

Article

Bondage of the Will: The Limitations of Political Theology in *Measure for Measure*

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Abstract: Although Peter Lake and Debora Shuger have argued that *Measure for Measure* is hostile to Calvinist theology, I argue that the play's world presents a Reformed theo-political sensibility, not in order to criticize Calvinism, but to reveal limitations in dominant political theories. Reformed theology informs the world of the play, especially with regards to the corruption of the human will through original sin. Politically, the sinfulness of the human will raises concerns about governments—despite Biblical commands to obey leaders, how can they be trusted if subject to the same corruption of will as citizens? Close analysis of key passages reveals that while individual characters in *Measure* suggest solutions that account in part for the corruption of the will, none of their political theories manage to contain the radical effects of sin in Angelo's will. Despite this failure, restorative justice occurs in Act 5, indicating forces outside of human authority and will account for the comedic ending. This gestures towards the dependence of governments in a post-Reformation world on providential protection and reveals why the Reformed belief in the limitations of the human will point towards the collapse of the theory of the King's two bodies.

Keywords: original sin; political theology; human will

1. Introduction

Measure for Measure has generated layers of scholarship exploring the complex relationship between religion and politics represented in the play. The play depicts a morally unstable city, a ruler who absconds with an unsatisfactory explanation, a deputy zealous in punishing sexual immorality, and a strict novice who pleads for leniency. As such, the play is rich in political and theological tensions, central to most of which is the question of justice and mercy—when a ruler can and should use each. Many scholars have noted that this textual tension alludes to actual religious tensions present during the early years of James I's reign, when this play was first performed in 1604. Some scholars identify the different characters within the play as aligned with particular political theologies represented by either Puritan, Catholic, or Conformist positions in Jacobean society. Peter Lake and Deborah Shuger notably argue that Angelo represents a critique of Puritanism and Calvinist theology more generally (Lake and Questier 2002, p. 666; Shuger 2001). Shuger also claims that the Duke fits a more broadly Anglican or conformist profile as a stand-in for James I (Shuger 2001).

However, considering what divides the characters theologically and politically may prove less productive than looking at how they align. Recently, Matthew Smith has argued that what unites the characters is the need for “a common religious experience” which transcends the law and their failure under it (Smith 2018, p. 16). This is a unifying desire, to be sure, but are there unifying theological principles which contextualize that desire, or do the characters truly stand as representatives of separate religious positions? In response to Shuger and Lake, Jonathan Goossen argues that the Duke and Angelo represent equally dangerous versions of Puritan theology that threatened to “conflate spiritual and temporal power” (Goossen 2012, p. 217). Goossen claims that both Angelo and the Duke, because they want to regulate morality with civic law, represent radical Puritan reformers who

blurred the lines between church and state (Goossen 2012, p. 218). However, given that both James and Elizabeth I before him declared themselves head of the church and had been overtly making and enforcing laws that governed spirituality, Goossen seems not to understand that such conflation was not, in fact, radical. Even if this conflation is not radical, Goossen is right that much of the conflict of the play comes from the breakdown between spheres of rule, specifically between the King's two bodies. As explained by Ernst Kantorowicz in his influential study of early modern political theology, the theory of the king's two bodies posits that the medieval and early modern monarch had the ability to suspend his identity between his natural, physical body and a spiritual, public body. The natural was subject to the laws of nature and died; the public body lived on (Kantorowicz 1957). While some have offered untroubled readings of the King's two bodies in *Measure*, claiming the play is a coherent working out of a ruler's public versus private actions (Rose 1966), Barbara Groves argues that the play is a criticism of the conflation of the "person and role" of the ruler (Groves 2007, p. 155). However, I would argue that this conflation is not merely problematic in the play, but inevitable. Anna Muenchrath shows that the play reveals both the difficulties of separating the King's public body from his private body and the inevitable collapse of that distinction (Muenchrath 2018, p. 2). I agree with Muenchrath that the play does reveal both the collapse of the King's two bodies and point towards its inevitability. However, it is not enough to understand the problem of the ruler's public and private actions as political in this densely theological play; rather, the political and the theological must be considered together as interrelated. Absent from Muenchrath's argument is the central theological principle that puts the theory of the King's two bodies in jeopardy and contributes to the resulting complications of its collapse: original sin.

The doctrine of original sin posits that everyone has been born into a state of sin rather than a state of innocence and therefore is inclined towards further sin. Although the doctrinal positions extrapolated from this principle differed between recusant, puritan, and conformist positions at the time the play was performed, all would have agreed with the basic theological tenet that every person must wrestle in some way with an inherent taint, unavoidable in our human condition. This theological belief becomes political when applied to sovereign rulers. All the characters in *Measure* who implicitly or explicitly express political theories of governing, do so while trying to account for the ruler's "infected will," as Sidney described it (Sidney 1973, p. 86). The question the play asks is not merely, how does a ruler exercise justice and mercy, but how does he do so while he himself is infected by sin?

Although united in their acknowledgement of the problem of sin, the play's central characters arrive at different political and theological solutions. The two dominant solutions are that either rulers should adjust their judgment to their own sin to avoid hypocrisy, or they should submit themselves to the same law by which they judge to avoid subjectivity in judgment. In terms of the political theology of the King's two bodies, the first position seeks to align the body natural with the body politic, and the second seeks to subject the body natural to the body politic. However, neither of these proposed theories successfully manages the thoroughly corrupting influence of sin in the world of the play; neither accounts for total depravity.

Total depravity is the Calvinist extension of the more widely accepted doctrine of original sin. It would be a misleading leap, however, to say that because total depravity is apparently at work in the play, the play presents a Puritan theological and political reality. Even conformist English doctrine was still broadly Reformed. In the 39 articles, article nine which examines original sin refers to it in similar language to Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*:

Original Sin standeth not in the following of Adam, (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the fault and corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is ingendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the spirit; and therefore in every person born into this world, it deserveth God's wrath and damnation. (The Thirty-Nine Articles 2005, pp. 71–72)

Original sin, therefore, seems to be a hereditary depravity and corruption of our nature, diffused into all parts of the soul, which first makes us liable to God's wrath, and then also brings forth in us those works which Scripture calls "works of the flesh" [Gal. 5:19]. And that is properly what Paul often calls sin . . . we are vitiated and perverted in every part of our nature that by this great corruption we stand justly condemned and convicted before God, to whom nothing is acceptable but righteousness, innocence, and purity. (Calvin 1960, p. 251)

In both texts the word "corruption" is used to refer to the effects of sin on the individual, a word avoided in Catholic theology which prefers to discuss the effects of original sin as concupiscence—an inclination towards evil and the clouding of the will and reason by sin. Reformed doctrine tends towards a more radical, thorough taint of sin, a taint infiltrating the whole of the human person.

In this article, I will demonstrate that in *Measure for Measure*, the ruler's will and reason are not subject merely to concupiscence but rather to corruption. I will first show that Escalus, Isabella, and the Duke all present a political theory which would have a ruler judge according to his own weakness so as to avoid hypocrisy, while Angelo prefers to avoid such subjectivity by claiming a ruler should instead judge according to the law, but subject himself to that same law. Both theories account for the presence of sin in the ruler's life, but fail in the world of the play to prevent the total corruption of justice following the corruption of Angelo. Given this failure, the play asks us to consider the extent to which divine intervention is necessary to allow justice to prevail as it does in Act 5.

2. Will, Sin, and Judgment

Of the two political theologies, the one more widely held is expressed by Escalus, Isabella, and the Duke. They claim that should rulers sin or be inclined towards a particular sin, such sin should naturally move them to mercy in their judgments of others guilty of that same sin; thus, rulers may avoid hypocrisy. David Thatcher calls this the "'natural guiltiness' plea" as it asks the executor of justice to consider his own natural state of guilt before pronouncing judgment (Thatcher 1995, p. 264). Moreover, Thatcher points out that this position recalls passages in the Gospels when Jesus reigned in legalistic tendencies as in the Sermon on the Mount ("Ivudge not, that ye be not iudged. For with what iudgement ye iudge, ye shal be iudged" [Matt 7:1]) and the instance of the woman caught in adultery ("Let him that is among you without sinne, cast the first stone at her." [John 8:7b]) (Thatcher 1995, p. 268).¹ Thus, the "natural guiltiness" position asks that the ruler conform the judgments of his public body to the sins of his private body, and asks that he apply the New Testament rule of mercy to those judgements as well. Escalus is the first character in *Measure* to express this political theology. When debating with Angelo about Claudio's fate, he argues for leniency based on the possibility of Angelo struggling with a similar sin as Claudio:

Let but your honour know—
 Whom I believe to be most strait in virtue—
 That in the working of your own affections,
 Had time coher'd with place, or place with wishing,
 Or that the resolute acting of your blood
 Could have attain'd th'effect of your own purpose,
 Whether you had not sometime in your life
 Err'd in this point, which now you censure him,
 And pull'd the law upon you. (2.1.8–16)²

¹ All references to scripture come from (Bible 1969).

² All references to *Measure for Measure* come from (Shakespeare 1965).

Escalus suggests that Angelo could have, given the right circumstances, been in the same situation as Claudio. His suggestion implies that Angelo's virtue has as much to do with fortunate circumstances as Angelo's will—his virtue is providential. Thus, Angelo's will is not without the possibility of corruption, and that should color his judgment of Claudio.

Isabella makes a similar assertion when she pleads for Claudio's life in the next scene. She begins by presenting a series of arguments for mercy, many of which, if applied as consistent political theologies, would result in the absence of justice in favor of blind mercy; most of these Angelo refutes with ease, but her final argument begins by reminding Angelo of the discrepancy between earthly and heavenly authority, claiming that human authority is both less than heaven's and paradoxically used more harshly than heaven's is, and ends by asking Angelo to consider his own weakness and use that as a measure by which to judge Claudio:

Go to your bosom,
 Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know
 That's like my brother's fault. If it confess
 A natural guiltiness, such as is his,
 Let it not sound a thought upon your tongue
 Against my brother's life. (2.2.137–42)

While Escalus had asked Angelo to consider the possibility of past sin, Isabella suggests that within Angelo's heart, at the moment of her speech—notice her verbs are all present tense, whereas Escalus's had been past tense—is the very evil for which he is condemning Claudio. Moreover, she suggests that his guilt is “natural,” as in part of his nature, not something planted or grafted there, but a part of him. This echoes the language quoted above in Article nine: “man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil.” According to Isabella, the presence of this “natural guiltiness,” the taint of original sin, should prohibit Angelo from judging another who shares that guiltiness. The unspoken difference is that Claudio has acted upon his nature while, so far, Angelo has not.

The Duke, like Isabella and Escalus, asserts that a ruler should judge based on his own state of virtue. Although he does not assert that the mere presence of original sin in its form as a temptation or inclination is enough to warrant a ruler to show mercy, he does suggest that once such a sin has been committed, the ruler should and, indeed, would naturally withhold any judgment from a like sin. In a soliloquy after learning of Angelo's advances to Isabella, the Duke proclaims:

He who the sword of heaven will bear
 Should be as holy as severe: . . .
 More nor less to others paying
 Than by self-offences weighing. (3.2.254–55, 258–59)

While it had served Escalus and Isabella's purposes to remind Angelo of his natural sin, the Duke first asserts the virtue a ruler should exhibit. However, he quickly transitions to the claim that “self offences” should determine how others are judged: if a ruler does sin, those sins should influence their judgment. He proceeds in the following lines to denounce Angelo for his fall from virtue and the difference between his appearance and his reality. Yet, acknowledging Angelo's hypocrisy does not stop the Duke from believing that Angelo's sin will lead him to mercy, just as Isabella and Escalus had suggested it should. He believes that after the bed trick, Angelo will follow through on his promise to pardon Claudio because Angelo's own guilt should lead to mercy:

This is his pardon, purchas'd by such sin
 For which the pardoner himself is in . . .

When vice makes mercy, mercy's so extended

That for the fault's love is th'offender friended. (4.2.120–21, 124–25)

According to the Duke, Claudio's pardon paradoxically is "purchas'd" by sin rather than the more traditional theological idea that pardon is purchased by the sinlessness of Jesus (in Acts 20:28 Paul says the church has been "purchased" by Jesus' blood). The Duke believes that Angelo's sin will make him sympathetic towards others in the same sin, and, therefore, he will pardon Claudio. However, he mistakes just how thoroughly corrupt Angelo's sin has made him. After this confident assertion that the necessary effect of vice is mercy, he learns that Angelo plans to withhold mercy despite his own vice.

In the end, Escalus, Isabella, and the Duke's political theology, which would have a ruler use his own sins to determine the harshness of his justice, fails because the ruler must have an internal consistency in his nature—he must both recognize his own flaws and apply them in a consistent way to his judging. Although their position confronts the likelihood that the ruler will struggle with sin, they nevertheless presume that the ruler is above hypocrisy—that, despite sin, there remains a unity in Angelo's nature which will prevent him from judging another for the sin with which he struggles. In fact, Angelo's sin disables his unity: he becomes other than he appears, and it is his appearance that his sinful nature desires to keep rather than his unity. In this, Angelo mirrors the actions of the very first sinners who, after sinning, hid, disguised, and when that failed, deflected blame for their sin. Such proliferation of sin is to be expected in a world in which the doctrine of total depravity is at work. Calvin asserted that "this perversity never ceases in us, but continually bears new fruits" (Calvin 1960, p. 251). Despite the Duke's hope that Angelo's sin would lead to mercy, it instead propagates in Angelo more sin, making it clear the Duke had not understood the full, corrupting influence of sin.

There is a further flaw to Escalus, Isabella, and the Duke's theory. In their proposed system, the law becomes subject to the ruler, the public body subject to the private body, as the ruler's sins determine which laws are applied. Thatcher discusses several legal objections to this subjectivity, calling the "natural guiltiness" position "absurd, invidious, impractical, and without historical and legal precedent or validity" (Thatcher 1995, p. 278). Some of these concerns are anticipated by Angelo; in his response to Escalus, Angelo points out the danger of ruling without a fixed law. While he also acknowledges the possibility of a ruler's corrupt will, his solution is not to change the ruler's judging, but rather to make the ruler subject to the same law he applies to others. When Escalus first suggests that Angelo judge Claudio according to Angelo's potential sin, Angelo responds by claiming that his own sins should not affect the application of the law:

You may not so extenuate his offence
 For I have had such faults; but rather tell me,
 When I that censure him do so offend,
 Let mine own judgement pattern out my death,
 And nothing come in partial. (2.1.27–31)

Angelo claims that Escalus's hypothetical suggestions about Angelo's sinful nature should not determine which laws are enforced in Vienna; rather, he encourages Escalus to hold him to the same standard he applies to others. His position avoids the problems of the subjective nature of the political theory proposed by the Duke, Isabella, and Escalus, because the law remains constant despite the ruler's own flaws. However, Angelo's theory, like theirs, is not foolproof against a radically corrupting sin. Just as the Duke supposes the ruler will maintain unity between his private sins and his public actions, Angelo assumes he will maintain unity in judging others' sins and his own. Both assumptions misunderstand the effects of the penetration of sin into the human will. The entrance of sin into Angelo's life does not merely alter, but reorders his will entirely.

In addition to misunderstanding the radically corrupting effects of sin, Angelo also fails to recognize that the law, in which he places so much trust, is itself a predictor of sin, as Paul explains in

Romans: “I knewe not sinne, but by the Law: . . . But sinne toke an occasion by the commandement, and wrought in me all maner of cōcupiscence: for without the Law sinne is dead” (Rom. 6: 7b-8). Considering the law’s close connection to sin, Angelo’s fall should not come as a surprise. Indeed, when Angelo first encounters Isabella, he is perplexed because Isabella, herself a figure of strict morality, creates in Angelo the temptation which causes his fall: “What’s this? What’s this? Is this her fault or mine?” (2.2.163). Angelo does not understand why he is tempted by “virtue;” it runs counter to his logic that he should “sin in loving virtue” (2.2.183). However, this encounter makes perfect sense within Pauline logic: the law has created in Angelo “all maner of cōcupiscence.” Thus, Angelo’s political theology is ultimately flawed: reliance on law will never lead to a sufficient system of government, but rather will always point towards, as Smith explains, a “universal desire for an authority beyond law” (Smith 2018, p. 8). As expected, this political theology which places the law above the ruler, soon deteriorates in the face of Angelo’s sin.

This is first signaled at the end of Act 2, Scene 2, when Angelo realizes the first signs of weakness in himself after his initial encounter with Isabella. He suggests that his weakness makes Claudio’s execution more problematic: “O, let her brother live./Thieves for their robbery have authority/When judges steal themselves” (2.2.175–77). Angelo realizes that the law itself is undermined by a ruler’s sin. When he experiences temptation, he immediately collapses the distinction he had made between the authority of the law and the authority of the judge, initially recognizing the hypocrisy of his position. His realization comes too late, however, and his resolution to free Claudio soon dissolves, as does his desire to be held accountable to the law. By Act 2, Scene 4, Angelo’s taint is complete; while he appears to be wrestling with his conscience, he nevertheless recognizes the futility of the struggle:

Heaven [is] in my mouth,
As if I did but only chew His name,
And in my heart the strong and swelling evil
Of my conception. (2.4.4–7)

Before he sees Isabella the second time, he is considering the growing discrepancy between his apparent virtue and his true evil. His outward actions of prayer do not match his inward desire for Isabella, and “strong” and “swelling” indicate both the force of the evil and its growing nature. By the end of the scene with Isabella, he is no longer fighting the taint of sin: “I have begun,/And now I give my sensual race the rein” (2.4.158–59). Once he has given in to his impulse and his sin, he no longer bemoans the discrepancy between his inward and outward states but rather sees them as an advantage that will allow him to escape the law to which he had claimed he would submit. He explains as much to Isabella when she threatens to expose him:

Who will believe thee, Isabel?
My unsoiled name, th’ austereness of my life,
My vouch against you, and my place i’ th’ state
Will so your accusation overweigh
That you shall stifle in your own report
And smell of calumny. (2.4.154–59)

His reputation, about which the Duke and Escalus have spoken highly (1.3.54–58; 1.1.23–25) and which even Lucio acknowledges (1.4.60–65), remains the same despite the penetration of sin into his will. The gap between appearance and reality serves Angelo’s interests in this case, and the presence of sin in his will means he will take advantage of the resulting hypocrisy. After the bed trick, he sinks further into his hypocrisy by ordering Claudio’s execution rather than his release. Reflecting on both of these deeds, he sees himself within the cycle of sin: “Alack, when once our grace we have forgot,/Nothing goes right. We would, and we would not” (4.4.31–32). Angelo’s reference here is to Romans 7:19 “For I do

not the good thing, which I wolde, but the euil, which I wolde not, that do I." Angelo's self-awareness suggests that he not only recognizes the trap of sin into which he has fallen, but he is helpless to escape it. Angelo having fallen from a state of innocence, like the original Adam, is now trapped in a state of sin, enslaved, as Paul notes, to the law of sin: "But I se another law in my membres, rebelling against the law of my minde, & leading me captive vnto the law of sinne" (Rom. 7:23). This enslavement makes him unable, despite all his desires, to do good. This enslavement explains his unwillingness to either conform to the law or reveal his sin and face the judgment of the law.

3. Implications and Conclusions

So where does that leave the play's political theology? It appears to be in trouble if neither of the political theories—either the belief that a ruler will judge subjectively based on his own sins, or that a ruler will subject himself to the law he applies to others—is able to contain the spread of Angelo's sin. The Duke, Escalus, and Isabella are proven wrong in their dependence on Angelo's desire to maintain unity between the public and private bodies of the ruler. Angelo's belief that he would maintain unity between judgments of others and himself falls apart as his will for justice deteriorates in the face of his desire for Isabella. And yet, in the end of the play, justice prevails. The Duke returns to his role, uncovers what had been hidden, reveals his own machinations and arranges marriages.³ However, the Duke's political theology, as shown, has been proven flawed, incapable both in its theory and in its execution of carrying out justice. So how is justice possible?

The answer lies in part in the difficulty many scholars have with the Duke as the agent of justice. As John Cox summed up in his review on "Shakespeare and Religion," the Duke is generally "abhor[red]" by scholars (Cox 2018, p. 7). Louise Schleiner points out that the Duke is represented in some ways as an *imitatio dei* or a "little god," just as James had portrayed himself in *Basilikon Doron*, his treatise on kingship which had been widely distributed in England in 1603 (Schleiner 1982). However, she along with Groves note ways in which this god-likeness is ironically undermined throughout the play (Groves 2007, pp. 162–80). Schleiner concludes that the Duke is at best a comedic example of a well-intentioned ruler attempting to imitate God in a corrupt society (Schleiner 1982, p. 236). Others have been less benevolent in their assessment of the Duke. Harriet Hawkins has argued that he is a troubling executor of justice and mercy because he was a poor ruler to begin with and seems to learn very little by the end of the play (Hawkins 1972, p. 73). Some point to the Duke's strange self-limitations: if he is meant to be "like power divine," why does he fail to anticipate Angelo's refusal to pardon Claudio? (Lewis 1983).⁴ Although they do not put it in the same terms I have, all of these scholars grapple with the problem which the play reveals: no ruler can escape the total corruption of the will and the fallibility of human nature. Even the Duke, the rightful ruler, comes to his moment of ruling scathed and tainted by the events of the play. And yet, miraculously, wrongs are righted, evil punished, corruption exposed, and harmony in society restored. This discrepancy forces us to acknowledge a gap in the play between the way things should have worked out, and the way they actually do: an additional disunity in the world of the play.

In order for justice and mercy to prevail, another political theology must be in effect. Arguably, the source of the justice for which Isabella cries out at the end (5.1.26) is not possible if the only forces at work in the play are human ones. While earthly authorities are aligned in Renaissance political theology with heavenly ones, this play makes clear that the "demigod authority" operates differently from the way the true God would. At the beginning of the play, Claudio resigns himself to both authorities, earthly and heavenly, as he is being led away to prison:

Thus can the demigod Authority

³ (Meilaender 2012) discusses more fully how marriage figures both politically and theologically in this play.

⁴ (Lewis 1983) answers this question mostly by asserting he is not meant to be like power divine; rather Shakespeare's goal was to reveal the ruler as human and flawed rather than as godlike.

Make us pay down for our offense, by weight,
 The words of heaven: on whom it will, it will;
 On whom it will not, so; yet still 'tis just. (1.2.112–15)

The “demigod” has the power of the law, making individuals “pay down” for their sins, an earthly imitation of heaven’s authority. Interestingly, however, the verse alluded to by Claudio refers not only to God’s willing punishment, but also mercy: “He hathe mercie on whome he wil, & whom he wil, he hardeneth” (Rom. 9:18). This verse comes out of a discussion about God’s sovereignty and is used by Calvin and other Reformed theologians to inform doctrines of man’s sinfulness and of God’s irresistible grace. Paul in this chapter speaks of the limitations of man’s will in the face of God, including the limitations of earthly authorities, specifically mentioning Pharaoh as an earthly ruler whom God’s sovereignty hardened. This allusion early in the play is the key to understanding why justice is able to prevail in the end of the play. The demigods, Angelo and the Duke, would be unable, through their tainted wills alone, to ensure the city’s return to a state of justice and the characters’ return to a state of internal and external harmony. It is only through “power divine” that justice is possible.

In many readings of the text, the Duke represents this “power divine,” as Angelo calls him (5.1.416–17).⁵ Most recently, Benedict Whalen has argued that the Duke brings together political and spiritual justice in Act 5, making him the “allegorical figure of God” (Whalen 2014, p. 89). However, as mentioned above, for most scholars, the Duke is an unsatisfactory executor of justice, given his own flaws and flawed thinking. I would argue “power divine” is not figured in the Duke, but rather represented by the necessary but improbable events and coincidences outside of either the Duke’s or Angelo’s control. One comedic example of this is the unmasking of the Duke by Lucio. Ironically, the man against whom the Duke has the most hostility is also the one who reveals the Duke in his friar’s robes and ends Angelo’s deception. Against his will, the Duke is “mad’st a duke” (5.1.354). It is especially striking that this is done by Lucio, who in both words and actions aligns himself throughout the play with deception, sexual immorality, and injustice. His will is utterly corrupt, and yet he is providentially a part of the movement away from injustice and towards restoration. Undoubtedly, the Duke had intended to reveal himself, but it is notable that the timing is not of his choice and is physically out of his control. It is this unwilled unmasking which allows justice to proceed. However, another earlier providential event allows both mercy and justice to be balanced in that final act.

That event is the death of Ragozine, the “most notorious pirate,” whose unintended substitutionary death makes possible Claudio’s reprieve (4.3.76).⁶ Unlike the Duke’s attempt to substitute Barnadine, who is resistant to death, Ragozine dies off stage, without the Duke’s authority, and outside of the willed actions of any of the characters. It is further providential that he happens to look like Claudio, making the head swap all the more plausible. Were it not for Claudio being spared, the Duke makes it clear Angelo’s life would have been forfeit at the end of the play and ‘measure still for measure’ would have been enforced: “The very mercy of the law cries out/Most audible, even from his proper tongue,/ An Angelo for Claudio, death for death” (5.1.463–65). Thus, while an Old Testament justice may have prevailed without the salvation of Claudio or the unmasking of the Duke, the restorative justice of the comedy would not have been possible without providential coincidence. As Grace Tiffany has argued, another distinctly Calvinist feature of Shakespeare’s plays is that “it is not human rituals, but God’s grace, working through providential time, that effects resolutions and miracles” (Tiffany 2018, p. 2).

This reading of the ending does not and perhaps should not satisfy many readers of the play. A play which exerts a great deal of effort to understand how rulers can and should execute justice within

⁵ (Kirsch 1975; Gless 1979; Brad-Brook 1941) all hold variations on this position.

⁶ (Leggatt 1988; Byker 2016) both address the importance of the theological implications of substitution in *Measure for Measure*.

the limitations of sin ends with no human solution or earthly political theology intact. However, our lack of satisfaction is not, therefore, a fault in the play's construction. As Schleiner has mentioned, there is a useful "doubleness" to this play (Schleiner 1982, p. 236); it can be read as the triumph of a human ruler over corruption despite his fallibility, but I would suggest that if anything it gestures towards the limitations of human government within a corrupt world. Continentally, the Reformed movement, especially as it took hold in Geneva, recognized the likelihood of abuse in any system of human-run government; thus, the leaders of Geneva enacted a church government structure that, rather than being hierarchical, was democratic, ensuring a rotation and a sharing of power within the consistory (Witte 2007, pp. 4–5). *Measure for Measure* certainly does not overtly suggest democracy as a viable alternative to monarchy, but it does reveal a theo-political crack in a monarchical post-Reformation society which gestures towards why Reformed theology, even apart from the politically radical Puritan movement, would eventually lead to the collapse of the King's two bodies as a viable political theory. If all humans, including those with power, are radically corrupt and inclined towards evil, and if the inner state of the soul can only be judged and known by God, we either rely on God's providence to intervene and ensure justice, or we disperse power more widely to lessen the impact of a potentially corrupt ruler.

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