and expressed desires." The criticism is dissatisfying because it consistently evokes the preconditioned

7Lechter-Siegel p372.
opinions of the critics. Today's criticism has done nothing to break Isabella's silence - and perhaps never will.

Isabella disrupts the final act because she becomes silent at the very moment when she shouldn't be. Scholarship for two hundred years has asked "What would Isabella do?" without ever arriving at a satisfying answer. The character of Lucio disrupts the final act for exactly the opposite reason. He refuses to be silenced throughout the final act, interjecting his typically vulgar commentary and interrogating other characters' sincerity - soliciting the readers' attention at moments when his dramatic importance seems trivial. But because of his disruptions, Lucio enters the center of the activity and is responsible for bringing about the dramatic climax of the play. He forcibly unmask the Duke, and later he is forcibly removed from the stage for "slandering a prince." His punishment is severe: "Marrying a punk, my lord, is pressing to death, whipping, and hanging" (V i 517-8). A question that has vexed the criticism dealing with Lucio is "what has he done to deserve what he gets"; even while being allegorized as the Devil (Lucifer), New Critics couldn't help describing his punishment as undue despite his sleaziness.\(^8\) The "problems" Lucio causes to resolving the play are punctuated by the fact that he is the only character besides the Duke to speak in its last 60 lines, precisely when Isabella should answer Vincentio's proposal. It is the Duke himself that focuses everyone's final attention on Lucio: "I find an apt remission in myself,/And yet here's one in place I cannot pardon" (V i 494-5). He forgives his own deceptions and subterfuge in order to villify Lucio's disruptions.

\(^8\)Lever's Arden edition introduction manifests the still-prevalent uneasiness towards allotting Lucio with narrative agency: "In reality it is Lucio, not Escalus or Angelo, who serves here as the Duke's true deputy.... He supplies his ruler with a comic foil, and his slanders provide emotional relief from the over-exemplary virtues of the supposed Friar. At the same time his character undergoes a progressive denigration" (page xcvi).
So, Lucio, whose seemingly random appearances throughout the play give his inappropriate vulgarity minor significance, acquires a great deal of significance because something intentionally inappropriate happens to him in the final moments of the play. Lucio has caused the critical problem of addressing his disruptive presence because not until the last moments of the play (when the Duke has the chance to judge him) does his presence actually seem dangerously, indeed criminally, disruptive at all. Nineteenth-century productions merely removed Lucio from the entire script, negating altogether his disruptive potential. Contemporary scholars finds his removal from the stage his most disruptive moment. New Historicists have gone to great pains to justify the "humiliating" and "subordinating" final Act, such as by exploring Jacobean slander laws as they would apply to how the Duke punishes Lucio for it: "The Duke condemns Lucio not because the latter's slanders malign the ruler's good government, but because Lucio exposes the state's own slanderous practices." Cultural materialists have applied Bakhtin's theories of the carnivalesque in order to make Lucio represent an ideologically-marginalized anarchism. Dollimore has critiqued the Marxist Bakhtinian position by pointing out that Lucio exploits his own deviancy in the same way that Duke exploits his disguise as Friar Lodowick; and Charles Swann has critiqued Dollimore's dismissal of Lucio's indeed truthful comments of Vienna's political/authoritarian scene. While interpretations continue to vary on what Lucio represents, no one questions that Lucio represents something powerful and threatening because the Duke singles him out on the stage, in front of all

9Kaplan, M. "Slander for Slander in Measure for Measure" (Renaissance Drama, New Series XXI, 1990, p24). In her notes, Kaplan traces the OED genealogy of the term slander to its Jacobean counterpart "scandal," defined then as "slander, in which false imputations bring about infamy." Slander thus connotes both fabrication and exposure.
the characters and the entire audience, to punish him in the last moments of the play.

However, by valuing Lucio's criminality as the source of his thematic power, scholars have for the most part neglected to examine both his crime and his punishment. The text of *Measure for Measure* provides no clarity in explaining why Lucio is punished or what the form of his punishment will be. The Duke lists both immorality and slander as the two offences that Lucio is guilty of committing; furthermore, Lucio's sentence is first to marry any woman he has seduced, and then "The nuptial finished,/Let him be whipped and hanged." Seven lines later, the Duke announces an official pardon to Lucio: "Upon mine honor, thou shalt marry her./Thy slanders I forgive, and

thereewithal/Remit thy other forfeits. [emphasis added]" As Lucio protests his fate, "Marrying a punk, my lord, is pressing to death, whipping, and hanging," the Duke suddenly reinvokes slander as Lucio's convicted crime: "Slandering a prince deserves it" (V i 506-519). Lucio is sentenced for slander even though moments prior to his sentencing, he was pardoned of everything. I suggest that by confusing both the criminal charge and the mode of punishment, the Duke, and *Measure for Measure*, make Lucio's fate unknowable. His removal from the stage is thus all the more uncomfortable because, for some reason left obscured and absent, Lucio is being silenced. The scholarship consistently reacts to Lucio's silencing. He has come to represent an agency forced into a conspicuous silence, an agency that applies friction to *Measure for Measure*'s narrative/ideological machine. At the same time, critics cannot agree whatsoever on the nature of such friction or of such a machine. Swann's comment may be off-the-cuff: "Lucio has rarely had a good press - and neither
Marxist nor feminist criticism are likely to see him as a heroic figure,\textsuperscript{10} but it characterizes the still-contemporary disdain for addressing the character whose importance to today's discourse is irrefutably vital. For whatever politically-motivated purpose, criticism consistently negates Lucio's self-assumed voice in order to verify the Duke's silencing of it, whether the Duke is good or evil.

Contemporary scholarship, while approaching Isabella and Lucio in different ways and from different political/ideological perspectives, has done little to move beyond its own omissions. If anything, the great rift among critical voices simply proves that silence causes uneasy feelings to resonate from every reading of the play. In the political atmosphere of today's scholarship, one thing has become clear: \textit{Measure for Measure} very much involves what one brings to the text. One could say that all of \textit{Measure}'s complexities primarily ask readers to examine what "seeming" is - or, when seeming ends. Duke Vincentio's prophetic statement at the start of the play: "Hence shall we see, /If power change purpose, what our seemers be" (I iii 53-4) acquires a doubly-prophetic significance because it implicates reading as an activity involving power, change, and seeming -- triply-prophetic because it anticipates diverse readings, misreadings and contention among the scholarship. When criticism must choose what something means so that it can mean something, then choosing always feels disquieting because it silences all-too-real alternatives.

Even after one hundred years of "problemed" criticism, the uneasiness remains. It is as if the very act of reading \textit{Measure for Measure} involves misreading both the text and whatever is absent from it, conspicuously (as in Isabella's silence and Lucio's removal) or, inconspicuously - exposing meaning

\textsuperscript{10}Swann p56.
as just another disguise. Meaningful, and politically-motivated critical methodologies just don't answer the uncomfortable silences that consummate the climax of *Measure's* plot. And the criticism will become less and less enriching the more and more it confronts *Measure for Measure's* silences and voices from the same perspectives. *Measure for Measure* indeed poses a problem to reading: the tremendous analytical problem of reading silence while ignoring speech. The criticism requires a reading that refuses to isolate any single figure as a central fixture that generates the play's lasting meaning. I believe, that only in relationships, without fixing meaning upon any single character, can one begin locating the emanations of voices within the text - the emanations of *Measure for Measure's* meaningfulness.
ISABELLA SPEAKS AND THEN DOESN'T: SILENCE AS TEXT?

Most of Measure for Measure's convoluted plots and sub-plots rely upon Isabella's presence as a common site of dramatic tension and eventual resolution. Her sibling relationship with Claudio influences her decision to approach Angelo on his behalf; her initial appeal to Angelo to spare Claudio inspires Angelo's plot to extort sex from her; her "bed-trick" agreement with the Duke sets into motion the actual form of Angelo's ethical test while unknowingly re-acquainting Angelo with the jilted Mariana; and her final appeal to the Duke to spare Angelo reconciles Mariana with her honor (by marrying Angelo), Angelo with his shame (by both marrying Mariana and discovering that Claudio still lived), while simultaneously salvaging her own chastity. Although her power in all of these events appears at times nominal - and at no time more obvious than in Act V, when the Duke appears to control every aspect of Measure's action - her presence among them all ensures them a common locus of dramatic impact. Isabella is at the hub of all the activities that consummate the play. Including her in the "marrying off" of all the main characters, Claudio to Juliet, Angelo to Mariana, Lucio to Kate Keepdown and the Duke to herself, is sensible insofar as it forefronts her presence as a catalyst for the generic festive resolution offered by the Duke in Act V. But at this very typically-festive moment, Isabella is left without stage directions and without lines to speak. The text silences her at the moment when her narrative importance is fully realized. Measure's climax rapid-fires emotionally-saturated moments directly at her: her plea for Angelo's life, the very person that threatened to rape her in the first place: "Let him not die; my brother had but justice./In that he did the
thing for which he died. For Angelo,/His act did not o'ertake his bad intent,/That perished by the way" (V i 444-49); the re-appearance of Claudio, whom she thought dead; and then lastly, the Duke's proposal. Her seeming resilience throughout the play would imply that she would respond with her typical eloquence, her "prosperous art/When she will play with reason and discourse,/And she can persuade" (I ii 180-81). The very figure whose presence conveys the drama to its comedic outcome disappears in a silence lasting for the final hundred lines of the play. Isabella intimidates readings of Measure for Measure because she becomes literally unreadable.

That Isabella enters the play as a character wishing to be silenced only compounds the urge to read her silence in Act V as a form of expression. Isabella introduces herself in Act I iii as a potentially mute character. By joining the Votarists of Saint Clare, she would necessarily take their vow of public silence; even their enforced silence is not enough discipline for her: "I speak not as desiring more,/But rather wishing a more strict restraint/Upon the sisterhood" (I iv 3-5). Although an enforced ritual of piety, Isabella's desire to be silenced has become regarded in the criticism as firm proof of a strong, if ascetic, personal agency.11 This is an agency essentially related to her sexuality; the sisterhood protects her virginity, after all. While criticism varies widely over what Isabella's sexual proclivities actually are - from puritan, to naively heterosexual, to masochistic - her desire to be mute has come to express her sexual desires. Consequently, her presumed sexuality informs the

11Reifer, M. "'Instruments of Some More Mightier Member': The Constriction of Female Power in Measure for Measure" (reprinted in Modern Critical Interpretations: Measure for Measure, Chelsea House Publishers, 1987 pp131-144): "Isabella has been idealized as a paragon of feminine virtue; on the other hand, she has been denigrated as an example of frigidity.... When not idealizing or denigrating Isabella, critics have generally ignored her" (p131).
outcome of all the criticism interested in her. Allegorical readings such as Knight's structured sex and gender in such a way that criticism influenced by his actually neglected the play's erotic, psychological subtext. Psychoanalytic interpretations, on the other hand, focused upon the eroticism embedded in Isabella's rhetoric, primarily respecting this much-cited passage of a startlingly masochistic plea for chastity: "Were I under the terms of death,/Th' impression of keen whips I'd wear as rubies/And strip myself to death as to a bed" (II iv 100-5). Uncovering a very real, albeit repressed, sexual presence underneath Isabella's chaste exterior offered a great challenge to the New Critics, who relied upon Isabella to be the image of chastity in order to substantiate Measure for Measure's ahistorical value. However, Isabella's erotic agency, an aspect of her character generally assumed in today's criticism, has only further vexed approaching her silence. Jonathan Dollimore, motivated to expel the conservative New Critical insights, ironically concludes that Isabella's silence signifies consent. Whether one finds it laughably prudish or admirably willful, Isabella's initial silence, despite being a form of restraint, overwhelmingly has come to represent an expression of power. Silence, in other words, is read as the first textual expression of Isabella's voice.

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12As Puritan farce, Wilson Knight says that "Isabella... is more saintly than Angelo, and her saintliness goes deeper.... Isabella lacks human feeling" (pp44-5); as naively heterosexual, see Zender, K. "Isabella's Choice" (Philological Quarterly, vol 73 no 1 Winter 1994 pp77-93): "It allows Isabella... to gain insight into the nature of love and shame,... so if Mariana is willing to undergo this experience, the relation between love and shame must be more intricate than the polarity Isabella assumes to exist when she makes her initial decision" (p86); as sadomasochistic desire, see Hawkins, H. "'The Devil's Party': Virtues and Vices in Measure for Measure" (reprinted in Aspects of Shakespeare's Problem Plays, Cambridge University Press 1982 pp77-95): "Does her initial desire for more severe restraints within the convent suggest that there is something to restrain?" (p91); as lesbian, or at least anti-patriarchal, see Lechter-Siegel: "in her adherence to her virginity, she resists the social control of the Duke as both a private and public patriarch" (p372).

13Dollimore p83: "we see that Isabella speaks a vulnerability freed in part from its own ideological misrecognition;... it is Isabella's fate to be coerced back into her socially and sexually subordinate position."
Because of their insistence that her desire to be silenced means something - because it seems to express power - critics have framed the meaning of *Measure for Measure* as though the very lines Isabella speaks were supplements to her silence. When confronting Isabella's silence after the Duke's proposal, a meaningful interaction with the play necessitates resolving the initial expression of her narrative power - her desire for silence in I iv - with its reemergence after the spectacle of her complete submission, on her knees before the Duke begging for Angelo's life, in Act V. Risking simplicity, I would call such criticism cathartic because it assumes that Isabella's final silencing fulfills a set of expectations graphed onto the event of silence, according to one's valuation of Isabella's desire to be silenced. In some of the most emphatic critical voices, Isabella's silence frames a drama which is always a power struggle.\(^\text{14}\) Less ideologically-motivated criticism claims that Isabella's silence acknowledges the Duke's secular, pragmatic solution to a power relationship that marriage cannot resolve, but can diffuse.\(^\text{15}\) Criticism narrates Isabella's silence as a movement from either self-imposed confinement to liberation, or self-imposed liberation to confinement, framing the narrative event of her silence in Act V as a praxis of Moral, or Realist, or Patriarchal themes according to whichever political side one adheres to.

\(^{14}\)Riefer's influential essay, although not representative of all contemporary feminist positions, reflects the critical sympathy that Isabella's manipulation leaves her powerless by the end of the play: "she returns to Vienna, where, gradually, her character dissolves, her spirit erodes, and she becomes an obedient follower of male guidance"(p137); Seiden argues that a silent acceptance is utterly characteristic of a virtuous Isabella: "The reasons for Isabella's conventional acceptance of marriage are manifold;... if we look back at her other choices, isn't this one consistent with all the others in that she characteristically opts for the hard and unpalatable decision?" (p164).

\(^{15}\)Wheeler, R. *Shakespeare's Development and the Problem Comedies* (University of California Press, 1981): "This marriage which on the Duke's instructions will be conducted in prison, is an appropriately debased culmination of the play's unpurged tension between sexuality and the moral order" (p153). Wheeler is one of a number of scholars who maintain that *Measure for Measure* is an experimentally-Realist drama.
However, such readings elide textual evidence that contradicts their presupposed function and meaning of Isabella's silence. Reading the Duke's proposal as liberating neglects the fact that the Duke depicts their possible marriage as incestuous: "Give me your hand and say you will be mine-/He is my brother too" (V i 488-9), a relationship that Isabella condemns when she at first refuses to sacrifice her chastity for her brother: "Is't not a kind of incest, to take life/From thine own sister's shame?" (III i 139-40). Neither moral nor secular mercy - that could absolve Angelo - could ever tolerate the Duke's "bad" action (incest) that would definitely overstep his "good" (marriage) intentions. Reading Isabella's silence as confinement overlooks the fact that silence and confinement are exactly what Isabella asks for, according to her very first lines of the play. Similarly, reading her silence to the Duke as consent overlooks the fact that marriage, and in particular sex, are what she seeks to avoid throughout Measure for Measure. How could it be confining if her wish for silence exemplifies her wish for confinement and restraint? How could a silent liberation be moral if it means engaging the very immorality that the Votarists of Saint Clare shun? Reading meaning into Isabella's silence merely echoes the critical/meaningful preconditions of the reader.

In efforts to ascribe to Isabella a latent internal potential that informs Measure's themes, even of something as ambiguous as a "sense of self," criticism of the play engages Isabella only in terms of what she say, forsaking exploring how she says things and for whom she says them. Assuming that Isabella voices her own desires when she speaks ignores the fact that Isabella only expresses the desires of other characters who have compelled her to

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16Note: I will address the importance of incest in Measure's plotting and themes later.
17Riefer p137: "we can see how her sense of self is undermined and finally destroyed through her encounters with patriarchal authority [emphasis added]."
speak in the first place. In I ii, Claudio beseeches Lucio to convince his sister to plead for him on his behalf:

Implore her, in my voice, that she makes friends
To the strict deputy; bid herself assay him.
I have great hope for that; for in her youth,
There is a prone and speechless dialect,
Such as move men [emphasis added] (175-9).

Isabella does not seduce Angelo by her youthful "prone and speechless" dialect, but by the words that she speaks, "What, do I love her,/That I desire to hear her speak again," (II ii 177-8) - words prompted by the ever-insisting Lucio.

Her first meeting with the disguised Duke, "What is your will?" (III i 153) anticipates, if not even imitates, her later words describing her role within his machinations: "I am directed by you" (IV iii 135). Despite discovering that the Duke's plan is fraudulent, she continues to participate in what amounts to be Angelo's public humiliation: "I would say the truth; but to accuse him so,/That is your [Mariana's] part. Yet I am advised to do it,/He says, to veil full purpose" (IV iv 2-4). And in a final reversal of sympathies, she kneels next to Mariana to beg for Angelo's life, the very man who staked his authority on raping her.

Disregarding Mariana's statement that "Sweet Isabel, do yet but kneel by me,/Hold up your hands, say nothing, I'll speak all [emphasis added]" (V i 434-5), Isabella orates what very well ought to be Mariana's plea for mercy! Isabella negotiates the events of the play without influencing their resolutions because her voice conveys the wants and desires of other characters but never conveys her own desire. If the desire to be silenced is a desire at all, readings motivated thus negate themselves with the same textual evidence they evoke in support. Her "voice" is not a voice at all. It carries the voices of others.
Isabella is the medium in which voices engage one another, not a voice within that medium. She is the silence to be filled with noise. She is the text.\(^{18}\)

Isabella's silence, seen as Isabella's voice, is a vacuum for any criticism which seeks to explain it as expression. Understanding silence as expression, criticism can assuage the uneasiness of Isabella's silence but will never agree upon what it actually expresses. Recognizing Isabella as text rather than "in text" helps define what power means and where it comes from in Measure for Measure. Isabella is so effortlessly manipulated that her function as text suggests something other than she is always in controlling her role. The question is not what she does in the narrative, but rather, who narrates what she does? One can see that Isabella is not a figure at all paramount to determining the trajectory of Measure for Measure's plot; she is more like the very space onto which the narrative tracks. This does not nominalize her importance. Precisely because of her presence as text can one recognize the relationships emerging among voices - emerging disguised. Only in relationship can the real powers generating this whole sordid drama of desire and disguises emanate, relationships which wholly exclude her but rely upon conveyance through her. Once the criticism makes her mean anything more

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\(^{18}\)Note: "Text" is the first of two terms that I will employ in order to address Measure's uneasiness as a product of the conflict of "Voice." By text, I mean the very medium in which one can identify the meaning of something; because characters plot against and dupe one another throughout Measure for Measure, text is always intentionally deceptive because it never means what it seems to mean. It is what is staged and is plotted. In contrast, voice is the meaning that one identifies in the text; voice is always subtextual and disguised. It is what stages and plots.
than this, it speaks into her silence - it lets her silence speak - and hears no more than itself.
ISABELLA'S OTHER BROTHERS: INCESTUOUS DESIRES, RELATIVE MEANINGS

Just as the plot of the play relies upon Isabella's presence in order to convey it to its conclusion, it relies upon Isabella's sibling relationship with Claudio to inform its tensions and its outcome. Their relationship frames Measure's plotting from beginning to end: Claudio calls upon his sister's "prosperous art/When she play with reason and discourse" to "move men" (I ii 177-9) to evade execution; their sibling love leads to her confrontation with Angelo, whose plan of extortion places their siblinghood in dire jeopardy. This in turn forces Isabella to confront the hypocrisy of excusing "the thing I hate[promiscuity]/For his advantage that I dearly love[Claudio]" (II iv 119-20), compelling Isabella to choose her chastity over Claudio's life. Upon hearing of Isabella's "choice" to condemn him, Claudio pleads for his life anyway, which Isabella immediately understands to be the grossest corruption of their relationship: "Wilt thou be made a man of my vice?/Is't not a form of incest, to take life/From thine own sister's shame?" (III i 137-9). It is at this moment, at the proclamation of incest, that the narrative locates its fundamental rupture that all of the ensuing subplots will need to resolve in order to avert a tragic outcome.

The catch-22 is basic. Sex or death. But by describing the situation as a "form of incest," Isabella depicts their tragedy as problem internal to the family structure. By agreeing to Angelo's proposal, she would commit not one but two sins: both adultery (as a nun, she is married to God) and incest. How she describes this "form of incest" evokes this double-whammy of sin; by urging
Isabella to agree to Angelo, Claudio is at once engaging in sex with her, and being reproduced by her, "taking life/From thine own sister's sharne [emphasis added].” She reacts awestruck and horrified, unaware of where Claudio's desire to corrupt the family came from: "Heaven shield my mother played my father fair,/For such a warpéd slip of wilderness/Ne'er issued from his blood" (III i 141-3). Daddy was never that way. Claudio's desire to survive is twice as tragic as the fact of his impending death because it liberates him at the same time that it defames his sister as an incestuous sibling and defames himself as a progeny of incestuous siblings. Isabella's one hopeful phrase as she walks away from Claudio, "Take my defiance" (II i 143) is a call for him literally to defy what he wants. It is her brother's very desire, and not his act, that strikes Isabella as the grossest corruption of herself and her family.

Nothing prior to, and nothing except the Duke's intervention in Act III seems capable of resolving the incestuous conflict underlying Isabella's and Claudio's crisis. Without the Duke, either Isabella relents to Angelo, or Claudio dies (or both). The Duke presents what will be the "bed trick" to Isabella in very appealing terms: "You may most uprighteously do a poor wronged lady a merited benefit, redeem your brother from the angry law, do no strain to your own gracious person, and much please the absent Duke" (III i 196-200). Despite the bed trick in which Mariana replaces Isabella as Angelo's victim, and the head switch, for which Ragozine's head replaces Claudio's, the possibility of their family tragedy remains very real. Claudio does not know that Angelo raped Mariana and not Isabella, while Isabella does not know that Claudio is alive. The Duke has plotted all of this tension onto the stage to be resolved: he alone is responsible for overseeing both the bed-trick and the head switch. Only because of these deceptions and disguises do Isabella and Claudio avoid confronting the tragic outcome that they face. Their acts "do no o'ertake their
bad intent" because the Duke has arranged for both Isabella and Claudio to be absent from the events that otherwise stage for Angelo the trade for sex. Therefore, not only does the threat of a sexual encounter seem to disappear, but also the threat of sex with her brother disappears with it, as the Provost removes Claudio's death shroud revealing that he yet lives. Because of the Duke, the sexual tension compelling brother and sister towards a tragic, incestuous relationship diffuses among the many levels of text, plot, and subplot whose meanings lie in how they are intended to seem.

Even the Duke's "efforts," though, are not enough to smother incest out of the plot. The very definition of mercy that best expresses how Isabella and Claudio avert tragedy, "His act did not o'ertake his bad intent/And must be buried as an intent/That perished by the way [emphasis added] (V i 446-9), expresses Angelo's absolution from attempting to rape Isabella. The same form of justice that protects the sibling relationship also protects Angelo, whose plot threatened to corrupt it. Furthermore, Isabella condemns Claudio not on the basis of his act (they never had sex) but on his intention, his desire. Either Isabella forgives Claudio and has sex with Angelo, or she forgives Angelo and condemns her brother. The Duke's unexpected proposal to Isabella:

If he be like your brother, for his sake
Is he pardoned, and for your lovely sake -
Give me your hand and say you will be mine -
He is my brother too. But fitter time for that (V i 485-9)

re-evokes the incestuous relationship, "He is my brother too" just as it appeared to be abolished. They would be brothers after the marriage, and not before. The bed trick therefore is not the non-tragic 
\textit{deux ex machina} as it is often described in scholarship. While it evades committing Isabella to really having sex for her brother, it consummates the initial desire for it. The incestuous intention, on which the bed-trick rests, and which utterly repulses Isabella,
achieves fulfillment because of the bed-trick. Incest therefore must re-appear at the very moment of its seeming dissolution, at the very end of the play. The expeditious intention of the bed trick as listed by the Duke in Act III - to redeem Marianna, protect Isabella, save Claudio and please the Duke - disguised its incestuous purpose.

Furthermore, incest reappears as the underlying foundation of Isabella's relationship with the Duke, a relationship that was definitely strange, but not of family. Of course, their relationship was always "familiar," but never one of siblinghood. The Duke always maintains a definite supposed kinship - a patriarchal one - with all of his subjects, by virtue of being the administrative authority in Vienna. His use of the royal "we" in describing the limits of the powers he will bestow upon Angelo: "We have with special soul/Elected him our absence to supply,/Lent him our terror, dressed him with our love" (I i 17-19) underscores the fact of his initial position as Vienna's central patriarchal power. Once disguised, the form of his relationships with other characters who would otherwise be subjects begins to change, as is nowhere more apparent than in his first encounter with the siblings, Isabella and Claudio. When he first approaches Isabella, he refers to her as a sister: "Vouchsafe a word, young sister, but one word," and immediately thereafter names Claudio his son: "Son, I have overheard what hath passed between you and your sister" (III i 152-160). Later, disguised as Friar Lodowick, he addresses Isabella as a child: "Show your wisdom, daughter, in your close patience" (IV iii 115-16), and not until his disguise is removed does the Duke reposition himself as a brother (when he proposes to Isabella). Because of his use of disguise, the Duke maintains the ironic position of being at once a holy Brother who is a patriarch and Vienna's patriarch who is actually a brother. The sanctity of his religious role gets him closer to Isabella. Is this an elaborate seduction? If so, it is a
seduction where the image of a chaste family relationship (priest to nun) disguises the desire to corrupt the family relationship of brother and sister. Incest and authority appear inextricably linked, the power of one type of relationship influencing the expression and appearance of the other.

The proliferation of disguises and substitutions in Measure for Measure contorts the extensive family structure already pervading the governing system of Vienna. The first of these substitutions, Angelo for the Duke, replaces one cousin with another (V i 1). Angelo acquires the position as patriarch because the Duke says that he is qualified, but Angelo is already related to the Duke. Escalus describes his relationship with Angelo as one of siblinghood: "Provost, my brother Angelo will not be altered. Claudio must die tomorrow.... If my brother wrought by my pity, it should not be so with him" (Ill ii 195-8), and the disguised Duke addresses Elbow the deputy as both a sibling and patriarch, a "good brother father" (Ill ii 11). At every administrative level, Vienna's government maintains a derivative of a basic patriarchal structure, from a regal Father to an "Abhor-son"; but the conflation of brothers confuses the limits defining the differences between fathers, sons and brothers, suggesting that any one character could embody any one of those roles. Even more than one role: the completely lowly Elbow is at once a brother and father (or a father and a son), and Angelo is at once a subject and patriarch (or a son and a father). In Vienna, an Abhor-son could just as easily be an Abhor-father. While sexual license may be the Viennese authority's largest social problem, incest - itself sexual license - compels its authoritative hegemony. The entire structure of its patriarchal rule receives its motivation to punish sexual transgression ("too much liberty") from a gross form of sexual transgression and family corruption, incest. Lucio's quip to the disguised Duke in Vienna's prison that Angelo's "vice is of a great kindred" (Ill ii 95) acquires, as most of his comments do, a
heightened significance: in the very place where Viennese authorities imprison transgressors, Lucio exposes Vienna's enforced moral ideology as profoundly transgressive in its own right, from the top of the administration to the blade of the executioner's ax.

The omnipresence of incestuous "urges" implies that any male character in *Measure for Measure* could become Isabella's sibling and thus re-establish the primary sibling crisis motivating the entire drama. Each of Isabella's encounters with a male figure marks a significant dramatic development which she recognizes as a transgression of a familial role. She first meets Lucio who has sought her on Claudio's request; she immediately dismisses his teasing means of relating Claudio's imprisonment:

Is: Sir, make me not your story.
Lu: 'Tis true.
I would not, though 'tis my familiar sin
With maids to seem the lapwing and to jest,
Tongue far from heart, play with all virgins so (I iv 30-34)
[emphasis added]

by stating that sexual double-entendre, Lucio's "familiar sin," is blasphemous: "You do blaspheme the good in mocking me" (I iv 38). Her assessment of Angelo's proposal: "Ignomy in ransom and free pardon/Are of two houses:

lawful mercy/Is nothing kin to foul redemption [emphasis added]" (II iv 111-13) depicts it as a corruption of two categorically different but essentially related forms of justice. Her meeting with Claudio elicits her most blatant evocation of the violation of their siblinghood. And her first meeting with the Duke displays her resolve that letting Claudio die would protect the sanctity of a hypothetical future family: "I had rather my brother die by the law than my son should be unlawfully born" (III i 87). Whenever a man approaches Isabella, their relationship results somehow in her representing it as denigrated:
blasphemous, foul, incestuous, illegal. The mutual presence of herself and (potential) siblings always evokes the real threat Claudio's desire presents to their siblinghood, a presence that seems to generate Measure's dramatic tension.

The Duke's timely intervention averts the tragic conundrum that the siblings face, either Claudio's execution or Isabella's rape. Isabella's and Claudio's relationship at the end of Measure for Measure appears as stable as it was in the play's beginning, when she "dearly" loved him. Isabella, however, is not a "stable" character herself; she is text, the medium of absent characters in relationship. The relationship founding Measure's very plot is fundamentally deceptive because Isabella as text conveys relationships but cannot be considered an agency that maintains them. As the criticism proves, fixing value to Isabella as a character is thoroughly frustrating. And as Angelo proves, fixing value to a distinct relationship between characters is as frustrating, even punishing; after all, his assurance of Isabella's love for her brother Claudio leads him to assume falsely that his plan to extort sex from her is flawless, that she simply wouldn't refuse or deceive him. Angelo could not know either Isabella's relationships with the Duke and Mariana or of the Duke's vague plot to test him: "Lord Angelo is precise,/Stands at a guard with envy; scarce confesses that his blood flows, or that his appetite/Is more to bread than stone" (I iii 50-3). Angelo fails to control Vienna (and Measure for Measure) because he trusts what appears trustworthy and suspects what appears suspicious. Very sensible, except in Vienna, where the virtuous like Isabella and the Duke lie, and the suspicious like Lucio tell the truth. Reading a relationship as fixed is akin to the act of reading Isabella as meaningful: both readings perceive only what the text appears to be and say without perceiving what is motivating what is being. Isabella is the consummate disguise because of her seemingly stable
relationship with her brother Claudio - a stability challenged not by a lack of love between Isabella and Claudio, but by the perception of sexual love between them.

In his book *The End of Kinship: Measure for Measure, Incest, and the Idea of Universal Siblinghood* (Stanford University Press, 1988), Marc Shell identifies incest as the essential tension that the whole play seeks to overcome. However uncomfortable such an argument was for Shell,

he concludes that the incestuous relationship is *Measure*’s overriding teleology: "The telos of *Measure* for *Measure* and the informing element of its plot is the ideal taliation of a chaste, incestuous marriage." The many substitutions and interchanging roles eventually dissolve Isabella and Claudio’s explicit sibling dilemma, manifest in what Isabella perceives to be Claudio’s repulsive incestuous overtures in Act 3.1:

It is the irony of the play that the commercial commensuration, hence interchangeability, of death with birth on which the logic of her decision not to sleep with Angelo relies is significantly akin to the incestuous conflation, hence interchangeability, of brother, son, and father that she would avoid.

According to Shell, the essential gender and class distinctions upon which Vienna’s (and by extension our own) patriarchal system rests, the very ones that stabilize faith in marriage and rulership, receive a serious threat from what *Measure for Measure* suggests, "that marriage is itself incestuous." The Duke’s proposal offers Isabella an amenable solution to her avoidance of incest.

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19In his conclusion, Shell apologizes twice for the extreme implications of his argument: first, by suggesting that his insights into *The End of Kinship* “are not necessary to enjoyment of the play” (179); and second, by outright distancing his personal opinions from those he heretically pursued throughout his book: "That is why I have dared to entertain for a while the heretical, not to say beastly, view that incest of a kind is an essential precondition to liberty, or that incest is essential to, and is the measure of, any truly equalitarian society" (197).

20Shell p175.

21Shell p116.

22Shell p170.
by transcending the heresy of it, sanctifying it only as a hypothetical, intended transgression. *Measure for Measure* thus makes kinship differences among spouses dissolve because the narrative "pushes to their extreme limits the implications of personal substitutions and playacted intentions."\(^{23}\) In a Universal Siblinghood such as *Measure's*, incest is the "best" expression of the flexibility of marital/familial limits because it minimizes the relevance of the very differences which base the power of the seemingly patriarchal Vienna, or even a "vestigially-patriarchal"\(^{24}\) culture such as our own.

Shell's argument conveniently smoothes away the uncomfortable wrinkles of *Measure for Measure's* silent ending. By reinvoking family, the Duke simply reminds Isabella of the omnipresence of the thing that repulsed her in the first place. However, unless one heeds her advice to "Die, perish" (III, i 144), the play offers no textual restraint against its corruptibility, no exorcism of its damnable teleology. Motivated by incest as defined by Isabella, *Measure for Measure* never resolves its sibling crisis. Isabella is always in-crisis because each deception she performs and each substitution she conveys results in a re-encounter with the same desire that compelled her to deceive. If Isabella is always in-crisis, and Isabella is text, then is *Measure for Measure* ever resolved? Furthermore, is *Measure's* telos incest? Certainly, incest is a profound-enough cultural taboo to cause discomfort among a readership that locates incest beyond the limits of acceptable sexual practices. However, designating incest as the focus and mitigating quality of the entire play assigns a meaning to the text that it cannot retain. Exploring whether incest itself

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\(^{23}\)Shell p147.

\(^{24}\)Note: this is Shell's dandy term for late 20-Century American-centric culture: "The popular contemporary argument that incest is basically child molestation focuses on the unhappy fact of father-daughter seduction or rape in our vestigially patriarchal society" (p197).
compels deceptions or whether it is a deception itself could address what encountering power, voice and desire may actually represent.
DUKE VINCENTIO AND LUCIO: SOLIPSISM, ABSENCE AND VOICES

Precisely because it isolates incest as the teleological essence of Measure's drama, Shell's otherwise thorough analysis of a theme as disquieting as incest forces a meaningful critical conformity onto the text that (I hope I have proven already) the text cannot tolerate. Whether or not incest is the fundamental tension of the text, undoubtedly Angelo's proposed rape of Isabella brings it directly onto the stage to be acted out. His attempted seduction brings the two siblings together and generates the vocalization of their crisis as incestuous. Angelo's soliloquy reveals that Isabella attracted him because of her virtue as expressed in her words during their first interview: "Dost thou desire her foully for those things/That make her good? O, let her brother live:/Thieves for their robbery have authority/When judges steal themselves. What, do I love her,/That I desire to hear her speak again" (II ii 174-8). However, during their interview in II ii, Lucio, not Isabella, is responsible for interpreting the eroticism to which Angelo positively responds. Without Lucio's prodding - from "You are too cold" to "touch him; there's the vein" to "He's coming, I perceive't" - Isabella would have turned away, Claudio would have died, end of story. Lucio recognizes and responds to Angelo's sexual attraction by directing Isabella to continue her appeal. What finally seduces Angelo is what is embedded in what Isabella says: "She speaks, and 'tis/Such sense that my sense breeds with it" (II ii 141-2) - the erotic undercurrent which Lucio's voice injects into the conversation.

Lucio's role in the conversation casts him, on the surface, as Isabella's "pimp." He elicits Angelo's attention by sexualizing Isabella's appeal.
However, Lucio more than pimps Isabella's "prone and speechless dialect, / Such as move men" (I ii 178-9). Lucio's eroticization of Isabella's appeal, not Isabella herself, is what propels Angelo over the proverbial edge; Isabella's appeal may nurture Angelo's "breeding senses," but her appeal's genesis occurs in the masculine eroticization of what she says. In the immediately preceding scene, one witnesses a similar and more vulgar display of men attracting men through women. During his meeting with Pompey and Master Froth, Escalus discovers that Froth's crime is soliciting Pompey's prostitute. After admonishing Froth: "I would not have you acquainted with tapsters; they will draw you, Master Froth, and you will hang them," Escalus releases him. To which Froth replies: "I never come into any room in a taphouse but I am drawn in" (II i 193-8). Froth admits that it is the way the pimp tempts the man by presenting the prostitute, and not the prostitute on her own, that ultimately leads him to follow his temptation. The woman conveys a sexual exchange between men by substituting bodily for the power that is attracting one man to the other. The proposed rape play-acts a homoerotic encounter for which Isabella and Angelo's first interview masquerades.25

Shell's insistence on heterosexual incest stems from his assertion that no sexual act in Measure for Measure has dramatic currency without the fact of its reproductive potential.26 But this homoerotic occurrence suggests that if incest indeed motivates Measure's plot, then it definitely does not require birth or regeneration in order to retain dramatic impact. Lucio sought Isabella on

25 For the seminal discussion on male homosocial relationships conveyed through women in English Renaissance literature, see: Sedgwick, E. Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).
26 Shell p79: "In the dramaturgical economy of Measure for Measure,... the sexual act is teleologically conflated with its biological end, so that intercourse is always reproduction and fornication is always bastardizing, hence always eventually incest. Measure for Measure goes a step further: it conflates intent and act as well, with the result that the mere desire for sex is treated as essentially reproduction."
Claudio's request: "Implore her, in my voice, that she make friends/To the strict deputy; bid herself assay him" (I ii 176-7) which establishes the series of misdirections through which Claudio's initial erotic entreaty can find Angelo's ear and literally pique Angelo's "sense." Incest among brothers is still incest - Measure's telos of siblinghood inculcates both into its structure of mutual brothers, sons and fathers. Shell's hypothetical Universal Siblinghood can tolerate the dissolution of gender difference because incest doesn't need to involve gender difference; but what such a relationship must preserve is the essential autonomous difference of siblings. It is a question of identifying one's sexual-object as an identity; however, Angelo's erotogenesis begins with Isabella's suggestion of the reversal of identification: "I would to heaven I had your potency./And you were Isabel; should it then be thus?/No, I would tell what 'twere to be a judge./And what a prisoner," punctuated by Lucio's sexual comment: "Ay, touch him; there's the vein" (II ii 66-70). The very object that attracts Angelo is exactly what he desires to become! The vehemence with which he coerces Isabella in their second interview in III ii extenuates the extremeness of such a hypothetical reversal of identification, i.e., the powerless prisoner (Claudio) is liberated by the master (Angelo) who is empowered by being mastered. This exceeds apparent (and in Angelo's case overt) sadomasochism and suggests that desire is the actual negation of identity, as Angelo says, to "crave death more willingly than mercy" (V i 472). If, as Lucio describes, Angelo's "vice is of a great kindred" (III ii 95), then doesn't this imply that the great kindred vice of incest does not motivate, but rather is motivated by, Angelo's desire to be annihilated? This is getting-off-on-one's-self with a

27Claudio's request that Isabella "make friends" with Angelo connotes a sexual relationship because the term "friend" in Measure for Measure acquires a profound sexual significance: Claudio's crime of too much liberty, after all, is evinced by his getting "his friend [Juliet] with child" (I iv 29).
vengeance: the pleasure of becoming the opposite of what one is. Claudio's final appearance on stage in Act V embodies the end result of such desire: the fundamental Brother is masked and restrained, and then unmasked and silent, an apparition of the vowed Sister that Isabella in the beginning of the play sought to become: "if you speak, you must not show your face,/Or, if you show your face, you must not speak" (I iv 12-13). The brother desires the sister in order to become a sister. Desire, therefore, is both self-contained and self-eliminating because it wants the exact opposite of what it is. Homoeroticism and incest disguise an even more embedded solipsism.

I do not wish to ascribe intentions upon Claudio that the text just does not evince; simply put, Claudio never could have swayed Angelo on his own. However, Claudio's first words to Lucio betray his awareness that his crime of "liberty" must end in confinement: "As surfeit is the father of much fast,/So every scope by the immoderate use/Turns to restraint" (I ii 122-4). This implies more than he knows he "did wrong"; Claudio seems to know that the fulfillment of his desire necessarily produces the opposite of his desire, "fathering" its own erasure. Only because of his absence from the string of substitutions and dramatic events that connect him to Angelo can one actually identify his desire as self-eliminating, characteristic of Measure's solipsism. Therefore, Claudio needs to be absent from the very drama that his solipsism motivates. This raises a definite problem: attributing the origin of power to a source absent from its expression in the text requires the same process of (mis) reading that makes the criticism so dissatisfying. It requires reading what is absent in what is present - reading the emanations of powers which are always deferred. If the fulfillment of Measure's solipsism is to become the opposite of what one is, then the primary tension of the entire text is to make either what is present within it absent or what is absent from it present. Locating agency within the
text thus necessitates a deference to whatever enters it from beyond it, from absence.

The most "conspicuously" absent agent in the text is the Duke, conspicuous because readers know that he is the one manufacturing the many deceptions, and absent because his disguise distances him from his imminently-recognizable position of authority in order to be so deceptive. His disguise allowed him to exercise a great deal of power; but exercising his power was not the reason why the Duke opted to disguise himself in the first place. Duke Vincentio leaves unknowable the very motives that would explain his "going underground." While bestowing his regal authority upon Angelo, the Duke says that the reasons compelling his departure are too complicated to impart and so does not even mention them: "Our haste from hence is of so quick condition/That it prefers itself, and leaves unquestioned/Matters of needful value" (I i 53-5). Act I, scene iii, in which the Duke reveals he will be disguising himself, begins in the middle of a conversation the content of which is withheld from the text, except for the Duke's rejection of one possible reason for his plot: "Believe not that the dribbling dart of love/Can pierce a complete bosom; why I desire thee/To give me secret harbor hath a purpose/More grave and wrinkled than the aims and ends/Of burning youth" (I iii 1-6). Moments later, he dons his disguise and suggests: "Moe reasons for this action/At our more leisure shall I render you [Friar Thomas]," only one of which, Angelo's test, he explicitly divulges: "To behold his [Angelo's] sway/I will, as t'were a brother of your order,/Visit both prince and people... Only this one: Lord Angelo is precise,/Stands at a guard with envy; scarce confesses/That his blood flows" (I iii 43-52). And the final words of the play - the Duke's - direct our attention to a space outside of it: "So, bring us to our palace, where we'll show/What's yet behind, that's meet you all should know" (V i 533-4). According to the Duke, his
own motives are always present in that we all "should know" them. Our
understanding of those motives is deferred because he always locates them in
a space outside of the text. The two reasons he does divulge for disguising
himself contradict two of the major dramatic developments resolved in Act V; he
tests Angelo only to pardon him and rejects love only to propose to Isabella.

In addition to locating his intentions outside of the text, the Duke
maintains an access to non-textual information which proves essential for
resolving the drama. The form of Angelo’s test requires the bed-trick; the bed-
trick itself is not possible without the sudden appearance of Mariana. The
depth of information on Mariana’s pre-Measure jilting that the Duke injects into
his first meeting with Isabella (III i 204-260) renders its truth indisputable,
especially in light of Mariana’s total complicity in the plot. Later, the Duke
produces an official pardon sparing Claudio, which convinces the Provost to
comply with the head-switch: "The contents of this is the return of the Duke.
You shall anon over-read it at your pleasure.... This is a thing that Lord Angelo
knows not" (IV ii 188-92). While I do not want to challenge the truth of
Mariana’s story proper, one must ask why the Duke tests Angelo at all if
Mariana proves he has already fallen. These two most dubious deceptions in
the whole play have expediency only because of the sudden addition of
information previously nonexistent within the play itself. The Duke’s power to
direct and misdirect intentions and actions according to his ever-deferred
scheme is compounded by his power to manufacture crucial events of the play
by adding to the plot events from outside of it.

The Duke’s apparent omnipotence and deceptive omnipresence,
coupled with his suspect intentions, have inspired a large and concentrated
response of recent negative scholarship - as if to counter the unimpeded
authority of the Duke's voice. But this position, however, unifies the source of Measure for Measure's discomfort, conveniently dispelling its rightful title as "problemed" as though tyrannical patriarchy were the only source of tension within the text. "Anti-Vincentio" criticism implies that the entire play is a solipsistic endeavor on the Duke's behalf, hoodwinking his subjects and readers alike. Patriarchy - the Duke - is subject to a great deal of tension within the text that his in absentia powers cannot resolve: explicitly, what the Duke labels as Lucio's slanders. The character of Lucio provides resistance to the Duke's desires because of the influence of his own absent engagement with the text. Lucio's presence challenges the fulfillment of the Duke's solipsism because Lucio's origin(s) beyond the text renders him an alternative and therefore disruptive solipsistic voice.

Despite the fact that the Duke gets the final say in judging Lucio for "slandering a prince" (V i 519), Lucio's slanders are remarkably accurate descriptions of the Duke's subterfuge. To Isabella, Lucio reports that the supposed reasons forcing the Duke's departure from Vienna are not at all the real reasons: "We do learn/By those that know the very nerves of state,/His givings-out were of an infinite distance/From his true-meant design" (I iv 52-5). To the Duke in disguise, he relates that he knows that the Duke has undertaken disguising himself in order to gain access to the public the image his regal authority would otherwise prohibit: "It was a mad fantastical trick of him to steal from the state, and usurp the beggary he was never born to" (III ii 87-89). When Lucio first meets the Duke in disguise, he immediately assumes that the Duke/Friar Lodowick knows the Duke's whereabouts: "What news

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28McLuskie, K. "The Patriarchal Bard: Feminist Criticism and Shakespeare: King Lear and Measure for Measure" (reprinted in Political Shakespeare): "Marriage is the solution to the puzzle of the bed-trick but it is also the solution to the disruptive power of Lucio... The solution is imposed in this play by... the all-powerful Duke [emphasis added]" (p94).
abroad, friar, what news?... What news friar, of the Duke?” (Ill ii 77-81). Lucio goes so far as to suggest that his familiarity with the Duke has led him to discover why the Duke has disappeared: "Sir, I was an inward of his. A shy fellow was the Duke, and I believe I know the cause of his withdrawing" (Ill ii 123-5). Although Lucio does not utter the actual cause, he does say: "The Duke yet would have dark deeds darkly answered; he would never bring them to light" (Ill ii 165-7), a precise depiction of the Duke's manufacturing of subplots and disguises that comprise the play's entire narrative. Lucio presents himself as an "insider," relying upon his access to information outside of the text in order to place himself inside. He acquires dramatic power because his commentary originates outside of and extends beyond it.

But even as an insider, Lucio could be nothing more than "inside" the Duke's absent motives, just another deceptive expedient. Without Lucio's initial intervention on Claudio's behalf, Angelo would have executed Claudio without batting an eye - immediate, and none-too-suspect (unlike his slanders) proof of his essential role in establishing Measure's dramatic tension. But where his role in Act I, scenes ii and iv expediently introduce the tension the Duke sets about to resolve, Lucio's role in Act V frustrates resolving the plot his intervention actually began. Just as Isabella begins to summarize the events leading to her confrontation with Angelo, Lucio intervenes to tell her story: "I came to her from Claudio, and desired her/To try her gracious fortune with Lord Angelo/For her poor brother's pardon" (V i 75-78) which earns the Duke's immediate reproach: "You were not bid to speak" (V i 77). It is a strange reproof (was Lucio also not bid to speak to Isabella in the first place?) because what Lucio says is true. Isabella immediately says in his defense: "This gentleman told somewhat of my tale" (V i 84). The Duke promptly amends his censure to account for the legitimacy of Lucio's comments: "It may be right, but
you are i' the wrong/To speak before your time" (V i 86-7). At the moment when the Duke explicitly stages the dramatic outcome that his deceptions began, Lucio emerges as a possible alternative source of dramatic tension - alternative and disruptive. Lucio's intervention (his timing was all wrong) on Claudio's behalf may never have been the Duke's intention at all.

As Act V proceeds and more of the plots unfold, Lucio's voice becomes increasingly disruptive. Lucio's claim that he knows the Duke/Friar Lodowick: "My lord, I know him; 'tis a meddling friar" (V i 127), causes Friar Peter, the only character to know of Friar Lodowick's identity, to lie in order to verify Friar Lodowick's/the Duke's credibility: "I know him for a man divine and holy,/Not scurvy, nor a temporary meddler/As he's reported by this gentleman" (V i 143-6). Friar Lodowick doesn't even exist except as a masquerade, and he definitely is a temporary meddler. Mariana could testify to Lodowick's/the Duke's deception because of her role in the bed-trick. In her interview (V i 160-213) with the Duke, she (quite reasonably) explains the reason for and the confusing outcome of the bed-trick substitution: "[Angelo] thinks he knows he ne'er knew my body,/But knows he thinks that he knows Isabel's" (V i 200-2). Lucio's comments throughout the interview call into question the moral and legal justification on which the bed-trick rested: "My lord, she may be a punk, for many of them are neither maid, widow, nor wife... [Angelo] was drunk, then, my lord; it can be no better..."; "[Duke to Angelo]: Know you this woman? [Lucio] Carnally, she says." Simultaneously, Lucio's comments evoke the Duke's increasing displeasure and express his growing frustration. However, none of Lucio's suggestions of the bed-trick's vulgarity challenges the already-vulgar staging of Mariana's interview in Act V; the Duke bids Mariana onto the stage already disavowed: "Let her show her face, and after speak" (V i 168). Lucio validates Mariana's charges against Angelo that the Duke characterizes
as slanderous, "stir not [Angelo] till you have/Well determined upon these slanderers" (V i 256-7). Lucio threatens to dissolve Mariana's "uncred-ibility," the Duke's last deception required to conclude Angelo's test.

Lucio's disruption of the Duke's plottings has become pervasive; the Duke's departure from the stage endows him with the same authority to "sort out" the slanders from the truths that the Duke throughout Act V irminently displays. After the Duke leaves the stage in Act V (returning promptly in his disguise), Angelo and Escalus turn immediately to Lucio first to interrogate Friar Lodowick's credibility: "We shall entreat you to abide here till he come and enforce them against him" (V i 264-5), and then dictate the means of interrogating Mariana: "I think, if you handled her privately, she would sooner confess; perchance publicly she'll be ashamed" (V i 273-5). He has so thoroughly debased the Duke's/Friar Lodowick's believability that when the (disguised) Duke relates his opinion of Vienna, "Laws for all faults,/But faults so countenanced that the strong statutes/Stand like the forfeits of a barber's shop" (V i 317-319), Escalus accuses him of "slander to th' state" (V i 321). The Duke's description of the leniency of law enforcement in Vienna - leniency that defined his 14-year reign - is a near-exact evocation of his Act I summation of the laxity of Viennese law. According to the description of Escalus at the start of the play, Escalus could not be so inept that he would not recognize an accurate depiction of the growing libertinism of Vienna's public. By accusing the Duke/Lodowick of slander, Escalus inadvertently proves Angelo's seduction plot to be true because "real" slander would negate the validity of the Duke's/Lodowick's proposed non-role in the bed-trick: [Escalus] "Did you set

29The Duke lists Escalus' administrative abilities in I i: "The nature of our people,/Our city's institutions, and the terms/For common justice, y'are as pregnant in/As art and practice hath enriched any/That we remember" (9-13).
these women on to slander Lord Angelo? They have confessed you did."

[Duke]: "Tis false" (V i 286-8). Of course the Duke did not set them on to
slander Angelo; but the truth of Lucio's voice, in which "Cucullus non facit
monachum" (V i 261), has assumed such a disruptive presence that it compels
a powerful disorder even as the authoritative power of the Duke seek to re­
enforce order. Because of Lucio's voice, Vienna's authority slanders itself.

Swann accurately describes what has become the contemporary
scholarly standard of addressing Lucio's slanders: "Lucio tells truths concealed
among untruths."30 Other critics have begun analyzing the textual similarities
between Lucio, a "fantastic" according to The Names of All the Actors and the
Duke, "fantastical" (IV iii 155) according to Lucio himself.31 Even a brief side­
by-side comparison of the two is very revealing. Lucio is free to roam
throughout Vienna, mingling with all classes of society and conversing with
people of every mode of distinction; not until he gives away his deception, his
marriage to Kate Keepdown, does he lose his freedom. The Duke has no
freedom to roam throughout Vienna until he deceives, until he is supplied with
the "habit;" not until his deception is given away does he lose that freedom.

Lucio tempts Angelo by manipulating the way Isabella presents herself to him;
she acquires a sexual presence (to Angelo) because Lucio enhances and plans
presentation. The Duke tempts Angelo by presenting Isabella to him; she is
sexually present (again, to Angelo) by way of a planned substitution. Lucio
solicits Isabella to plea to Angelo for Claudio's life by appealing to the "power" a
living woman has; the Duke solicits Claudio to plea to Isabella for his own life
by appealing to his "powerlessness" in the face of execution. Both siblings

30 Swann p65.
31 Kaplan p38: "Lucio's most astute insight about the duke is that the latter is a fantastic too. An
examination of the duke's actions shows them to be almost identical to Lucio's...."
respond to Lucio and the Duke with the same words: "I humbly thank you" (I iv 88 and III i 42). The similarities extend over so much of Measure for Measure that one would wonder how Lucio and the Duke ultimately differ.

To criticism, that their similarities extend into absence, reaching beyond the text, has meant that their lasting difference is a moral one. J.W. Lever, whose introduction to the 1965 Arden Edition version of the play is still the most comprehensive overall analysis of Measure for Measure, could not leave the question of Lucio unanswered. Not only is Lucio "the Duke's true deputy," he is also a "dark double."³² "Doubling" the two characters, however, poses a problem for the scholarship. The removal of one presumes the removal of the other; there is no coin without its flip-side. But Lucio is removed, the unforgiven perjurer in a crowd of forgiven criminals: a lying nun, her libertine brother, her would-be rapist, two disavowed women, an administrative deputy that accuses the Duke of slander and an accused murderer. Furthermore, doubling the Duke and Lucio causes another problem: wouldn't placing Lucio in a position of authority, exemplified by the one that he assumes in Act V, set him up to compromise the very authority that he has gained? This is exactly what occurs: by betraying to the Duke the existence of his child with Kate Keepdown, he condemns himself to marry a whore. Lucio's authority rests no more firmly than the Duke's in defining "the truth" about Vienna precisely because of his own voice. Because of Lucio, Measure for Measure's truth, even his own truths, all seem suspect.

³²Lever, page xcvi. See note 10 for additional cited passage.
CONCLUSION: “MAKE ME KNOW THE NATURE OF THEIR CRIMES” (II iii 7)

I find myself both at once tempted and reluctant to offer a unified conclusion to this analysis of Measure for Measure. I have argued that such a move would only masquerade the problems I seek to explain without ever actually explaining them; I would therefore only be repeating the critical habit of misreading - leaving my reading in the dark to eventually bump into the text - rather than offering valid illumination into Measure's profound, unresolved problems. At the same time, my analysis seems to refine a unified conclusion, that an eidos of solipsism is the sub-sub-subtext of its themes, plots, relationships and resolutions. Frustrating this conclusion is the suggestion that Measure's solipsism ultimately erases the very authority that it initially retains.

If, as Swann suggests, we must take up Lucio's position in order to critique the Duke's Vienna, wouldn't this be taking up a critique that unavoidably implicates ourselves? Or, if we take up the Duke's position, that we must perpetuate our own "lies"? So if I resist offering a decisive reading of the play (which so much criticism does), especially its last one hundred lines, I do so in order to avoid "slandering" myself.

I believe that slander accounts for much of the discomfort that the play generates; unfortunately, truth can be as slanderous as untruths and lies, as Lucio's punishment exemplifies. It is first and foremost the reader's/audience's responsibility to sort out the various truths from the non-truths in order to make any sense of the play at all. Measure for Measure makes reading a particularly active ordeal because of its convoluted plot and proliferation of substitutions, look-alikes and lies. That the events of the play are always being staged by...
some character in it makes the value of "the truth" subject to its role in the staged deception. Therefore, a reader must acknowledge the function of the truth in the spectacle in order to assign it a meaning. Reading is thus inculcated as an informant in the very spectacle it only claims to observe. *Measure for Measure* implicates reading as an act of slander because of its instrumental role in carrying-out the deceptions.

At this point, one could ask: when do we know when what is being staged ends? We must rely upon what we have read in order to know whether to assign it relevance, when to believe it and when not to believe it. Knowing, in *Measure for Measure*, is an aggressive and powerful practice; because of the extra-textual information that they know, the Duke and Lucio both greatly influence the outcome of the play. In addition, knowing is a very risky activity because it presumes authority when authority is hardly secure. Lucio's claim to know the Duke: "Sir, I know him, and I love him" may be uncomfortable enough to watch because he says it to the disguised Duke; but Lucio's next comment, "Come sir, I know what I know" is an even more marvelous and terrible presumption to make in the Duke's presence because Lucio validates his own authority over whom a reader knows to be the Duke. The Duke's rebuke of Lucio is itself strange: "I can hardly believe that, since you know not what you speak" (III ii 140-5). According to the Duke, Lucio isn't credible not because he lies but because Lucio never could have the access to the information he claims to have. The very threat to the Duke's authority over Vienna, and implicitly the whole play, is not Lucio's lies, but Lucio's knowing.

Is knowing in *Measure for Measure* ultimately an illicit practice? Although Lucio is sentenced for slander, he is undoubtedly punished for "making a duke" - for unmasking him, and for literally making him, producing the Duke on-stage when every other character "knows" him to be absent. But
what Lucio's punishment is, and for what crime, the Duke leaves rather vague. He lists several punishments: whipping, hanging, marrying Kate Keepdown, imprisonment, and execution. And the Duke repeals the sentence of slander: "Thy slanders I forgive, and therewithal remit thy other foreits" (V i 514-15), only to reinstate it four lines later as Lucio is removed from the stage: "Slandering a prince deserves it" (V i 518). However, if, as I contend, Lucio's punishment is for "making a duke," then what is one to "make" of the Duke's aside to Lucio immediately following his unmasking: "Sneak not away, sir, for the friar and you/Must have a word anon" (V i 354-5)? Forget the familiarity of it: does the Duke imply that Friar Lodowick will be the one to visit Lucio in the prison after the play ends, to "see our pleasure herein executed" (V i 516)? The Duke has already used Angelo as a proxy for his administrative power. In addition, the Duke has already suggested that he requires a substitute in order to avoid defaming his power: "I have on Angelo imposed the office,/Who may, in th' ambush of my name, strike home,/And yet my nature never in the sight/To do it slander [emphasis added]" (I iii 40-3). But why threaten to "have a word" with Lucio while donning a disguise everyone recognizes is a fraud? What is it about the Duke's "nature" that could incriminate (that could "slander") the image of his name - the recognizable presence of his power over Measure's Vienna, and more importantly for a reader, over Measure's plots and meanings? As if the nature of authority is always deceptive - as if claiming to know is always slanderous - as if reading Measure for Measure is always criminal.
A NOTE ON THE TEXT

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